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From Policy to Practice: University Accreditation and National Development in Nigeria

A Review Essay by: Bukola Adeyemi Oyeniyi, Missouri State University

Introduction

Drawing from my experience as Head of Department in two Nigerian universities between 2005 and 2012, this review essay examines the politics and practice of higher education accreditation in Nigeria. This review essay, mainly, compares the ethics of programmatic accreditation and resource verification with actual implementation.

The National University Commission (NUC) is charged with the task of regulating higher education in Nigeria. It is also tasked with ensuring innovation in educational delivery and course design, ensuring quality in staffing and teaching. To understand the politics and practice of university accreditation in Nigeria, it is important to understand the nature and characteristic of the relationship between the NUC and universities. Among other things, the NUC mandates that higher educational institutions in Nigeria undergo resource verification at the beginning of any program and a periodic programmatic accreditation. In administering these requirements, the NUC appoints Ad-Hoc staff composed of professors who served as peer-reviewers during both the resource verification and programmatic accreditation exercises (RVPAE).

Given that there are thousands of courses and over 150 higher educational institutions in Nigeria, the use of participant observations and only two universities as case-studies could lead to unhealthy generalizations and misleading conclusions. To ameliorate these inadequacies in method and sample size, the essay used data-sets from the NUC, Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Education Trust Fund (ETF), International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) to analyze a more nuanced data-set before drawing conclusions. Secondary sources such as journal articles and essays were also used. This research probed the following questions: What is the nature and characteristic of the relationship between the NUC and universities in Nigeria? With the NUC appointing professors as Ad-Hoc staff who were charged with RVPAE during the periodic accreditation exercises, what sort of relationship has developed between the NUC, its Ad-Hoc staff and the universities? How does this relationship impact on RVPAE processes? Is there any connection between quality of education and the quality of RVPAE?

Encountering the National University Commission

Between 1993 and 2009, I have had three encounters with the NUC both as a student and as a professor. During the 1993/94 academic year, I was admitted to the University of Ibadan to read Classics. Originally, I applied to the University of Ilorin to read Law, but the JAMB – the body that is responsible for conducting entrance examination into Nigerian universities, offered me admission into Ibadan instead. The switch in course and university was occasioned by the

failure of the Department of Law, University of Ilorin to secure NUC's accreditation, a development that prevented the program from admitting new students. In 2005, I was appointed pioneer Head of the Department of History and International Relation at the Redeemer's University (RUN)¹. I stepped down from the position in 2008. When I joined Joseph Ayo Babalola University (JABU) in 2010, I also emerged as its pioneer Head of the Department of History and International Relations; at JABU, I, however, also stepped down in 2011.² In both RUN and JABU, my colleagues and I not only designed the 4-year Bachelor of Arts in History and International Relation programs,³ but also saw the departments through the NUC's RVP AE – the two stages involved in the NUC's accreditation of academic programs in Nigerian educational system⁴.

It was on the basis of my experiences in these two institutions that I evaluate the impact of accreditation on the practice of course-designing and accreditation ethics, resource input and quality of process, quality of output and quality of academic content in this essay. In general, the overall motive is to show, within the limits of these two cases, how policies are translated into concrete, actionable practices and how this impacts educational goals and standard in Nigeria's educational system.

The NUC, established in 1962 as an advisory agency, conducts institutional accreditations for higher education programs in Nigeria.⁵ It became a statutory body in 1974 and was charged with granting approval for the establishment of higher educational institutions offering degree programs. Two other fundamental functions of the NUC were the ensuring quality assurance and serving as a clearing-house for external supports to Nigerian universities. As at 2009, the NUC's mandate was widened to supervise orderly development of a well-coordinated and productive university system that will guarantee quality outcomes through relevant education.

To implement RVP AE, the NUC depends on reports filed by its ad-hoc officials to evaluate higher educational institutions, programs and their affiliated bodies. The NUC awards programs with one of three results: (a) Full Accreditation, (b) Partial Accreditation and (c) Denial of Accreditation. When a program is denied, the program is not only given another opportunity to make changes but it is also presented with a list of recommendations to be approved in the future. Following this, another RVP AE is then scheduled. Consistent denial of accreditation might automatically cause a program to lose its accreditation. When this happens, existing students will then be allowed to either graduate or they are transferred to merge with another department.

NUC and A Reluctant HOD

¹ The Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) owned the Redeemer's University (RUN).

² The Christ Apostolic Church owned JABU. Both RUN and JABU were privately-owned universities. Besides privately-owned universities, two other ownership structures are federal government-owned universities and state-owned universities. Despite differences in ownership structure, the NUC subjected the three types of universities to the same regulations.

³ At the Redeemer's University, Dr. Akinjide Osuntokun - the Dean, College of Humanities, retired as a Professor of African history from the University of Lagos where he taught for many years. Professor Osuntokun provided the Department with a sample of the University of Lagos 4-year program courses. Within the first year, my other colleagues – Ms. Oyeleye Dairo and Mr. Omoh Osiki worked through this document and within the first two years, produced a 4-year Bachelor's degree in History and International Relations program.

⁴ Before RVP AE, the NUC required an on-campus visit by Ad-Hoc officials to examine the level of preparedness and resources available to a prospective department. The RVP AE enabled departments to prepare for the accreditation exercise proper in later years.

⁵ See section on "Function" on <http://nuc.edu.ng/>. Accessed June 10, 2018.

When I was made Head of Department at RUN in 2005, I was not only fearful, but also reluctant since I had no experience whatsoever. RUN was a new private university and I understood the need for one to start right from the outset. The Dean of the College of Humanities, Professor Akinjide Osuntoku was unlike myself an experienced academic since he had taught for many years in different universities in Nigeria and Canada respectively.⁶ Between 1978 and 1979, he served as a director at the NUC's Office Ottawa, Ontario, Canada and, between 1979 and 1982 he served as a director at the NUC's Office, Washington DC, USA.⁷ He was also Nigeria's ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to Germany between 1991 and 1995.⁸

Under his tutelage as well as with in-puts from my colleagues, I not only designed a 4-year Bachelor's History and International Relations' degree program but I also led the Department through the RVPAE. In the exercises that were undertaken, the NUC awarded Full Accreditation to the Department at RUN.

When I joined JABU in 2010, the experiences garnered from RUN came in handy and, before departing JABU in December of 2012, I had successfully designed the Department's 4-year Bachelor's History and International Relations' degree program and led the department through the RVPAE.

In the remaining part of this section, I shall treat the different core issues of interest to NUC officials based on my experiences at RUN and JABU respectively. I shall endeavor to compare activities, where need be, and I shall examine the differences and similarities as well as explain the reason why the one action was taken in one place while different action was taken in another. Where my observations and experiences were inadequate, I drew upon secondary sources for insights and conclusions.

Accreditation and Quality of Input

At the inception of RUN, the department started with three full-time lecturers - a full professor, a Lecturer Grade 2, and 2 Assistant Lecturers. With a total of 21 pioneer students, a ratio of 21 students to 4 full-time teaching staff was just adequate for the department. Not only were we able to monitor these students effectively, we were also able to fully satisfy one of the university's core value of '*in loco parentis*'.⁹

For the RVPAE in the second year, 2 Full-Time Lecturer Grade Two, and 3 part-time/adjuncts were employed.¹⁰ By the third year, when student population grew to over 60, 3 part-time/adjuncts professors were added, the three had PhDs.¹¹

The situation in JABU was, however, different. At inception, the department started with 18 students to a ratio of 3 professors - a Full-Time Lecturer Grade One, 1 Full-Time Assistant

⁶ See "Akinjide Osuntokun: My Public Profile View" accessed June 10, 2018 at <http://staff.run.edu.ng/process.php?active=myprofile&usrid=RUN%20FREG%20FSS%20FPF%20F005>.

⁷ See "Professor Akinjide Osuntokun" in *Biographical Legacy and Research Foundation*. Accessed June 10, 2018 at <https://blerf.org/index.php/biography/osuntokun-prof-akinjide/>

⁸ Dare Babarinsa (2017). "A Princess, a Professor and the Missing Key" in *The Guardian*, August 9. Accessed June 10, 2018 at <https://guardian.ng/opinion/a-princess-a-professor-and-the-missing-key/>

⁹ See "Student Handbook - Redeemer's University. Accessed June 10, 2018 at <https://run.edu.ng/media/19209181793345.pdf>.

¹⁰ Mr. Ikenna Obi and Mrs. Ngozi Obiageri were employed as Full-Time Lecturers Grade Two. It is sad to note that although both had registered for their doctorate degree before joining RUN, none of them completed the program before their untimely death. May their souls continue to rest in peace.

¹¹ Others that were appointed as Adjunct members were Drs. David Aworawo, Femi Adegbulu and Abolade Adeniyi.

Lecturer, and 1 Part-Time Assistant Lecturer. For the RVP AE in the third year, we had a Professor¹² and two PhD holders¹³, all were Full-Time appointees. In addition, we added one PhD holder, as adjunct and two other Assistant Lecturers.¹⁴ As at this time, the student population had risen to 52 across all the three levels.¹⁵

From the above, it could be argued that within the first three years of setting up the Department of History and International Relations at both RUN and JABU, the staff grew in line with student population; through this process they thereby satisfied NUC's carrying capacity requirements. In both universities, management was by and large reluctant to recruit; however, at both institutions the management teams, for fear of not securing Full Accreditation, were forced to employ fresh staff members.

Although we were able to satisfy the requirements to guarantee RVP AE at both RUN and JABU, , the two departments were both 'top-light' and 'bottom-heavy' in term of categories of teaching staff. In other words, they were staffed by lower-cadre teaching staff, a situation that paved the way for aberrations, such as my appointment as Head of Department in both institutions.

From the outset, RUN established a well-stocked library, with most of the books being donations from different well-wishers and friends of the university, its pioneer Vice-Chancellor and its proprietor – the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG).¹⁶ Few weeks before RVP AE, it dawned on us at the department that majority of the books in the library did not cover History and International Relations. To solve this problem, the department adopted the most pragmatic stop-gap measure available to us - we agreed to loan the library our own books. The Dean was the worst for this, as most of his books ended up as donations to the library.

In addition to the above, I approached the Director of the Nordiska Afrika Institute (NAI), Uppsala, Sweden and got a sizeable donation of books that were also donated to the university library.¹⁷ After the RVP AE, we compiled a list of must-have books and journals and submitted a budget to the university. We liaised with the subject officer in the library to ensure that these teaching and learning resources were purchased before the RVP AE process.¹⁸

Given my experience at RUN, I went to the university library upon joining JABU. I went to see for myself what sort of teaching and learning resources were available. Except for a few books, not a single journal in the field of History and International Relations was available. Armed with this, I tabled it at the departmental meeting and after sharing my experiences at RUN, we agreed that all lecturers should compile a list of key books and journals that were germane to our different classes. After harmonizing and compiling the list, we drew up a budget and submitted

¹² Professor Z.O. Apata was appointed for a year. He came on sabbatical leave from Kogi State University, Ayingba.

¹³ Dr. Noah E. Attah was appointed as a Full-Time Senior Lecturer from Osun State University. It is sad to note that it was during his time as Head of Department that the department collapsed.

¹⁴ Dr. Osaro Victor Edo was appointed Adjunct Professor on Part-Time while Messrs. Stephen Anisere and Kayode Faleye were Assistant Lecturers. While Faleye went on to register for a doctorate degree, Anisere was dismissed in 2013 for gross misconduct.

¹⁵ By 2013, when I was disengaging from JABU, the student population had grown to above 60; unfortunately, by 2016, poor and ineffective management had led to a total collapse of the department, with less than 10 students remaining in it.

¹⁶ Mrs. Tamuno who had worked for many years at Kenneth Dike Library of the University of Ibadan, was the pioneer Librarian.

¹⁷ I thank Ingrid Andersson for her assistance in this regard. She not only gave me books, but she also facilitated extra cash to cover cost of extra luggage to bring them to Nigeria.

¹⁸ My gratitude goes to both Mrs. Tamuno and Mr. Adeleke, the subject Librarian for Humanities for putting up with my persistent requests for texts and journals. They were quite phenomenal in their profession.

both to the Dean.¹⁹ Only one percent of the required funds, which were requested, was approved.²⁰ We had no alternative but to source books privately. I discussed my predicament with Professor Robert J. Ross who was my doctoral degree supervisor at the University of Leiden, the Netherlands.²¹ He suggested a few names, including the Librarian of African Studies Center (ASC) in Leiden that I could contact for help.²² These individuals and the ASC gave me tons of books, which today adorn the JABU's library. Through this method, we were able to secure more books and were able to scale through the RVPAE. We spent the small sum of money that was given by the University on procuring current editions of relevant journals. After scaling over the hurdle of RVPAE, we successfully got full approval for our program a year later.

Accreditation and Quality of Process

According to Oprea, external examination, self-assessment, and student-lecturer assessment are some of the instruments used in measuring internal quality assurance and reporting mechanisms.²³ After its first year, RUN began with a student-lecturer assessment. Unfortunately, the system was discarded after a semester. The general concern among teaching staff was that students were not knowledgeable enough to determine whether a teacher assigned adequate number of reading material, or if a teaching method was engaging or not. In general, the real intentions behind the assessment – quality assurance and reporting mechanism – was lost, as many teaching staff considered it an insult for students to evaluate their teaching or their level of engagement with teaching materials, etc.²⁴

In JABU, no student-lecturer assessment or any similar internal quality assurance measure was implemented. Whether during Resource Verification or Accreditation, NUC showed no concern over student-lecturer assessment. The above is not peculiar to RUN and JABU alone, there was no time during my undergraduate and postgraduate days at the University of Ibadan when the university afforded students opportunity to provide any feedback about teachers, teaching methods, teaching resources, etc. Whether as undergraduate or postgraduate student at the University of Ibadan, I cannot recall any time when another professor was in class to evaluate what all my professors were teaching. The result is simple: there was no feedback system, no internal

¹⁹ Professor Dele Orisawayi, Dean, College of Humanities played decisive roles in ensuring that management listened to us. Despite that its Registrar retired from the University of Lagos, it was shocking to note that at no time during my tenure as Head of Department, was I invited to any Senate meeting. Professor Orisawayi, therefore, became the only eyes and mouth of the Department of History and International Relations at the Senate. It was ironic that Head of Department of Mass Communications, Mr. Duyile who also had no doctorate degree was a member of the Senate. The above is another example of the kind of shoddy management practice that existed at JABU.

²⁰ In a letter signed by Mr. Wale Aderibigbe, the department was informed that a sum of 15,000 naira (about 30 US dollars) was approved for books and journal procurements for History and International Relations Department.

²¹ I thank my promotor, Professor Robert J. Ross for donating many books and for linking me up with many other people in Leiden.

²² I sincerely thank Dr. Akinyinka Akinyoade and the ASC for the numerous book donations. More specifically, Dr. Akinyinka not only took it upon himself to privately source for books, but also money to bring these books to Nigeria. In addition to physical books, I got more than 3000 electronic copies of different books – all of which were donated to JABU.

²³ Oprea Mihaela (2011). "A University Knowledge Management Tool for Academic Research Activity Evaluation" in *Informatica Economica*, vol. 15, no. 3. pp. 58 - 71.

²⁴ Like other teaching staff, I also found the student-lecturer evaluation strange. Management also failed to carry the teaching staff along in its decision on the issue. At no time was the intention behind the exercise made known to teaching staff; hence, it becomes easier to see it as a way to witch-hunt. It was only when I joined the University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, South Africa that I knew better.

quality assurance measurement, and no reporting mechanism that existed in Nigerian universities to allow the universities measure their impact.²⁵

Accreditation and Quality of Output

As the International Institute for Educational Planning noted, academic achievements on test and other quantitative scores are functions that test what students really learned in terms of knowledge acquisition and attitudinal changes.²⁶ To this end, student evaluation, peer evaluation, and retention rates become important in evaluating institutional outputs.

As noted above, neither RUN nor JABU conducted any peer evaluation of teaching. In both institutions, there were also no annual reviews: no attempt at measuring the quality of teaching and curriculum and no attempt at capturing retention rates. In considering large data-set, the absence of all of these indicators contributed to the deterioration of quality of Nigerian graduates, especially in communication and professionalism.²⁷

It must be noted, however, that both RUN and JABU invested in staff development, especially in the provision of research support for their teaching staff. Given paucity of PhD holders, RUN provided funding to its staff on doctoral programs. Such staff were provided with full tuition, with a provision that he or she will serve the university for the number of years that the university provided doctoral funding. In addition to this, the university also provided financial support to teaching staff to attend academic conferences. For example, teaching staff were provided with a stipend to cover the costs of flight, conference registration, accommodation and local transportation to international and local conferences.²⁸ 30min

Unlike in RUN where I was a recipient of conference grants many times between 2005 and 2009, the situation in JABU was different. Although I was eligible for a conference grant and was approved for one in JABU in 2010, the money was never released. I also do not know of any teaching staff whose doctoral degree tuition was covered. Despite this, the university continually made statements of its support for staff developments in these two key areas. Even if its pronouncements were merely talk, I, however, got a study leave with full pay for a semester, which afforded me the time and resources to complete my doctoral degree. Although dealing with documents that claimed a certain level of staff development initiatives, NUC officials made no effort to verify directly from recipients of either the conference grants or tuition support. At both institutions, managements were commended and rewarded for their staff development initiatives.

Accreditation & Quality of Content

²⁵ As at the time of writing this chapter, I interviewed a cross-section of former students from different universities in South West Nigeria to see if any system of evaluation was implemented during their university days, none affirmed the existence of any such system.

²⁶ Jo Anne Anderson (2005). *Accountability in Education*, International Institute for Educational Planning, pp. 1-2.

²⁷ Mohammed Danjuma, Sani Ahmed Yauta and Musa Jerry (2018). "Outsourcing as an Alternative for Higher Education Financing (HEF) in Nigeria: The Case of Adamawa State University Mubi, Gombe State University and Taraba State University, Nigeria." in *European Scientific Journal*, Vol.14, no.16. 226.

²⁸ I was the first recipient of this staff development grant. I thank Professor Oyewale Tomori, the pioneer Vice-Chancellor of RUN who took it upon himself to ensure that my trip to the international conference on War and Conflicts in Africa, which held at the University of Texas at Austin, United States America was funded. Without his support and the grant, the journey would not have been possible. In other to reduce costs, international travel was later limited to once a year and not exceeding 200, 000 naira in RUN. In JABU however, I was approved to receive a 100,000 naira to attend an international conference at Humboldt University, Berlin. I was never reimbursed, despite all appeals and entreaties.

Despite its mission to guarantee quality education, neither NUC's Resource Verification nor Programmatic Accreditation Exercise measures quality of academic content. At no time did NUC officials demand, even for evidential purposes, to see sample course syllabi or teaching modules. Although departments ensured that each teaching staff's file contained current Curriculum Vitae, emphases were on the number of publications and not on quality of publications. In other words, NUC's focus was narrow, focusing only on how universities and departments translate its policies into actionable terms in the areas of faculty, curriculum, student services and libraries. It made no efforts to query process and quality of content in concrete terms.

Conclusion

From the above, it could be argued that Nigeria has a highly saturated educational market, with more applicants than the number of higher educational institutions available. In other words, it is a seller's market where quality is sacrificed for quantity and time-tested measurements, and other measurement indicators are oftentimes disregarded. A situation like this exposes the system to corruption and rut, as the need to self-evaluate is daily swept under the rug. Further, the NUC's Resource Verification and Programmatic Accreditation Exercise in Nigeria have critical contributions to the quality of inputs and outputs. However, much needs to be done in these areas in order to effectively survey the performance of educational institutions.

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