

An Appraisal of the National Universities Commission Quality Assurance Measures in the Development of Academic Programmes in Nigerian Universities

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ABSTRACT: *The paper appraised the procedures involved in the development of academic programmes in Nigerian Universities and the associated Quality Assurance measures by the National Universities Commission (NUC). It specifically examined the roles of the Academic Planning Unit, the Resource Verification and the regular Programme Accreditation exercises in Nigerian Universities as critical quality assurance measures by the NUC to ensure quality academic programmes in the institutions. The challenges associated with the effective implementation of the NUC Quality Assurance strategies were also examined. These included inadequate academic staff, inadequate and dilapidated physical facilities, inadequate funding among others. Suggestions were then proffered to ensure the realisation of the quality and standards envisaged in the NUC Quality Assurance measures. These included the motivation and recruitment of more academic staff, the construction of more physical facilities and rehabilitation and maintenance of dilapidated facilities, increased fund allocation to education sector in the annual national budget to between 15 and 20%, consolidation of undergraduate programmes, establishment of more postgraduate programmes, introduction of bursary and loan schemes for the indigent students by the Federal and State Governments, etc.*

KEYWORD: development of academic programmes, national universities commission, Nigerian universities, quality assurance measures

INTRODUCTION

Higher institutions worldwide have been known to be reputable and attract global recognition and patronage owing to the organization and quality of their academic programmes; quality and efficacy of the research outputs by both staff and students and the collaborative research and technical relationships between the institutions, reputable industries and companies. The totality of the academic enterprises of such institutions have often resulted in scientific and technological innovations and inventions that are patented for global/international applications. This is a challenge to Nigerian Universities which should strive to be globally competitive as well in their core mandates of teaching, research and community service. A critical exercise in

Publication of the European Centre for Research Training and Development-UK that enterprise is therefore the procedures for the development of academic programmes in Nigerian Universities and the measures often adopted by the superintending agency of government, the National Universities Commission (NUC) to ensure quality and standard.

Meanwhile, an academic programme can be defined as any combination of courses and/or requirements leading to the award of a degree or certificate, or to a major, co-major, minor academic track and/or concentration. It is a programme of study that has been assigned a unique classification of instructional programmes usually involving theoretical and sometimes practical knowledge (BLS, ASU). Thus, two major categorizations of university institutions could arise from the nature of academic programmes offered in them. These are (a) conventional institutions and (b) specialised institutions.

The conventional universities are those institutions which offer courses (academic programmes) in almost all fields of academic/human endeavours such as the Arts, Social Sciences, Management Sciences, Sciences, Education, Dentistry, Medicine, Pharmacy, Engineering, Environmental Sciences, Law, Veterinary Medicine, etc at the undergraduate, postgraduate, postgraduate diploma/certificate levels. Sometimes non-degree certificate and diploma programmes are run in their Centres for continuing education or foundation studies. Examples include the Universities of Ibadan, Lagos, Nigeria, Benin, Ahmadu Bello University and Obafemi Awolowo University. In fact, all first, second and third generation federal institutions as well as many States together with some private institutions belong to this group. The specialised Universities are those institutions established to pursue academic programmes in specialised disciplines such as Engineering and Technology, Agriculture and recently, Medical Sciences. Institutions in this group include the Federal Universities of Technology Minna, Owerri, Tafawa Balewa University, Bauchi, Modibo Adamawa University, Yola and the Federal University of Technology Akure (Technological Institutions); the University of Agriculture Makurdi, Michael Okpara University, Umudike, Federal University of Agriculture Abeokuta (Agricultural Institutions), the University of Medical Sciences Ondo, PAMO University of Medical Sciences (Port Harcourt) (Medical Sciences).

Procedure for the Development of Academic Programmes in Nigerian Universities

The evolvement of academic programmes in Nigerian Universities could take two forms depending on whether the institution is a new one or already existing. If an emerging institution, the Committee of experts usually constituted to draw up the Academic Briefs for the development of such institutions develop the academic programmes required to attain the vision, mission and objectives of the institutions. The development of the academic programmes are usually in phases owing to resource constraints and the need to ensure quality of instruction. Also, such academic programmes are drawn/developed in consonance with the prescribed minimum benchmarks and standards by the NUC. Therefore, such programmes become part of the other information forwarded to the National Universities Commission (NUC) for consideration and recommendation to the Federal Executive Council (FEC) for consideration and approval. It is only after such approval by the FEC that the new institution could commence operations.

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In the case of already existing institutions, the scenario is different. Two processes are involved, internal and external processes. The internal processes take place within the institution and the external procedures take place outside the university at the NUC and the FEC. From the practices over the years, the internal procedures for the development of academic programmes in the Universities could be subdivided into the following stages:

Stage 1: Conceptualisation of the academic programme

Stage 2: Resource verification visit by government agencies and professional bodies.

Stage 3: The commencement or operational stage (trial stage).

Stage 1: The first stage involves the conceptualization of the programme by the Department using the approved and relevant Benchmark Minimum Academic Standards (BMAS) and now called the Core Curriculum and Minimum Academic Standard (CCMAS) (NUC, 2022) document in the development of the curricula contents of the programmes, ensuring that the minimum resource requirements of staffing, physical facilities and library resources are available. The stage also requires the Academic Board of the Department to consider the academic content of the proposed new programme to ensure that it conforms with the prescribed minimum course outline developed by the NUC. Thereafter, the department forwards the approved programmes to the Dean of the Faculty/School for the consideration of the Faculty Board of Studies. From this stage, the document is sent to the Vice Chancellor who directs it to the Senate Committee on academic matters for consideration and recommendation to Senate if approved or sent back to the Faculty/Department if otherwise.

At the Senate, the new programme is critically examined to ensure compliance with all relevant NUC resource requirements. The Senate approval is followed by the completion of the NUC application form for new programmes by the Department. The Form is then submitted to the NUC for the commencement of the external processes.

It should be emphasized that in all the internal processes, the Academic Planning Unit should be involved to ensure that the academic contents of the programmes are in line with the prescribed NUC Benchmark Minimum Academic Standards and that relevant resources of personnel, physical facilities, library holdings and budgetary provisions are made for the programmes.

The external processes commence with the submission of the application form to the NUC for its consideration. The Form seeks general information on the University and specific information on the programme especially in the areas of intended growth in student enrolment, physical facilities, staffing situation, and their qualifications, equipment needs and cost implications, sources of funding for the programme and the academic content of the programme. The information on students, costs of equipment, sources of funding and personnel cost are to be provided for a period of 10 years during which the programmes would be expected to have matured and graduated students.

The visitation by the NUC officials to undertake available Resource Verification is crucial in the academic programme development process.

Stage 2: The stage of Resource Verification Visit by the National Universities Commission (NUC) to verify and ascertain the level of resource availability indicated/claimed by the institution in its application form to the Commission.

The NUC is expected to analyse the application form for resource verification visit to the University. A date for the visit is usually fixed and communicated to the institution after the payment of the relevant fee by the institution to the NUC to cover the expected costs of the exercise. This visit is very critical as all claims by the institution are examined and verified to ascertain veracity. The institution is later notified of the outcome of the visit by the NUC.

The outcome of the visit by the NUC determines further action on the part of the institution and the NUC. If approved by the NUC, formal letter of approval is sent to the institution and copied to the Federal Ministry of Education (FME), the JAMB, NYSC, relevant professional agencies, and other relevant agencies of government for noting and other necessary actions. But if approval is declined, the University would be required to rectify observed deficiencies for a re-visitation to be conducted by the NUC. Until these processes are concluded, no institution is expected to admit candidates to any new programme.

Stage 3: A positive outcome would lead to the commencement of the programme. The programme is expected to admit students and run for two years before a re-visitation by the NUC and relevant professional bodies (if any). All admitted students are required to possess the minimum admission requirements for the programme. This stage could also be termed the trial stage because a revisit after two years by the NUC to re-ascertain the level of resource availability and enhancement as well as the quality of instruction could make or mar the continued existence of the programme.

Quality Assurance Measures by the NUC

The NUC Quality Assurance measures could be seen from the perspective of Hornby (9th Edition) who defined Quality Assurance as the practice of managing the way goods are produced or services are provided to make sure they are kept at a high standard. To ensure that quality academic programmes are developed and taught in the Universities and that the products (graduates) from the system are fit for purpose, the NUC has ensured that the following measures among others are undertaken in the Nigerian university system:

- The establishment of Academic Planning Units in Nigerian Universities.
- The resource verification visits to Universities by Teams of experts from the university system along with representatives of professional bodies where necessary during the programme conceptualisation stage.
- The introduction of the possession of a Doctorate degree as the minimum qualification for lectures in the University system. Lecturers with lower qualifications are encouraged to undertake further studies or risk the consequences of being stagnated at the Senior Lecturer level in the career progression.

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- Encouragement of lecturers in the University system to utilize the training/funding opportunities provided by the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (Tetfund) to attend local and international conferences, staff training, book publishing and development, research activities etc.
- The annual accreditation of programmes using experts from the University system along with some professionals (where necessary).

Ensuring Quality Academic Programmes in Universities

The NUC in 1980 directed institutions to establish academic planning units to serve as the liaison office between it and the institutions in ensuring the implementation of NUC guidelines in academic and allied developments in institutions. Among other duties, the Academic Planning Unit is to ensure that the prescribed procedures and resource requirements for the development of academic programmes are followed and available in institutions; therefore, the unit should at all times discourage the running of programmes not approved by the NUC. This unit is expected to be operational in all Universities in Nigeria and located in the Vice-Chancellor's Office (NUC, 1980).

Resource verification visits to institutions to ascertain resource availability for the commencement of new programmes. The Resource Verification Teams are usually made up of experts from the Universities and professional bodies (where desirable) to undertake the critical review and assessment of information provided by the institutions on the level of requisite resource availability and preparedness for the commencement of such programmes. Once the programmes are operational, the NUC undertakes the third procedure which is the periodic evaluation of quality and standards in the academic programmes of institutions. This is done through annual accreditation visits to institutions to assess the quality of programmes. The NUC exercises notwithstanding, relevant professional bodies undertake similar exercises/visits to Universities to ensure the sustenance of quality and standards in their programmes. Examples include the Medical and Dental Council of Nigeria (MDCN), Council for the Registration of Engineers in Nigeria (COREN), Pharmacists Council of Nigeria (PCN) and Medical Laboratory Council of Nigeria (MLCN).

Periodic Evaluation of Academic Programmes in Universities through Accreditation Exercises

The National Universities Commission (NUC), Professional Bodies of relevant academic programmes and other agencies of government have consistently undertaken periodic evaluation of the academic programmes in higher institutions in Nigeria to ensure and sustain quality and standards. For the Universities, the NUC undertakes what is known as the accreditation of programmes usually in October/November of every year and a mop up exercise in March/April annually. Programme Accreditation, according to the NUC (2012, p. 5), means a system of evaluating academic programmes in Nigerian Universities as having met the provisions of the minimum academic standards document. The exercise which is seen as peer-review, attempts to evaluate the academic programmes based on the provisions in the BMAS/CCMAS documents. It is a quality assurance exercise which attempts to monitor quality and ensures that standards are not only continuously sustained but equally improved

Publication of the European Centre for Research Training and Development-UK upon. Also it is a system of recognizing educational institutions' level of performance, integrity and quality which entitles them to the confidence of the educational community, the public they serve and employers of labour.

Specifically the objectives of accreditations have been summarized by the NUC as follow (NUC, 2012):

- to ensure that the provisions of the BMAS document are attained, maintained and enhanced;
- to assure employers of labour that Nigerian graduates of all academic programmes have attained an acceptable level of competence in their areas of specializations; and
- to certify to the international community that the programmes offered in Nigerian Universities are of high standards and that our graduates are fit for employment and further studies internationally.

The results of the accreditation exercises in institutions are usually in three categories:

- **Full Accreditation Status:** This status is accorded to any degree or other academic programme that has satisfied the provisions of the relevant BMAS/CCMAS. This status is granted to programmes for a period of six academic sessions with a mid-term appraisal after three years. The overall score to earn this status must be 70% and above. Also the programme must have scored 70% and above in the core areas of academic contents, staffing, physical facilities and library.
- **Interim Accreditation Status:** This status is granted to any degree or other academic programme that has minor deficiencies that must be rectified within a stipulated period. The duration of this status is not more than two academic sessions. The overall score for this status is between 60% and 69%. The overall score may be 70% and above; but the programme must have scored below 70% in at least one of the core areas (academic contents, staffing, physical facilities and library).
- **Denied Accreditation Status:** This status applies to any degree or other academic programme which has failed to satisfy the approved BMAS/CCMAS document. To earn this status, the programme must have earned overall score of below 60%.

Request for re-visitation for purposes of accreditation are made by the institution concerned after the identified deficiencies had been rectified. Programme evaluation or the accreditation process involves the evaluation of six different components of an academic programme with a cumulative score of 100% thus: (Tobrise, 2018):

Component	Maximum Score (%)
Academic matters	18
Staffing	32
Physical facilities	27
Library	18
Funding	3
Employers' rating of graduates	2
Total	100

Detailed analysis of each of the criteria is shown hereunder:

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Academic Matters

- (i) The philosophy and objectives of programme - 1 mark
- (ii) The curriculum - 2 marks
- (iii) Admission requirements - 2 marks
- (iv) Academic regulations - 2 marks
- (v) Standard of tests and examinations - 3 marks
- (Exam and continuous assessment)
- (vi) Evaluation of students' work - 2 marks
- (vii) Practical work/degree project - 2 marks
- (viii) Students' course evaluation - 2 marks
- (ix) External examination system - 2 marks

18 marks

Staffing

- (a) Academic staff
 - (i) Staff/student ratio - 8 marks (science 1:20)
 - (ii) Staff mix by rank - 5 marks (Prof/Assoc Prof: SL: others)
(20:35:45)
 - (iii) Qualifications of the teaching staff - 7 marks (% with Ph.D \geq 70% = 7mks;
60 - 70% = 4 marks;
50 - 60% = 2 marks
< 50% = 0% mark)
 - (iv) Competence of teaching staff - 1 mark
- (b) Administration of the Department - 3 marks
- (c) Non-Teaching staff - 3 marks
- (d) Staff development efforts - 5 marks

32 marks

Physical Facilities

- (a) Laboratory/clinic/studios for the programme
 - (i) Space in existing laboratories - 4 marks
 - (ii) Equipment - 7 marks
- (b) Classrooms/lecture theatres
 - (i) Space available meets standards - 5 marks
 - (ii) Equipment/furniture, etc - 3 marks
- (c) Office accommodation - 5 marks
(offices are adequate in space and well equipped)
- (d) Safety and environmental sanitation - 3 marks
(the environment and buildings should be clean, safe, and in line with safety standards, eg. toilets, fire extinguisher, fire buckets with sand and water, etc)

Library

- A. Physical library
 - (i) Holdings. Number and Quality - 4 marks
 - (ii) Currency of Holdings - 4 marks

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- B. e-Library
- (i) Subscription to e-Books and e-journals - 7 marks
 - (ii) Available computers for staff and students - 3 marks
- Note: 1 computer to 5 students is considered very adequate.
1 computer to 7 students is considered adequate.
1 computer to 8 students is considered fairly adequate.
Anything above 1:8 is not adequate.
- **Funding**
Financing of the programme - 3 marks
 - **Employer's rating of graduates**, if any.
Any of 2 components is used for assessing employer's ratings.
 - (a) Graduates performance on the job - 2 marks
(for Universities that have graduated students)
 - (b) Students performance during supervised industrial - 2 marks
and other similar experience (SIWES, teaching practice etc)

Documents for the Evaluation/Accreditation Exercise

The department whose programme is scheduled for an accreditation visit is expected to assemble the following information/documents for the use of the panel:

- (i) Staff files (Academic and Non-Academic)
- (ii) List of Academic staff by rank, qualification and employment type
- (iii) List of Non-Academic staff by rank and qualification
- (iv) Students files (all levels)
- (v) List of students by levels
- (vi) Student handbook
- (vii) Past Examination Question Papers (all levels)
- (viii) Past Examination Answer Scripts (all levels)
- (ix) Student final year project work (3 years or more)
- (x) External examiners' reports
- (xi) Moderated questions
- (xii) Marking schemes
- (xiii) Continuous assessment sheets
- (xiv) Employers' rating of graduates reports
- (xv) Laboratory logbook (where applicable), and
- (xvi) List of Academic and Non-Academic staff that have benefited from staff development (Masters, PhDs, conferences, seminars, etc).

Note: Head of Department should ensure that the information available in the above list is in line with the information in the SSF.

Preparations for Accreditation Exercises before Programme Accreditation

The Heads of Departments and the Academic Planning Unit of the institution should have good working relationship officially and unofficially to ensure a hitch-free exercise. The Head of Departments are expected to have gone through the result of the last accreditation exercise to enable adequate preparation to be made to address observed deficiencies.

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Therefore, Heads of Departments are required to ensure the following:

- establish departmental accreditation committee to get the programme ready for the exercise;
- task the committee to determine the cost implications of deficiencies and other accreditation needs;
- ensure that the cost implications of the needs for the exercise are forwarded to the University management.
- follow up on the request for money and other logistics for the exercise.

The Academic Planning Unit is expected to collate the Self Study Forms (SSF) of programmes to be accredited before the arrival of the accreditation teams. The SSF consists of two parts - sections A & B. Section A contains information about the University while section B contains information on the programme to be accredited. It should be noted that the information with the department is the same as in the SSF.

Getting the Department Ready for Accreditation

When the date of visitation by the accreditation Team is confirmed, the Head of Department should ensure that the departmental accreditation committee in collaboration with the Academic Planning Unit, address the deficiencies that could be remedied by the Department. Besides, the Head of Department should;

- ensure that the department environment (offices, teaching laboratories, lecture theatres/halls, toilets etc) is clean, tidy and safe.
- brief all staff about the impending exercise and solicit their support and cooperation.
- link up with the university librarian to ascertain the holdings/stock, and currency of books and journals. Ensure their shortfalls are available and shelved.
- ensure that staff offices and laboratories are properly tagged/named.

During Accreditation

Team Arrival

The Accreditation Teams arrive institutions mainly on Sundays except when they move from nearby institutions to new locations. In the latter situation, arrival could be midweek (ie Wednesday). On arrival, the Team is expected to be given copies of bound SSF to enable members to be familiar with the programme to be visited. The Head of Department and the Academic Planning Unit are to ensure that members of the Accreditation Team are adequately accommodated in safe and secured hotels.

Actual Exercise

Courtesy Call on Institutions Management

Before the commencement of work, every Team is expected to pay courtesy call on the Management of the University under the leadership of the Provost/Dean/Head of Department who would thereafter receive the Accreditation Team to their Faculty/Departments immediately after the courtesy visit on management. The Head of Department should ensure that all academic and non-academic (permanent, adjunct and visiting) staff are around and

Publication of the European Centre for Research Training and Development-UK seated in their respective offices, laboratory and or classrooms. If any staff is not going to be around for any reason, a written permission should be obtained from the Head of Department stating the reason for absence. The head of laboratory should ensure that safety measures are put in place and that staff conduct themselves in professional manner (appearance). The Head of Department should also ensure that students enrolled in the department are adequately briefed about the exercise and to comport themselves in good manner (dress well, wear lab coats during practical and exhibit general good behaviour).

Physical Inspection of Facilities

The Head of Department is expected to take the Team to inspect the classrooms, laboratories, academic staff offices and any other facilities important to the accreditation visit.

Scrutiny of Documents and Discussions

An office should be provided to the Team and the relevant documents should be made available to the Team to peruse and scrutinize. The Team would be expected to meet with the students and academic staff during which staff are expected to demonstrate friendly attitude/disposition even when some observed deficiencies are highlighted.

After the Accreditation Exercise (Exit Visit by Accreditation Teams)

Heads of Departments are expected to:

- attend Team's meetings with the management staff of the institution, (courtesy and exit visits) during which the team would make their observations known;
- take notes on the observations of the Panel and the reactions of the University Administration.

Note: It should be noted that no programme earns an absolutely perfect accreditation status. But with adequate preparations based on the BMAS/CCMAS, programmes can achieve full accreditation. Even when a full accreditation status is earned, there are always minor deficiencies that an institution has to rectify/remedy.

Therefore, Heads of Department and Academic Planning Unit are expected to work collaboratively before, during and after the accreditation visit to ensure that academic programmes have the minimum requirements for quality instructions, maintain and enhance standards.

Challenges Associated with the Quality Assurance Measures of the NUC in Nigerian Universities

The development of academic programmes in Nigerian Universities is fraught/bedevilled with several challenges. They include but not limited to the following:

(1) Inadequate information about the programmes

Some of the academic programmes in Nigerian Universities are not known to many prospective candidates. The potential benefits to be derived by students, the career prospects and possible areas of the economy graduates could possibly apply their competences/skills from such programmes are not known to many school leavers. There are also societal perceptions or prejudices against some of these programmes which discourage parents/guardians and in turn

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 their children/wards from patronizing such programmes. Therefore, many of such programmes are under-subscribed or not chosen at all by candidates during the University Tertiary Matriculation Examinations (UTME).

For instance, while programmes such as Medicine, Dentistry, Law, Pharmacy, Nursing, Accounting etc are usually heavily subscribed by candidates, some other programmes and degree options in Education, Agriculture, Botany (Plant Biology and Biotechnology), Zoology (Animal and Environmental Biology), Actuarial Science, Insurance, Religious Studies, Philosophy, Fine and Applied Arts, History, Music, Foreign Languages, etc are usually undersubscribed. This situation often result in institutions relocating candidates from academic programmes with over subscription to these “unattractive” ones (UAB, 2021).

(2) Absence of the relevant BMAS documents

Many institutions develop academic programmes which are outside the ones for which the NUC BMAS/CCMAS documents are available. They do this with the hope that the relevant BMAS/CCMAS document would be developed by the NUC in due course. Most times, the documents are not readily developed to meet the needs of the institutions.

(3) Financial outlay for programmes with low students enrolment

Many programmes do not attract patronage from prospective candidates owing to inadequate information on the benefits and career prospects for graduates of such programmes. In spite of such low enrolments, institutions are made to endure and accommodate the enormous financial resources involved in sustaining such programmes in the areas of salaries, provision of physical facilities, etc (Table 1).

Table 1:
Uniben: Academic Staff Mix by Programme, 2020/2021

Programmes	Quota	Cleared	Staffing Prof/ Assoc	SL	Others	Total
Agriculture	678	454	35	12	53	100
Education	1,861	1,136	39	25	90	154
Animal & Environmental Biology (AEB)	195	155	18	3	18	39
Plant Biology and Biotechnology (PPB)	204	175	12	5	18	35
Industrial Physics	103	56	8	4	15	27
Physics	103	30				
Geography	54	30	8	5	9	22
Industrial Maths	153	22				
Mathematics	153	41	17	8	19	44
Maths & Econs	103	12				
Pure & Applied Maths	73	21				

Source: Academic Planning Division, University of Benin, 2022.

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(4) Non-availability of the requisite staff

The shortage of academic and other relevant staff for academic programmes in Nigerian Universities is well known. For instance, the analysis of the academic disposition against the required staff based on the NUC Student-Teacher Ratios for Faculties/Programmes in the University of Benin between 2014/2015 and 2018/2019 academic sessions revealed that some Faculties were understaffed. These included the Faculties of Agriculture, Arts, Basic Medical Sciences, Education, Environmental Sciences, Engineering, Life Sciences, Physical Sciences and Pharmacy as in Table 2.

**Table 2:
 Undergraduate Headcount Enrolment and Academic Staff (Actual, Required and Shortfall), by Faculty, 2014/2015 – 2018/2019 Academic Year**

Faculty	2014/2015				2015/2016				2016/2017				2017/2018				2018/2019			
	HC	Act ual	Req d	Sho rt fall	HC	Actu al	Req d	Sh ort fall	HC	Actu al	Req d	Sh ort fall	HC	Actu al	Req d	Sh ort fall	HC	Actu al	Req d	Shor t fall
Agriculture	2249	94	150	56	2271	103	145	42	1969	105	131	26	2037	100	136	36	2056	93	137	44
Arts	4909	145	164	19	5540	165	185	20					5726	172	191	19	5710	171	190	19
Basic Medical Science	1015	93	102	4	1193	104	119	15	1567	106	157	51	1807	106	181	75	1948	108	195	87
Education	4679	113	156	23	5705	145	190	45	6576	156	219	63	6543	154	218	64	7369	157	246	89
Environmental Science																	596	33	40	7
Engineering	3365	185	224	39	3492	200	233	33	3593	214	240	26	3952	193	263	70	3811	182	254	72
Life Sciences																	5088	230	254	24
Physical Sciences					3200	127	160	33	3427	160	171	11	3526	149	176	27	3552	131	178	47
Pharmacy																	994	62	66	4

Notes: HC = Head count; Reqd = Required

Source: Academic Planning Division, University of Benin, 2020

Thus available ones are being over-stressed with many of them having many students to supervise and or scripts to assess every semester. This challenge has also affected the conduct of practical/laboratory classes in many Science-related programmes. In some institutions, “alternative to practicals”, is now the order of the day due to inadequate laboratory spaces and staff to conduct regular laboratory classes.

The precarious situation has been exacerbated by the staff who are engaged as adjunct lecturers in multiple institutions. Thus, such staff are not committed to their parent institutions in the discharge of their duties. However, in recent years the NUC has tried to limit the number of institutions staff could be engaged as adjunct lecturers to a maximum of two. But such guidelines are difficult to enforce by the institutions. In fact, in many of the new or emerging programmes, the requisite staff are not available in terms of number, qualification and mix as would be required for academic programmes.

(5) Inadequate and dilapidated physical facilities, equipment and library resources

The provision of adequate physical facilities in schools play invaluable roles in the teaching-learning process. Many authors such as Asiyal (2012), Lawanson and Gede (2011) have noted that school physical facilities are material components which influence teaching and learning

Publication of the European Centre for Research Training and Development-UK in schools. Their provision is to ensure that students as well as the teachers are comfortable and safe in order to achieve quality education. Therefore adequate and functional school facilities are essential for effective teaching. Examples of such facilities include classrooms, libraries, laboratories, chairs, tables, computer and library software, etc.

Yates and Ge, 2010, emphasized that while the provision of school facilities is imperative, their maintenance play critical role in the actualization of the institutional goals and objectives. To them, adequately maintained facilities preserve their initial functional, structural and aesthetic state. Hence such maintenance could be planned and unplanned.

However, many Nigerian Universities lack adequate physical facilities for their academic programmes. The lecture theatres/halls are inadequate in number and occupancy rate to meet the growing number in student enrolment. Many staff do not have offices as prescribed by the BMAS/CCMAS document, and even the available ones are not adequately furnished to ensure good working environment. The laboratories are inadequate in number and size to cater for the needs of students. Similarly, the equipment in many of the institutions' workshops and laboratories are inadequate and sometimes obsolete to meet the practical or experimental needs of students. Thus, in some institutions, many of the practical exercises in some of the programmes have been reduced to only theoretical exercises and the development of special workshop/laboratory manuals as alternative to practical settings in the laboratories.

Besides the inadequacy in number of the lecture theatres/halls, laboratories and the staff offices, those available are not properly maintained. Broken seats, chairs, tables abound in many lecture halls. The halls are inadequately illuminated and thus uncomfortable for pleasurable teaching and learning to take place.

Also, every academic programme requires dedicated and specialised books and journals to assist the lecturers and students in their teaching-learning processes. It is common knowledge to find that in many Universities, the requisite library resources are grossly inadequate for many of the academic programmes. In some situations, existing ones are not adequate in number and obsolete in currency. Many institutions do not even subscribe to the relevant library softwares that would enhance the routine management of the library and provide unlimited access to staff and students to the requisite e-books and journals for their academic programmes. Meanwhile, the e-books and e-journals have become very essential component in the evaluation and assessment of the quality and status of academic programmes in Nigerian Universities. Examples of these software are:

- (1) The Library Management Software: The software has different modules for performing different in-house services such as cataloguing, circulation, serial management. Examples include New GenLib, KOHA, SLAM.
- (2) Electronic Databases (full text and non full-text) in different subject areas. Examples include EBSCOHOST, RESEARCH4LIFE, SCIENCE DIRECT, EMERALD, WILEY, TEEAL, SPRINGER.

(6) Funding & Government Policies

Finance is the enabling resource in any academic development enterprise. It is a very scarce resource indeed to both the public and private institutions. The unavailability of this resource in the required magnitude has hampered institutional growth and development generally. Infact, Azenabor (2021) captured the scenario succinctly when he stated that adequate funding of university education in Nigeria is the greatest developmental problem. To him, university education in Nigeria remains chronically underfunded. For instance the Federal Government under President Buhari allocated a paltry sum of 5-7% of the total budget to education as against the recommended United Nations Standard of at least 27% of annual budget of a nation to education.

Without adequate funding, institutions can hardly provide the resource needs of academic programmes. The recruitment of relevant staff, construction of physical facilities, acquisition of the needed equipment, library resources, payment of staff salaries and ensuring the provision of other resources for the operations of the institution depends on the availability of funds in the right quantity and value.

The abilities of some institutions, especially the federal institutions, to look inward in increasing their income have been curtailed by government policies and directives banning the payment of tuition fees by undergraduate students in Universities since 1977. Meanwhile, there is an unprecedented growth of Federal Universities from fourteen in 1977 to fifty in 2023 (NUC, 2023). Besides, the level of poverty and economic hardships in the country certainly puts a limit on the level of tuition fees that states and private proprietors can impose on the students in their institutions.

The Way Forward

The challenges associated with the enhancement and operations of academic programmes in Universities notwithstanding, there is the need to address the observed challenges besetting the system and the quest for new academic programmes to equip potential graduates with the knowledge, competences and skills to tackle emerging economic and social challenges ahead. Consequently, the following proposals are made:

(a) Adequate sensitization of secondary school students on the requirements for entering and the career prospects of existing academic programmes in Universities and other higher institutions. The Federal and State Ministries of Education could undertake this assignment through the career Guidance Councillors in schools. Therefore every secondary school in the country should have at least two career guidance counsellors. The higher institutions could also organise regular workshops and seminars for principals of secondary schools and their career guidance counsellors to regularly acquaint them with the requirements for entering into and the career prospects inherent in any academic programme. The successful implementation of these proposals would reduce the incidence of low applications to some of the existing programmes in the institutions.

(b) Federal Agencies should review existing BMAS documents of Academic Programmes to reflect new trends in the subject areas. However new documents could be developed for new

Publication of the European Centre for Research Training and Development-UK academic areas being envisaged by operators of the institutions. This exercise could be coordinated by the different agencies (NUC, NBTE, NCCE, etc) by requesting institutions under their supervision to submit lists of possible academic programmes or disciplines they consider desirable to address the economic, societal, technological, challenges of Nigeria within the next 10 years. Special committees of experts in the different subject areas would then be set up to formulate appropriate curricula contents (BMAS/CCMAS) for the disciplines.

This process could reduce the tendency by institutions working at cross purposes to develop contents for academic programmes and prevent the running of academic programmes without the documents to guide their operations.

(c) Deliberate development of manpower for higher education

The yawning gap between the existing academic staff in each academic programme and the ideal requirement using the different student-teacher ratios is very wide. This gap continues to increase with increasing enrolment in the programmes. To redress the situation, the federal government, should of necessity, establish a scholarship scheme for the training of academic, technical and laboratory staff for higher institutions. This scheme is to complement the prevailing provisions by Tetfund on the same matter. Higher institutions should therefore be encouraged to transparently identify good quality graduates from the different academic programmes of their institutions who desire to make a career in research and teaching to benefit from the scheme. This scheme should be accessible to all graduates irrespective of institutions attended (federal, state or private institutions).

(d) Provision of dedicated fund for capital projects (physical facilities and learning infrastructures), laboratory/studio equipment, books and journals.

In the university system, capital projects funded from the annual federal government budgets take several years before completion. Many new academic buildings in federal institutions are funded by Tetfund which is an intervening agency of government. Therefore, the Federal and State governments should budget and release adequate funds for the development of physical facilities and learning infrastructures in higher institutions.

Similarly, adequate funds should be provided for the expansion and development of laboratories and studios in higher institutions. The relevant equipment should be upgraded and obsolete ones replaced. Students should be exposed to modern equipment during their training in schools. Institutions should also strive to establish academic or on-the-job training relationships with industries for the practical training/exposure of students to the work environment and perhaps for the donation of equipment to the institutions. Also, library development and provision of the relevant resources or facilities is indispensable. Proprietors of institutions should see this as a sine-qua-non for meaning academic development in higher institutions. The relevant library softwares should be acquired or subscribed to in order to enhance access to e-books and e-journals by staff and students. The installation of close circuit television (CCTV) cameras in libraries is also recommended to reduce the incidence of theft, mutilation or tearing of some pages of books in the libraries.

(e) Improved funding of higher institutions in Nigeria.

The institutions require funds to meet the costs associated with the running of the system. Electricity bills, diesel for running generators, water supply schemes, road maintenance, repair of buildings, hostel maintenance, environmental cleanliness, health care provisions, security and other contingency requirements need fund to accomplish. Therefore existing budgetary allocations and releases should be greatly improved if institutions are to live up to their expectations.

To enhance funds available to higher institutions especially federal institutions, the federal government should allow undergraduate students to pay reasonable tuition fees, hostel maintenance fees and general maintenance fees. To Azenabor (2021), the federal universities should explore other avenues of income to boost government subvention if the university must survive such as –

- Engaging in fund raising activities and private sector participation in education.
- Financial resourcefulness and strengthening the internal and external control mechanism for better and transparent management.
- A two-fold rationalisation policy. One, the government needs to reconstitute and expand the membership of the University Council to reflect various interest groups and stakeholders associated with the activities of the university. Two, the present unprecedented proliferation of universities in Nigeria without commensurate development and basic infrastructures should be tackled frantically. There should be mergers and acquisitions.
- Pursuit of intensive and extensive agricultural programmes, especially for the universities in the rural areas.
- Establishing a linkage between higher education and industry, commerce and agriculture, in order to fully realise the potentials of the system.
- Education should be adequately funded as a social service to be financed by all tiers of education in line with the “National Policy on Education”.
- Funds from intervening agencies of government such as Education Tax Fund, National Science and Technology Fund, Nigeria Education Bank Fund, Industrial Training Fund, Petroleum Trust Fund along with Tetfund, should be mobilised and made available for Nigeria education to utilise.
- The NUC Minimum Standards should include a minimum standard of annual budgetary allocation of not less than 10-20 percent of Nigeria’s national budget.
- A certain degree of institutional autonomy should be granted to the university in order to facilitate economic diversity, for services to be adequately paid for and objectives effectively realised or achieved.

The above suggestions, if implemented, would help in transforming and reinvigorating the system. Infact, income from these sources would enhance the internally generated revenue of institutions. However, for the indigent students, the federal and state governments should reintroduce the Students Loan Scheme, Bursary award scheme or the scholarship scheme for students. In fact state governments should be made to provide bursaries to their students with active involvement of the local governments.

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(f) Consolidation of Academic Programmes

Universities should close down or merge “unviable” academic programmes that are no longer attractive/patronized by students. Such reorganization could reduce the cost of running the academic activities of institutions. Alternatively, such programmes could be reviewed and new perspectives brought in to attract candidates and meet the needs of the society.

(g) Development of higher degree programmes.

Institutions should be encouraged to develop higher degree programmes in existing academic programmes rather than the crave for new undergraduate programmes. In fact, older institutions should change their orientation to higher degree programmes and less attention to undergraduate programmes in the ratio of 60:40 or 70:30 in their admission exercises.

(h) Institutions should be encouraged to establish Centres of Excellence in some specialized subject areas rather than be generalists in all disciplines. Infact, institutions should carve a niche for themselves in specific subject areas for which they have comparative advantage and invest maximally to develop such disciplines.

(i) Institutions should adopt the systems approach to the development of academic programmes. By this is meant that academic programmes should only be developed when the other related conditions have been met, that is, there is the BMAS document to guide curricula development, existence of the requisite physical facilities/academic infrastructures, adequate staff by qualification and mix, library books and journals by quantity, currency and their e-versions, funding, etc. Above all, there should be enough sensitization of the public to guarantee the enrolment of required students when any programme is developed/approved.

CONCLUSION

Many higher institutions worldwide have been known to be reputable in their academic pursuits based on the organization and quality of their academic programmes, the quality of researchers undertaken by the Faculty (staff), the excellent research relationships between the institutions and industries and the associated inventions and patents therefrom. Therefore, the growth and development of any Nigerian University should continue to depend on the quality of its academic programmes, staff and graduates therefrom.

Thus, if Nigerian higher institutions are to be academically reputable, proprietors of the institutions should invest maximally in the development of quality academic programmes by providing the requisite physical facilities, guarantee good working environment, provide well-equipped laboratories/studios/workshops with modern equipment, library resources and the recruitment and retention of highly motivated staff. Besides, the Academic Planning Unit, the internal moderating office, should be adequately developed, staffed and encouraged to perform its tasks of guiding Management on the operations of only NUC approved programmes and ensuring that departments are provided with those resources that would guarantee academic excellence.

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