COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF UNIVERSITY ACCREDITATION SYSTEMS IN NIGERIA, EGYPT, MALAWI AND JAPAN: LESSONS FOR REGULATORY AUTHORITIES

a Rafiu Oyesola Salawu, b Mary Kehinde Salawu, c Aina-Obe Shamsuddin Bolatito

ABSTRACT

Purpose: Ensuring quality in accreditation standards and process for higher institutions is highly imperative in order to produce qualitative students and staff (national and international), and to securing the recognition of qualifications that institutions are awarding. The objective of this study was to investigate the similarities and differences in the accreditation process in Nigeria, Egypt, Malawi and Japan.

Methods: The study was based on qualitative approach. The study adopted the historical method of data collection. This study being descriptive, as well as historical, relied essentially on secondary information sources gathered by the researchers via many books, articles, journal periodicals, internet materials, and notable books. Data were analyzed using a narrative method that leaned more on the interpretivist approach.

Results: The study showed that accreditation process in the selected countries has some similarities in process and standards such as setting of minimum standards, self-study, selection and training of reviewers, site visit, reporting, final decision, disclosure, academic matter (curriculum), students, staffing, facilities and funding. Also, there exist some differences in the process and standards across the countries of study in term of preliminary/preassessment visit before actual site visit, factual error checking, virtual visit, third party agencies, verification of external auditor’s report, etc.

Conclusion: The study assesses the university accreditation systems in Nigeria, Egypt, Malawi, and Japan. Accrediting agencies need to focus on future accreditation in terms of digitalisation of accreditation process, emergence of non-traditional providers of higher education, high demand for competency-based university education/learning, high rate of global competitiveness, and elimination of academic and accreditation corruption in the system.

Keywords: accreditation, programme, university, education.

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a PhD in Management and Accounting, Faculty of Administration, Obafemi Awolowo University, Nigeria, E-mail: rsalawu@oauife.edu.ng, Orcid: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7797-0887
b PhD in Accounting, Faculty of Administration, Obafemi Awolowo University, Nigeria, E-mail: msalawu@oauife.edu.ng, Orcid: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7018-0746
c PhD in Public Administration, Faculty of Management Studies, Islamic University in Uganda, E-mail: samtito@iuiu.ac.ug, Orcid: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0584-0191
ANÁLISE COMPARATIVA DOS SISTEMAS DE ACREDETAÇÃO UNIVERSITÁRIA NA NIGÉRIA, EGITO, MALAVI E JAPÃO: LIÇÕES PARA AS AUTORIDADES REGULADORAS

RESUMO

Finalidade: Garantir a qualidade dos padrões de acreditação e do processo para instituições superiores é altamente imperativo para produzir estudantes e funcionários qualitativos (nacionais e internacionais), e para garantir o reconhecimento das qualificações que as instituições estão concedendo. O objetivo deste estudo foi investigar as semelhanças e diferenças no processo de acreditação na Nigéria, Egito, Malawi e Japão.

Métodos: O estudo foi baseado na abordagem qualitativa. O estudo adotou o método histórico de coleta de dados. Este estudo, sendo descritivo, bem como histórico, baseou-se essencialmente em fontes secundárias de informação recolhidas pelos pesquisadores através de muitos livros, artigos, periódicos de revistas, materiais da internet e livros notáveis. Os dados foram analisados usando um método narrativo que se baseou mais na abordagem interpretativista.

Resultados: O estudo mostrou que o processo de acreditação nos países selecionados tem algumas semelhanças no processo e nos padrões, como o estabelecimento de padrões mínimos, autoestudo, seleção e treinamento de revisores, visita ao local, relatórios, decisão final, divulgação, assunto acadêmico (currículo), estudantes, equipe, instalações e financiamento. Além disso, existem algumas diferenças no processo e nos padrões dos países de estudo em termos de visita preliminar/pré-avaliação antes da visita real ao local, verificação de erros fatuais, visita virtual, agências de terceiros, verificação do relatório do auditor externo, etc.

Conclusão: O estudo avalia os sistemas de credenciamento universitário na Nigéria, Egito, Malawi e Japão. As agências de acreditação devem centrar-se na futura acreditação em termos de digitalização do processo de acreditação, na emergência de fornecedores não tradicionais de ensino superior, na elevada procura de ensino/aprendizagem universitários baseados em competências, no elevado nível de competitividade global e na eliminação da corrupção acadêmica e de acreditação no sistema.

Palavras-chave: acreditação, programa, universidade, educação.

1 INTRODUCTION

The importance of education sector as the hub of human capital development of any country cannot be overemphasised because, higher education institutions have become major players and vital economic actors in all countries of the world, especially in respect of matters related to sustainable development. As a result, each country establishes higher education institutions and provides fund in the annual budget. This call for effective accreditation system of the institutions and the programme in order to prepare holistic and value-oriented graduates for useful living within the society. Quality assurance and credible accreditation by the regulatory body plays major role in the context of globalisation competitiveness and world university ranking. (Hanh, Nga, Loan, &Viet, 2019).
Accreditation has been variously described by researchers and experts in the context of higher education institution. According to Okebukola (2007), accreditation is the process of a competent body or organization reviewing an institution or a program to determine whether or not it fits a set of standards. It is the process by which an association or agency analyzes an educational institution or program of study and formally acknowledges it as having met and satisfied, or exceeded, preset educational quality requirements and criteria or standards (Ibrahim, 2014). In a simple sense, accreditation is a systematic and periodic evaluation or review of the institution or programme by a recognised independent regulatory body subject to a particular set of standards in order to ensure compliance and quality assurance. For practicality, effectiveness and efficiency, accreditation had been broadly categorised into two, namely, institutional accreditation and programme accreditation.

Institutional accreditation is a process of reviewing or evaluating institution as a whole by a competent regulatory body in order to establish the level of compliance with a particular set of standards with the aim of achieving quality assurance and capacity to deliver quality educational programmes. The process examines institutional characteristics such as governance, administrative strength, financial stability, institutional efficiency and effectiveness, institutional resources (physical facilities), student learning (quality of teaching, learning, research and community service), admission and student services (academic policies and procedures), extension services and consultancies and general ethos. The cycles for institutional accreditation ranges from five years to ten years depending on the performance using a set standard.

On the other hand, programme accreditation is a process of reviewing or evaluating programme within a department in a particular institution by a competent regulatory body in order to establish the level of compliance with a particular set of standards with the aim of achieving quality assurance. The process of programme accreditation varies from country to country and less comprehensive than institutional accreditation.

The recent increase in the number of private and public universities across countries and continents and increased pressures for accountability and value for money by relevant stakeholders such as the parents and general public, had consequently propelled governments and accrediting agencies to set control and monitoring measures through specific rules and regulations (Kajawoi & Dong, 2020). Ensuring quality in
accreditation standards and process for higher institutions is highly imperative in order to produce qualitative students and staff (national and international), and to securing the recognition of qualifications that institutions are awarding. This invariable necessitate some degree of commonalities of the process. Hence, effective and efficient university accreditation system is imperative.

The study investigates the similarities and differences in the accreditation process in Nigeria, Egypt, Malawi and Japan. Importantly, the study aimed to provide answers to the following questions. What are the education system structure of the selected countries? What are the similarities and differences in the accreditation processes among Nigeria, Egypt, Malawi and Japan? What are the similarities and differences in standard the accreditation processes among Nigeria, Egypt, Malawi and Japan?

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study is anchored on quality assurance mechanism. Quality assurance as a steering-and management mechanism is very imperative for achieving accreditation process goals. The greatest way to satisfy the public interest in the caliber of higher education is to create an institutional framework that supports the growth of robust, efficient, and collaborative systems for academic quality assurance within all higher education institutions. Dill & Beerkens (2010). The ultimate goal of accreditation process in the university is to achieve quality assurance of all the programs and institutions.

The initial conception of quality control is based on internal quality. The foundation of this concept is the achievement of predetermined goals through effective education. In this regard, quality assurance emphasizes the enhancement of internal and external environments and procedures to guarantee the efficiency of teaching and learning for the accomplishment of intended objectives (Cheng and Townsend 2000). The three major models informing internal quality are goal and specification, process and absence of problem models. The number of graduates enrolled in universities or graduate schools, the attendance rate, the dropout rate, and personal improvements are some examples of quality indicators according to the aim and specification model. Another indicator is the staff's professional qualifications.

Accreditation is a gateway towards to total quality, and it is also considered to be a motivation for institutions to promote comprehensive educational processes and quality systems to raise the level of confidence in the institution and its graduates (NQAAC,
2004). Because of this, theories and models guiding quality assurance of teaching and learning processes in higher education should shift from a quality control focus, where the emphasis is on examining the finished product, to total quality management, where the processes are monitored by regulatory authorities, to ensure a quality product (Allais, 2009).

3 METHODOLOGY

The study was based on qualitative approach. For the purpose of comparative analysis, four countries have been selected for this study, namely: Nigeria, Egypt, Malawi and Japan. The study adopted the historical method of data collection. Qualitative method of data collection was utilized to collect data for the study. This study being descriptive, as well as historical, relied essentially on secondary information sources gathered by the researchers via many books, articles, journal periodicals, internet materials, and notable books. The relevance of this design lies in its effort to proof the present, provide enabling conditions for a researcher to be able to interpret past events and have a clearer perspective. Data were analyzed using content analysis and narrative method that leaned more on the interpretivist approach. Thus, interpretivists try to comprehend the phenomena, as described by participants rather than testing through scientific standards of verification (Roth & Methta 2002).

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 EDUCATION SYSTEM STRUCTURE OF THE SELECTED COUNTRIES

4.1.1 Nigeria

4.1.1.1 General Structure of Education in Nigeria

The Nigerian educational structure has experienced key structural changes over some decades. Prior and after the Nigerian independence in 1960 the educational system at the primary and secondary levels were, 6 years of primary education and 5 years secondary and 2 years of higher level / A Levels. The structure was reviewed in 1973 to the 6-3-3-4 system (6 years primary, 3 years Junior Secondary, 3 years of Senior Secondary and 4 years Tertiary Education).
4.1.1.2 Structure of University Education in Nigeria

The variety and duration of programs offered at Nigerian universities define the educational structure in the country. The structure can be divided into two undergraduate programmes (undergraduate students) and postgraduate programme (postgraduate students). The duration of undergraduate programme ranges from 4 years to 6 years, depending on the type of course of study. This four years at the University completes the 6-3-3-4 system of Education. Courses in health sciences takes 6 years of study before graduation, while courses in faculty of technology take 5 years.

Postgraduate programmes include postgraduate diploma (1 year), Postgraduate Professional Master degree (1½ to 2 years), academic master degree programme (2 years), and doctorate of degree (3 years). Academic master and doctorate degree involve thesis writing. The number of enrolments across universities in Nigeria as at 2018/2019 session stands as 1.8 million undergraduate students and 242 thousand postgraduate students.

4.1.1.3 University Regulatory Agency of Nigeria

In Nigeria, there are three independent national regulatory agencies that are statutorily empowered to oversee and regulate the higher education system, while the National Universities Commission (NUC) was established in 1962 to regulate all the Nigerian universities. The National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) was founded in 1977 to oversee the country's polytechnics. In 1989, the National Commission for Colleges of Education was established to oversee all colleges of education. The statutes that establish higher education institutions overseen by these bodies provide them concurrent authorities to ensure the quality of their processes, product, and services. All the agencies are operating under the Ministry of Education.

Nigeria has National Universities Commission (NUC) as the only one regulatory agency that accredit and regulates institutions and program in the Nigerian universities. The NUC was established in 1962 as an administrative body inside the Federal Republic of Nigeria's cabinet office. It became a statutory regulatory authority in 1974, when Decree No. 1 of 1974, now Act 1 of 1974, was promulgated (Sali, 2021).

The Commission has the mandates to develops and manage university education and assure quality the programmes offered by the 197 universities in Nigeria.
In Nigeria an accredited programme is re-assessed after five years, this is similar to the practice in Malawi.

4.1.1.4 Accreditation process in Nigeria

Accreditation process in Nigeria for both programme and institutional accreditations are similar. The starting point is the setting and establishment minimum standards for both programme and institution accreditation. Standards for programme accreditation cover academic matter (curriculum), staff, internal quality control, physical facilities, library, funding, research and collaboration, tracer system and employers’ rating graduate as enumerated in Appendix 1. On the other hand, the standards for institutional accreditation consist of institutional vision, mission and strategic goals, institutional governance and administration; institutional resources; quality of teaching, learning and research; Institutional efficiency and effectiveness; extension services and consultancies; transparency, financial management and stability; and General Ethos (Appendix 1).

Figure 1: Programme/Institutional Accreditation Process in Nigeria

![Diagram of Accreditation Process]

Source: Authors’ Construct, 2023

The next stage is the application by the institution or a reminder notice by the NUC for renewal of accreditation. A self-study form is completed by the institution and forwarded to the agency. Thereafter accreditation team are selected, trained and post to
the institution seeking accreditation. Site visit commenced by courtesy visit with the principal officers and other relevant stakeholders like Dean or HOD. During the visit physical facilities are verified, relevant documents are checked and compared with what is stated in the self-study report. Report is written by the team and submitted to the agency for further processing before final decision is made. Final result is always disclosed to the institution and public by the NUC (figure 2).

4.1.2 Egypt

4.1.2.1 General Structure of Education in Egypt

The Egyptian educational system consists of three levels: primary (pre-primary and basic education), secondary and tertiary education (higher post-secondary education and postgraduate studies). Egypt has governmental educational institutions and private schools. Also, there are other forms of supplementary education, e.g., adult or non-formal education directed at children remaining beyond any official schooling system (Stopikowska, & El-Deabes, 2012). To secure admission into higher education in Egypt, students must pass National General Final Examination after completing 12 years formal school education (Amira, 2017). The National Authority for Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Education (NAQAAE) is responsible for Education in general not only Higher Education.

4.1.2.2 University Educational Structure of Egypt

University educational system started in Egypt in the nineteenth century with the establishment of public elementary schools and higher education institutions by Mohamed Ali. However, there was a paradigm shift in the middle of nineteenth century as result of the contributions of Ismail Basha’s Western Education System. Gamal El Din Al Afghani and Mohamed Abdo advocated for new policy in education which was enacted in law in 1876 (Ministry of Higher Education, 2010). The first university established in Egypt was in 1908 and was later named Cairo University. Egypt also started free education started in the 1950s which led to increase in enrolment and establishment of additional higher institutions (Loveluck, 2012). The number of universities has increased over decades to 20 public universities with about 2 million students and 23 private universities with about 60,000 students.
Quality Assurance System in Egypt has passed through three phases. First Phase was 2002-2007 - Quality Assurance and Accreditation Project (QAAP); Second Phase was 2007-2013 by NAQAAE - Program of Continuous Improvement and Qualifying for Accreditation (PCIQA). PCIQA projects were executed in public Egyptian HE institutions with the mission of reaching a self-activated institutional ability capable of carrying out continuous improvement. The third phase commenced in 2013 till date (Eid, 2021).

Egypt has developed a well-structured national qualification framework (NQF). The National Qualifications Framework (NQF) is a method for organising existing and new qualifications in any country based on learning objectives (knowledge, skills, and competences). The NQF categorizes qualifications according to a hierarchical levelling system. The levels are determined by the learning outcomes, skills, and competencies required for each certificate.

4.1.2.3 University Regulatory Agency of Egypt

NAQAAE is the accrediting body for all Egyptian higher education institutions (HEIs). NAQAAE is responsible for Education in general not only Higher Education unlike other countries where the agency for higher education is different from the agency responsible for primary and secondary education like Nigeria. The body was founded by the passage of Law No. 82 in 2006, and its executive norms were organized by the adoption of Bylaws in 2007. It is an autonomous organisation that reports directly to the Egyptian Prime Minister and Parliament (Eid, 2021). The mandates of NAQAAE revolve around setting and maintaining standards, and building trust in Egyptian graduates, ensuring a quality education to all learners, and develop and implementation of the NQF.
4.1.2.4 Accreditation process in Egypt

In Egypt's higher education system, there are two sorts of accreditation exercises. These are institutional and programme accreditations. Institutional accreditation is a mission-driven evaluation that focuses on two key goals: institutional capacity and educational efficacy. On the other side, program accreditation is an outcome-based examination that focuses on two areas: program administration and educational effectiveness.

In response to the challenge of COVID-19 pandemic, Egypt started digital accreditation process in 2020. The process involves seven stages as reflected in Figure 5. Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) submit an online application and once accepted payment is made online. NAQAAE reviewed application and acceptance is done online. Thereafter, portal is opened to allow for online submission of documents. Team composition is sent to the HEIs online. HEIs upload and submit all documents online and respond to the team composition online. In most cases, HEIs is allowed to upload supporting documents online. Report is written, compiled and reviewed online by the team. HEIs reviews report and respond to factual data error (only) online. Report is finalised, reviewed and decision posted online by the Board.

Figure 2: Accreditation Process in Egypt (before digitalisation)

Source: Eid, (2021)
4.1.3 MALAWI

4.1.3.1 General Structure of Education in Malawi

In Malawi, educational structure is 8-4-4 system comprising of primary school (takes 8 years) secondary school (takes 4 years) and university education (takes 4 years). Primary and secondary schools are both regulated by Malawi National Examinations Board (MANEB) and Ministry of Education. The first university in Malawi started in 1965 and offers bachelor degree programmes and a few master degrees courses.

4.1.3.2 University Regulatory Agency of Malawi

An act of Parliament established the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE), which began operations in 2014. The NCHE was created to oversee national qualifications, register institutions, and approve academic programs in Malawi's higher education system. The Ministry of Education was in charge of accreditation prior to the foundation of NCHE. The council worked on developing minimal criteria and assessment tools in 2014 and 2015. (Phiri, 2021).

NCHE's responsibilities include promoting and accrediting higher education institutions and programs, as well as registering and de-registering institutions and programs; determining a framework for funding public higher education institutions; as well as recommending institutional quality assurance criteria to the Minister.
4.1.3.3 Accreditation process in Malawi

Accreditation actually started in Malawi in 2016. According to NCHE’s programme accreditation is always commences from the institution seeking accreditation, that is, accreditation initiation emanates from institution, as shown in figure 4. Thereafter, self-study form is filled by the institution, and application form and accreditation fees are paid. NCHE will carry out desk review and conduct preliminary/preassessment visit where necessary. Selection and training of reviewers is done by the NCHE, and site visit (meetings and assessment) followed thereafter. Reviewers write the report. In most cases factual error checking is permitted by sending the report to the institution for cross checking if there is any false claim. Decision is always taken by the council before disclosure to the institution and public.

Figure 4: Accreditation Process in Malawi

Standards for programme accreditation in Japan includes the following as contained in Appendix 3, academic qualification of staff; students’ enrolment in each programme; graduate rating; ICT infrastructure and provision for training; library facilities; funding of the programme; student-staff ratio, curriculum (currency, relevance and frequency); disclosure (to the institution and public. Vision, mission, and core values;
governance, governing policies and procedures; financial and material; physical facilities; water and sanitation; student support; academic programs; staff complement; admission and recruitment of students; academic assessment; degree specification; quality enhancement; and registration and accreditation of institutions are among the standards for institutional accreditation in Malawi.

Malawi’s NCHE has published an updated list of approved institutions and academic programs for the 2020 academic year. A total of 25 out of 58 registered institutions have been accredited. There are 9 governmental institutions and 16 private universities and colleges among the recognized institutions (NCHE, 2020). As at June 2021, there are 8 accredited public universities and colleges while accredited private universities are 20 in number (NCHE website 2021).

4.1.4 Japan
4.1.4.1 General Structure of Education in Japan

Japan has five levels of educational structure known as preschool, primary, lower secondary, higher secondary and college/university. Entrance examinations are always conducted for potential candidate before they can be admitted to any level, regardless of the type of school (public or private). It was observed that public university enjoyed patronage more than the private universities.

4.1.4.2 University Educational Structure of Japan

University educational structure of Japan comprises of Bachelor’s degree Four years, Graduate school Master’s Degree (two years), Doctor’s Degree (five years) and Professional Degree (two years). Japan currently has 1,100 higher education institutions, with 786 four-year colleges and 326 two-year and three-year colleges having completed two cycles of Certified Evaluation and Accreditation (CEA).

4.1.4.3 University Regulatory Agency of Japan

The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) regulates higher institutions in Japan through CEA agencies, which are 5 in number. In 2004, the CEA was established as a nationwide required accrediting system to ensure and improve the quality of academic activities. HEIs, whether public or private are expected to undergo third-party evaluation periodically under the Education Law (Tutiya, 2021).
In Japan, the Japan University Accreditation Association (JUAA), the National Institution for Academic Degrees and Quality Enhancement of Higher Education (NIAD-QE), the Japan Institution for Higher Education Evaluation (JIHEE), the Japan Association for Quality of University Education (JAQUE), and the Japan Association for College Accreditation are the five certified regulatory agencies (JACA).

Out of the 5 agencies, JUAA was the first CEA Agency for universities and was established in 1947. Their accrediting activities started in 1951, but was approved in 2004 by the Minister of Education, the first to be approved among others. The JUAA has the mandate to regulate and accredit both institution and programme in Japan. The five accrediting agencies has the mandate to regulate and accredit institutions and programmes in Japan. Institutions are at liberty to choose from the five certified bodies to undergo institutional accreditation for a seven years cycle.

4.1.4.4 Accreditation process in Japan

In figure 5, process of programme accreditation starts with initiation by the institution just like the case of Malawi and Egypt. The institution seeking accreditation fill the self-study form and apply with payment to the accrediting agency. The HEIs apply and paid accreditation fees. Self-study report is submitted with other relevant documents. The agency selects and train the evaluator, subsequently site visit is carried out. The committee draft the report and forward the accreditation agency. The agency makes public the accreditation results after thorough review or evaluation of the results.
In Japan, HEIs can apply to any of the five-accrediting agency of their choice. The accreditation standards of the first approved agency (JUAA) are considered in this study. The standards are similar to the other agencies. The standards, as presented in appendix 4, for the programme’s accreditation are mission and purpose; self-study and information disclosure; curriculum and learning outcomes; student enrolment; faculty; student support; education and research environments; and social cooperation and contribution.

Standards for institutional accreditation in Japan comprise of mission and purpose; internal quality assurance; education and research organisation; educational program and learning outcomes; student enrolment; faculty and faculty organisation; student support; education and research environment; social cooperation and contribution; and management and finance.

From the foregoing, it obvious that the process has some commonalities. On the part of the government, these include the establishment of regulatory agencies, institutionalisation of quality assurance framework, and setting of minimum academic and institutional standards.

Also, on the part of the institutions to be accredited, the commonalities across the globe include application for accreditation, payment of accreditation fees, self-study/self-
assessment report. In the same vein the process involves members of experienced and trained accreditation team charged with the responsibilities for site visit, reporting while accrediting agency would make the final decision and make result disclosure to the institution being accredited and general public. In addition, counties across the world have some commonalities in standards such as academic matter (curriculum), facilities, staffing, funding and student matter. Product and Process. All these are discussed in the subsequent sub-sections.

4.2 SIMILARITIES IN THE ACCREDITATION PROCESS OF THE SELECTED COUNTRIES

There are some similarities among the four selected countries in term of standards and accreditation processes. In term of accreditation process, the similarities include setting of minimum standards, self-study form, selection and training of reviewers, site visit, reporting, decision making and disclosure. The common standards for both programme and institutional accreditation among the four countries are academic matter (curriculum), students, staffing, facilities and funding.

4.2.1 Similarities in the accreditation process among the selected countries

4.2.1.1 Minimum standards setting

Standards are yardstick for the measurement of performance in an organisation or an activity. Standards are set by the respective accrediting bodies and government in each country. The selected countries have minimum standards for both programme and institutional accreditation. Nigeria and Egypt have 8 standards for programme and institutional accreditation respectively. In Malawi there are 10 and 14 standards for programme and institutional accreditations, while Japan has 8 and 10 standards for programmes and institutions respectively (Appendixes 1-4).

Generally, each of these standards has a number of criteria which contain the main text, and perspectives of evaluation. Comprehensive instrument should include elements of input-process-output/outcomes. According to Okebukola (2021), accreditation instruments/standards should be as comprehensive and adequate, which must cover teaching, learning, research and community service/engagement.

Self-evaluation: Across the four countries, it is mandatory for the accrediting institution to prepare a self-study form and submit the report to the accrediting body
before accreditation can take place. A self-study report prepared by the institution is document completed for a programme or an institution undergoing initial accreditation or re-accreditation (Saliu, 2021). The report summarises program or institutional findings from the self-study process.

Selection and training of accreditors: The accrediting body reviews the self-study report and if the applicant is found eligible proceeds to the selection and training of the accreditation team or accreditors.

Site visit: This stage is peculiar to the four countries. The site visit commences with the courtesy visit and ends with exit meeting with the Vice Chancellor and other principal officers of the accredited Institution such as Dean, Head of Department. During site visit verification of classroom, office accommodation, library (physical and e-library), equipment and furniture, brief within with staff of the department, interaction with student, ICT facilities, delivery and evaluation modes, observation of on-going lectures, checking of staff and student files are usually carried out. This verification helps the accredditor to confirm information contained in the self-study form.

Reporting: The accreditation team is expected to write their report and submit to the accrediting body without disclosing the final decision to the accrediting institution. The panel reports are processed through the management of the accreditation agency in line with the provisions in the enabling law.

Decision making: Final decision is taken by the accrediting body. In Egypt, the final decision falls between accredited and non-accredited, while in Nigeria the options are full accreditation status, interim accreditation status and denied. In the case of institutional accreditation, the decision is among accredited/confidence, partial accreditation/confidence and not accredited/no confidence.

Disclosure: The final decision and summarised reports that gives detail strength and areas that need improvement are communicated to the institutions. The final decision is also made known to the public.

4.2.2 Similarities in standards in the accreditation process among the selected countries

Academic matter (curriculum): It is the responsibility of the institution to develop a coherent, comprehensive and contemporary issue-oriented curriculum that produces appropriate educational outcome which will eventually produce graduates that
can compete globally. Curriculum design and implementation policies must put in place. The selected countries have standards that cover curriculum and other academic matters.

**Staff:** The four countries make provision for standard on staffing. Emphasis was laid on the quality, qualifications and skills of both teaching and non-teaching staff.

**Facilities:** Standards in the four countries cover physical facilities such as classrooms, office accommodation, laboratories, and physical library. All these facilities must be equipped with appropriate and functioning furniture and equipment. Facilities and equipment for the programme and institutions by extension must be of good quality, adequate, sufficient and properly maintained.

**Funding:** For the fulfilment of research and innovation, institution require adequate funding of programme and institution’s activities. The selected countries address this standard. The financial plan of the institution and programme must factor in the institutional goals, policy, implication of long and short-terms funding and sources of fund. Financial resources must be effectively and efficiently managed. Institutional transparency, accountability and responsibility must be a priority.

**Student matters:** All the selected countries have standard on student matters. For the institutions to achieve their mission and goals, there must exist admission policies, basic requirement for admission, examination guide lines, appropriate staff-student ratio, students’ course evaluation, standard of test and examination, examination malpractices and penalties, etc. To secure appropriate educational outcomes, the institution must appropriately control the actual number of students enrolled in relation to facilities available and existing staff.

### 4.3 DIFFERENCES IN THE ACCREDITATION PROCESS OF THE SELECTED COUNTRIES

The differences among the four selected countries are in term of accreditation process and standards. In term of accreditation process there are some differences such as application made by the institutions without prompting them, preliminary/preassessment visit before actual site visit, factual error checking, virtual visit, third party agencies, verification of external auditor’s report, involvement of international reviewers, type of accreditation in practice and the number of accrediting bodies. Also, there are some differences in term of standards among the four countries.
such as teaching and learning strategy, student support services, research and innovation, internal quality assurance, and community/industry engagement.

4.3.1 Differences in accreditation process among the selected countries

Digital Accreditation System (Egypt): In Egypt, processing of application form, filing, and review of self-study form, pre-visit report uploading, and final report review are done online. This system will reduce paperwork; create an enabling environment for the virtual accreditation process and reduce unnecessary costs such as stationery, transportation, and so on. It will also facilitate a quick process. This system will provide solutions to the challenges posed by COVID-19. Institutions apply online, and the application are reviewed and accepted to determine eligibility. HEIs upload and submit all documents online, which are then reviewed. Nigeria and Malawi are yet to commence virtual accreditation. According to Jafarov, Imrani and Aliyev (2023), digitalization of accreditation process is very germane in this era of fourth industrial revolution.

Third-Party Regulatory Agencies: In Japan, there are five Certified Regulatory Agencies, approved by the Minister of Education to accredit institutions and programmes, unlike in Nigeria where we have a single Accreditation Agency (NUC). Institutions seeking Accreditation can choose any certified body of their choice out of these five approved agencies. Thus, each of these agencies are equivalent to NUC in Nigeria. Therefore, this gives institutions the option of choosing any of the certified agency to accredit and evaluate their institution, and it will be done free and fair without been biased.

Preliminary visit/Pre-assessment visit by the Regulatory Body: Embarking on preliminary visit for the purpose of verifying and clarification of the claims in the form submitted by the institutions, particularly funding of the programme, checking of audited financial statement and external auditor’s report is unique to Malawi. This usually takes place after the desk review of the self-evaluation form submitted by the Institution and before sending the formal accreditation team to the institution.

Factual Error Checking: This is one of the uncommon practices in accreditation process that may be useful. This process is peculiar to Malawi. The report written by the review team after the assessment is sent back to the institution for them to verifies the authenticity of the report and to confirm if the report represents what was actually found
during the assessment. It must be noted that the report does not include the scores or final decision of the council.

**Verification of External Auditor’s Report of the Institutions:** Funding and financial resources presented in the self-study form is not sufficient to assess the funding of the program and institution. The financial resources available for exclusive use by program under consideration should not be based only on the financial report by the university but rather audited financial report by the external auditor of the institution. The accrediting body can make it mandatory for all institutions seeking accreditation to be submitting the audited financial statements, which contain external auditor’s report. This way, Institutions are constrained from making false claims with respect to their funding and resources.

**Involvement of international reviewers (Egypt):** The involvement of international accreditors by the accrediting bodies will give accreditation process some level of visibility internationally and it will enhance quality assurance in the long run. Among the sample countries, only Japan and Egypt employed international reviewers in their accreditation process.

**Type of Accreditation in practice:** Japan conducts more of institutional than programme accreditation. That is, emphasis is on institutional review as opposed to program accreditation. There exists a two-stage system of institutional accreditation in Japan. The institution accreditation is periodic of no more than 7 years. Nigeria has not started institutional accreditation except pilot institutional accreditation that was carried out in 2011 for 26 selected universities, since then it has not been done again. However, NUC has prepared a template for institutional accreditation. Egypt absolutely focuses on Programme Accreditation and institutional accreditation.

Malawi focuses on both institutional and programme accreditation. An accredited institution is re-assessed after 7 years in Malawi. Egypt has both programme and institutional accreditations in place. World’s best 200 universities in 2017 are in the regions where both programme and institutional accreditation are practised (Okebukola, 2021).

**The number of Accrediting bodies:** Japan has five approved accrediting agencies or bodies. Accreditation goes through two stages; certified accreditation agents and the Ministry of education. The accreditation is done by the bodies certified by the education minister upon request from HEIs with reference to their standard. In Nigeria,
NUC is the only body that has the responsibility of assessing and controlling the quality of private and public universities. The Nigerian National Universities Commission set the accreditation standards for both institutions and programme of study being offered to be accredited. NAQAAE is the Egyptian authority in charge of the entire educational system, not only higher education. All Egyptian higher education institutions are accredited by NAQAAE (HEIs). The major objective is to help Egyptian educational institutions improve their quality assurance methods. The National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) is Malawi's single regulatory authority for institution and program accreditation.

4.3.2 Differences in standards in the accreditation process among the selected countries

**Teaching and learning strategy:** Through initial approvals, performance monitoring, and provision of institution-wide support services, the institution must have an effective system in place to ensure that all programs satisfy high standards of learning and instruction. Student learning outcomes must be clearly stated in all programs. Teachers, Teaching and learning are input and process respectively in the theory of input-process-output. The two elements will determine the quality of output in term of skilled and employable graduates. Therefore, teaching staff must be qualified and well experienced in their discipline to be able to impact knowledge. They must be able to deploy appropriate teaching strategies suitable for different learning outcome. Student assessment processes must be appropriate for the intended learning outcomes and effectively and fairly administered with independent verification of standards achieved (Rohman, Ulfatin, Arifi, Imron, & Salim, 2023).

**Student support services:** The verification of the learning support system put in place by the Institutions is very important in accreditation exercise. This entails what must be done beyond lecture delivery such as career guidance, counselling (academic and emotional), tutorial classes, language training for international students, food support, online support services and feedback mechanism from the students. The accreditation team can visit Directorate of Students Affair of the Institution to verify available learning support services.

**Research and innovation:** This is one of the key accreditation standards that emphasizes scholarly discovery of new methods, technology and new knowledge; experimental and observational research, and other creative work both at the at the
institutional and program accreditation levels. Operational changes in the society and economy cum rapid globalisation, has demanded universities to be more proactive, engage in cutting-edge research and fulfil their unique mission. All faculty must participate in sufficient acceptable intellectual activities to guarantee that they stay current in their fields, and these advancements should be reflected in their teaching. Staff that teach in postgraduate programs or supervise theses must be actively engaged in their field's research.

**Internal quality assurance:** Accreditation is both self-review and external review, therefore, institutions have the responsibility of establishing a system of internal quality assurance at central, faculty and departmental levels. The system must be functionally appropriately for consistent and continual assurance and for the improvement of the quality of education that the institution offers.

**Community/industry engagement:** The Higher Education institutions interact and impact on their communities through productive collaboration and partnership as means of knowledge transfer leading to commercialization of research ideas. Industries and other stakeholders expect universities, with their researchers, to make proposals based on constructive, critical verification of trends in the industry and society at large to provide for its betterment. The institution's commitment to community service must be articulated, both in terms of form and extent, and backed up by rules that encourage participation. Regular reports on activities should also be prepared.

5 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study assesses the university accreditation systems in Nigeria, Egypt, Malawi, and Japan. The study showed that accreditation process in the selected countries has some similarities in process and standards such as setting of minimum standards, self-study, selection and training of reviewers, site visit, reporting, final decision, disclosure, academic matter (curriculum), students, staffing, facilities and funding. Also, there exist some differences in the process and standards across the countries of study in term of preliminary/preassessment visit before actual site visit, factual error checking, virtual visit, third party agencies, verification of external auditor’s report, involvement of international reviewers, type of accreditation in practice and the number of accrediting bodies, teaching and learning strategy, student support services, research and innovation, internal quality assurance, community/industry engagement and internalisation.
Technological innovation would impact on qualifications of the assessors who would be required to unlearn, up-skill and reskill to capacitate them for accreditation exercise. This would impact the quality of programmes being accredited and resource verification towards improvement. Furthermore, accrediting agencies need to focus on future accreditation in term of digitalisation of accreditation process, emergence of non-traditional providers of higher education, high demand for competency-based university education/learning, high rate of global competitiveness, and elimination of academic and accreditation corruption in the system.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX

Appendix 1: Programme/Institutional Standards in Nigeria

**Standard for Programme Accreditation in Nigeria**

- Academic matters
- Staffing
- Internal Quality Assurance
- Physical facilities
- Library
- Funding
- Research and collaboration
- Tracer system and employers’ rating of graduates

**Standard for Institutional Accreditation in Nigeria**

- Institutional vision, mission and strategic goals
- Institutional governance and administration
- Institutional resources
- Quality of teaching, learning and research
- Institutional efficiency and effectiveness
- Extension services and consultancies
- Transparency, financial management and stability
- General Ethos

Source: Authors’ Construct, 2023
Appendix 2: Programme/Institutional Standards in Egypt

Standard for Programme Accreditation in Egypt

- Students and Graduates
- Academic standards
- Educational programs
- Teaching, Learning and Resources
- Academic Staff
- Scientific research
- Postgraduate studies
- Continuous assessment

Standard for Institutional Accreditation in Egypt

- Strategic planning
- Organisational structure
- Leadership and Governance
- Credibility and ethics
- Administration
- Resources
- Community participation
- Quality system management

Source: Authors’ Construct, 2023
### Appendix 3: Programme/Institutional Standards in Malawi

**Standard for Programme Accreditation in Malawi**

- Academic qualification of staff
- Students enrolment in each programme
- Graduate rating
- ICT infrastructure and provision for training
- Library facilities
- Funding of the programme
- Student-staff ratio
- Curriculum: currency, relevance and frequency
- An accredited programme is re-assessed after five years.
- Disclosure (to the institutions and public)

**Standard for Institutional Accreditation in Malawi**

- Guiding principles: Vision, Mission and core values
- Governance
- Governing Policies and Procedures
- Financial and Material
- Physical Facilities
- Water and Sanitation
- Student Support
- Academic Programmes
- Staff Complement
- Admission and Recruitment of Students
- Academic Assessment
- Degree Specification
- Quality Enhancement
- Registration and accreditation of institutions
Appendix 4: Programme/Institutional Standards in Japan

**Standard for Programme Accreditation in Japan**

- Mission and Purpose
- Self-study and Information Disclosure
- Curriculum and Learning Outcomes
- Student Enrolment
- Faculty
- Student Support
- Education and Research Environments
- Social Cooperation and Contribution

**Standard for Institutional Accreditation in Japan**

- Mission and Purpose
- Internal Quality Assurance
- Education and Research Organisation
- Educational program and learning outcomes
- Student enrolment
- Faculty and Faculty organisation
- Student support
- Education and Research environment
- Social cooperation and contribution
- University management and finance

Source: Authors’ Construct, 2023