

**REFORMING UNIVERSITY ACCREDITATION SYSTEMS:  
POST-COVID-19 CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS IN  
NIGERIA, EGYPT, AND MALAWI**

**Rafiu Oyesola Salawu<sup>1\*</sup> & Mary Kehinde Salawu<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1,2</sup>Department of Management and Accounting, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria

\*rsalawu@oauife.edu.ng.

**ABSTRACT:** Credible and quality accreditation across higher education institutions is no longer a luxury but a must for every institution that desires a high global ranking, competence-based education, global labour market penetration, and public trust. The objective of this study was to investigate the general and particular challenges with the system of university accreditation in Nigeria (West Africa), Egypt (Northern Africa), and Malawi (Southern Africa) after the COVID-19 pandemic. The study employed a qualitative approach with the aid of a documentary survey type. The study, being both descriptive and historical, relied essentially on secondary information sources gathered by the researchers. The data were analysed using a narrative method that leaned more on the interpretivist approach. The results showed some common challenges confronting the university accreditation system in the selected three countries, which are dwindling public resources for institutions, the massification of higher education, and the reviewer's capacity deficit. It also revealed peculiar challenges such as paper-based accreditation (Nigeria and Malawi), digital accreditation in Egypt, and irregular institutional accreditation in Nigeria. The study revealed the prospects (solutions to challenges) and future direction of accreditation in the three countries. The study recommended that virtual-based accreditation, regular program and institutional accreditation, solving the massification of higher education through technology, eradicating academic and accreditation corruption, and recruiting qualified and well-trained reviewers must be embarked upon by relevant accrediting authorities. The digitalisation of accreditation is not optional in the face of high development in information technology.

**Keywords:** University Accreditation, Post-COVID-19 Challenges, Higher Education Reform, Digital Accreditation Systems, Africa

## INTRODUCTION

Accreditation is an entryway towards quality assurance, and it is also considered an incentive for institutions to promote comprehensive educational processes and quality systems to raise the level of confidence in the institution and its graduates by the public and other stakeholders (NQAAC, 2004). It is the process by which an association or agency analyses an educational institution or programme of study and formally acknowledges it as having met and satisfied, or exceeded, preset educational quality requirements and criteria or standards (Ibrahim, 2014).

There are commonalities in the process across the world. The process covers both the initial and periodic approval of an institution or program. In USA, the earliest accreditation process started in 1787 with the establishment of the University of the State of New York as the first recognised certifying organization and continued until 1847, when the American Medical Association began accrediting medical programmes. However, between 1935 and 1948, the listing form of accreditation was terminated (Hareleroad, 1980), leading to a dramatic change in the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the history of accreditation. For example, the United States has gone through a succession of changes, from professional and subject association governance to state engagement, including university recognition in a list of "accredited universities."

In Africa, the earliest accreditation exercise dates back to 1911 with the formation of Al-Azhar University's Council of Senior Scholars (Al-Ahzar University in Cairo), with the singular aim of conducting evaluations during the training directed at producing graduates that meet the quality mark established by the university. In the 1960s, formal accreditation of programmes and institutions began when Nigeria established the National Universities Commission (NUC) in 1962. Also established in 1968 was the African and Malagasy Council for Higher Education in Francophone Countries (CAMES). The Commission for Higher Education (CHE) was established in Kenya in 1985 with the goal of regulating, coordinating, and ensuring quality in higher education. Also, in Ghana, the National Accreditation Board was established in 1993 and saddled with prosecuting accreditation mandates. Uganda commenced accreditation in 2006 after the establishment of the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE). In Egypt, the Commission for Higher Education (CHE) was established in 1985 to carry out accreditation for public and private universities, until 2007, when the National Authority for Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Education (NAQAAE) was established to oversee the accreditation of higher education institutions. Similarly, in Botswana, the accreditation process commenced in 2013, and in Malawi in 2016.

Accreditation of both the institution and program is the major path to go in enhancing and monitoring the quality of all institutions of higher learning in any country since there is no alternative to strict compliance with the required standards (Kajawoi & Dong, 2020; Salawu, Salawu, & Bolatito, 2023). Setting acceptable standards and sustaining them will give room for the internalisation of the institutions' programs and make them acceptable to all stakeholders globally.

The education sector is the hub of human capital development in any country. It is on this basis that each country establishes higher education institutions and provides funds in the annual budget.

Higher institutions are major players and vital economic actors in all countries, especially concerning matters related to sustainable development. This calls for an effective accreditation system of the institutions and the programs to prepare holistic and value-oriented graduates for useful living within society. All over the world there is increasing interest in higher education quality and standards, reflecting both the rapid growth of higher education and its cost to the government and proprietors of private universities (NCHE, 2018).

In this era, we now live in a VUCA (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, and Ambiguous) environment with several difficulties that the COVID-19 epidemic has only made worse. The advent of the fourth industrial revolution, which includes the COVID-19 pandemic, and the recent widespread disruption of technology, has led to tremendous advancements in almost every sphere of human endeavour, particularly in education (Salawu, 2023). Notably, the study aimed to provide answers to the following questions. What are the general and peculiar challenges of accreditation among the selected countries during post-covid-19? What are the prospects and future directions of accreditation in the selected countries?

This study investigates the common and specific challenges of the university accreditation system in the study area. Furthermore, it describes the prospects and possible future of accreditation in the selected countries in the post-COVID-19 era.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

In order to assure compliance and quality, accreditation is a systematic and ongoing evaluation or review of the institution or programme by a recognized independent regulatory organization that is subject to a specific set of standards. Higher education uses accreditation as a process of self-study and external quality assessment to examine an institution and/or its programs in terms of quality standards and quality improvement needs. This procedure is intended to determine whether an organization meets or exceeds set standards by external regulatory authorities for accreditation and whether the organization is fulfilling its stated mission (Obadara & Alaka, 2013).

An institution or program is evaluated for accreditation to determine if it fulfils a minimum level and is eligible for a particular status. The mission, resources, and operating processes of a HEI or program are all thoroughly examined as part of the accrediting process (Dill, 2000). There are two basic types of accreditations namely, institutional and program accreditations, and the main aim is to improve the quality of the institution and program being accredited. Different meanings of the term "accreditation" have been offered by academics. According to Lyamtane (2013), "accreditation" is the process of granting a university the public's trust by evaluating its professional and academic programme, governance, and management structures, and based on a specific level of required performance, standards, and quality. According to Lenns (2003), "accreditation" means that a university's eligibility for a certain status in accordance with the necessary norms for national standards of quality assurance is evaluated.

The legal procedure of granting certain universities permission to function under the auspices of a given Act of Parliament, statute, or decree is referred to as "accreditation" in several countries (Hayward, 2006). According to Shankar (2016), accreditation is the process of evaluating the

effectiveness of higher education institutions that voluntarily apply to be accredited. This evaluation is based on a variety of factors, including the curriculum, the facilities and learning resources, the leadership and management, the teaching-learning evaluation, innovations, and the performance and support of the students.

The National Universities Commission (NUC) is the organisation in Nigeria tasked with evaluating and regulating the calibre of postsecondary education in the nation. The Nigerian National Universities Commission established the standards that higher education institutions had to fulfil in order for their programs of study to be authorised, among other things (Ajadi, 2010; Saliu, 2021). Regardless of having these administrative bodies set up, studies have uncovered that there were a great deal of difficulties connected with certification and observing cycles and strategies of advanced education in African nations. In Uganda, Ochwa-Echel (2016) figured out, that every one of the four colleges remembered for his review was authorised, while just two of them were sanctioned. This caused the specialists to neglect to comprehend how they got certification without contracts.

The National Authority for Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Education (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 organised by the adoption of Bylaws in 2007. It is an autonomous organisation that reports directly to the Egyptian Prime Minister and Parliament (Eid, 2021).

### **Challenges of University Accreditation in the Post-COVID-19 Era by Accreditation Agencies**

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought significant challenges to various sectors, with higher education being one of the most affected. The process of university accreditation, vital for guaranteeing academic excellence, was particularly damaged. Adapting to the new post-pandemic environment has presented several challenges for accrediting organizations, who are in charge of certifying educational standards. These difficulties are complex and include pedagogical, financial, logistical, and technological problems that still affect university certification procedures around the world.

Accreditation agencies, which historically relied on in-person visits and evaluations, struggled to maintain the quality of assessment remotely as universities shifted to online and hybrid learning models during the COVID-19 pandemic. Accreditation agencies now have to make sure that universities' technological tools and online learning systems meet academic standards. The process of remote evaluation, which frequently involves virtual campus visits and online course assessments, requires accreditation agencies to create new frameworks to ensure quality assurance without in-person evaluations (Lundahl & Gilewicz, 2022). With universities moving towards blended learning models, accreditation bodies need to reconsider how they assess quality, focusing on learning outcomes and instructional effectiveness rather than delivery methods alone (Hernandez & Tucker, 2022).

The challenge is to ensure that accreditation processes accurately reflect the quality of student learning and institutional performance while accommodating the changes in educational delivery. As universities adjust to the new post-COVID landscape, accreditation agencies must rethink their approach to quality assurance, including revising standards to better assess and support universities that are pioneering new educational models and ensuring that these institutions can maintain high levels of academic integrity and quality (Carnegie, 2023). Accreditation bodies have had to reevaluate their frameworks for assessing learning outcomes, particularly when institutions are using diverse and non-traditional means of assessment (Lozano & Lema, 2022).

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study employed a qualitative approach with the aid of a documentary survey type. 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. Three countries were purposively selected for the study, namely Nigeria (West Africa), Egypt (Northern Africa) and Malawi (Southern Africa). The three countries captured the three regions of Africa as a continent.

This is to comprehensively analyse the existing research and provide an accurate evaluation of the current status of the accreditation process in higher education institutions. During this phase, it is important to actively pursue and thoroughly analyse appropriate articles, research papers, accreditation agencies' official publications, and other relevant sources. The study relied on the available secondary sources rather than primary data. Data were analysed using a narrative and content analysis methods.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Accreditation Process in Nigeria, Egypt, Malawi and Japan**

#### **Accreditation process in Nigeria**

In Nigeria, the procedures for institutional and program accreditations are comparable. The creation of minimal requirements for program and institution accreditation serves as the foundation. Academic content (curriculum), personnel, internal quality control, physical facilities, library, funding, research and cooperation, tracer system, and employers' evaluation of graduates are all covered by programme accreditation standards. The criteria for institutional accreditation, on the other hand, include the following: transparency, stable financial management, accountability, and general ethos; 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.

The institution must thereafter apply for accreditation renewal or respond to a reminder notification from the NUC. The institution fills out a self-study form, which is then sent to the agency. Following that, an accreditation team is chosen, trained, and assigned to the institution that is applying for accreditation. A courtesy visit with the key officials and other pertinent stakeholders,

such as the dean or head of department, preceded the site visit. Physical facilities are confirmed during the inspection, and pertinent papers are examined and cross-checked with the information found in the self-study report. Before a decision is reached, the team writes a report and submits it to the agency for additional processing. The NUC always makes the final findings available to the public and the institution (Saliu, 2021).

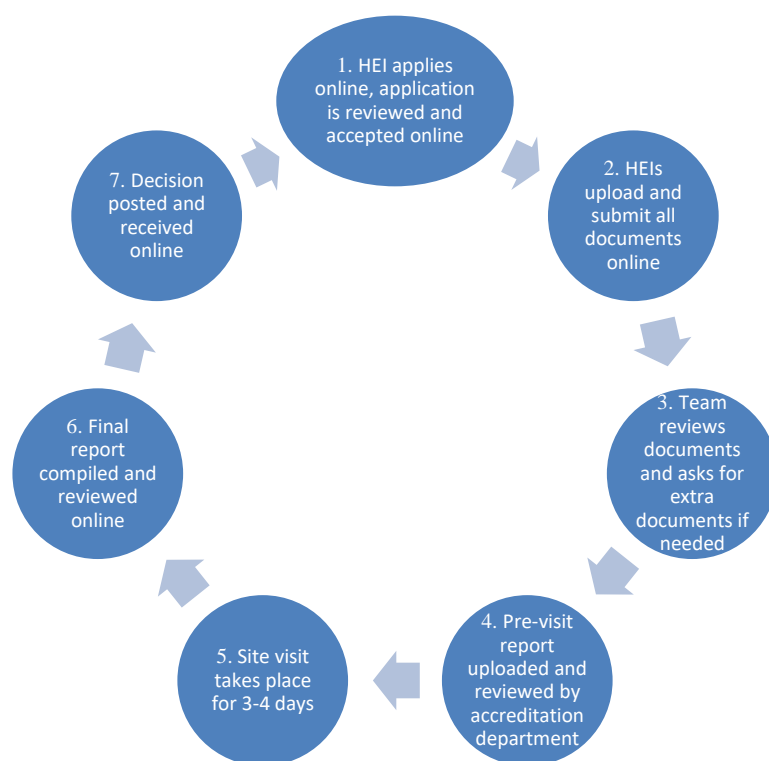
### **Accreditation process in Egypt**

There are two different types of accreditation exams in Egypt's higher education system. These are accreditations for programme and institutions. The two main objectives of institutional accreditation, which is a mission-driven review process, are institutional capability and educational efficacy. Program accreditation, on the other hand, is an outcome-based assessment that concentrates on two areas: educational efficacy and program management (Amira, 2017).

Egypt began the digital accreditation process in 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic issue. Seven steps are involved in the process, as shown in Figure 5. Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) use an online application process, and when their application is approved, they pay online. Applications are assessed by NAQAAE, and acceptance is completed online. A gateway is then made available to enable document submission online. The HEIs get the team composition online. All documents are uploaded and submitted online, and HEIs reply to the team composition in the same manner. HEIs are often permitted to post supporting papers online. The team writes, compiles, and reviews the report online. Online, HEIs examine reports and address factual data errors (exclusively). The Board finalizes the report, reviews it, and posts the decision online.

In response to the challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic, Egypt started the digital accreditation process in 2020. The process involves seven stages as reflected in Figure 1. Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) submit an online application and once accepted payment is made online. NAQAAE reviewed the application and acceptance is done online. Thereafter, the 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 are allowed to upload supporting documents online. The report is written, compiled, and reviewed online by the team. HEIs review reports and respond to factual data errors (only) online. The report is finalised, and reviewed, and the decision is posted online by the Board.





**Figure 1:** Digital Accreditation Process in Egypt

**Source:** Eid, (2021)

**Table 1: Stages of Programme accreditation process in Nigeria, Egypt and Malawi**

S/N	Nigeria	Egypt	Malawi
1	Setting minimum standards	Setting of minimum standards	Setting of minimum standards
2	Invitation to Institutions by the NUC (except commencement of new programme, the institution must apply)	HE Institution applies	Application by the Institutions without prompting them
3	Self-study	Self-study	Self-study by the institutions
4	Selection and training of accreditors	Selection of accreditors (approved by institute)	Desk review of self-study form
5	Site Visit	Site Visit	Preliminary/preassessment visit where necessary by the secretariat
6	Decision making	Reporting	Selection of reviewers by NCHE (training/orientation)

7	Disclosure	Team recommendation/Decision making	Site visit (entry meeting, assessment and exit meeting)
8		Disclosure (Accredited or not accredited)	Report writing
9			Factual error checking
10			Decision making by Council
11			Disclosure (to the institutions and public)

Source: Authors' Compilation, 2023

**Table 2: Stages of Institutional Accreditation Process Nigeria, Egypt and Malawi**

S/N	Nigeria	Egypt	Malawi
1	Setting minimum standards	Setting of minimum standards	Setting of minimum standards
2	Invitation to Institutions by the NUC/Application by the Institutions	HE Institution applies	Application by the Institutions without prompting them
3	Self-study	Institute Eligible	Self-study by the institutions
4	Selection and training of accreditors	Self-study prepared by Eligible HEIs & Submit	Desk review of self-study form
5	Site Visit	Selection of accreditors (approved by institute)	Preliminary/preassessment visit where necessary by the secretariat
6	Decision making	Site Visit for evaluation	Selection of reviewers by NCHE (training/orientation)
7	Disclosure	Evaluation of self-study form and document	Site visit (entry meeting, assessment and exit meeting)
8		Review teams formed (approved by the institute)	Report writing
9		Reporting	Factual error checking
10		Team recommendation/Decision making	Decision making by Council
11		Disclosure (Accredited or not accredited)	Disclosure (to the institutions and public)

Source: Authors' Compilation, 2023



### **Accreditation process in Malawi**

In Malawi, accreditation formally began in 2016. Accreditation always starts with the institution applying for accreditation, according to the NCHE program; this is how accreditation is initiated, as seen in Table 1. The institution next fills out the self-study form and pays the accreditation costs and application form. When required, NCHE will do a desk review and a preliminary/preassessment visit. The NCHE selects and trains reviewers and then conducts site visits, including meetings and evaluations. Reports are written by reviewers. Factual error checking is often allowed by submitting the report to the organisation for cross-checking to see if any claims are untrue. The council always makes the final decision before sharing it with the public and the institution (NCHE, 2015, 2020, Phiri, 2021).

### **Common and Specific Challenges of the University Accreditation Process**

Today, we are living in a VUCA (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, and Ambiguous) world that possesses many challenges that have only been compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic. The pervasive nature of the recent technological disruption and the emergence of the fourth industrial revolution including covid-19 pandemic has brought about unprecedented innovations in virtually all fields of human endeavours, especially, the education sector. The following are the common and specific challenges of the university accreditation process in the selected countries.

**Paper-based accreditation:** Out of the three countries, only Egypt is practising virtual accreditation, and Nigeria and Malawi are still practising paperwork. The paper-based approach is costly, time-consuming, eco-friendly, and problematic for updating and retrieving documents. Physical meetings, travelling expenses for the accrediting team, and other sundry expenses by accrediting agencies with the institutions are enormous.

**Insufficient Funds:** The major source of funds for higher education institutions across three countries is the government. The amount of funding from the government in most cases is not sufficient, and most of the time, institutions do not get the required amounts for their operations (Shawa, 2014). In most cases, the institution presents false evidence of adequate funding of the programme or institution, which is contrary to what is on the ground. Previous studies have established that funding is a major challenge to quality assurance in higher education in some African countries and, by extension, accreditation exercise (Marmolejo, 2011; Okojie, 2011; Ramon-Yusuf, 2013; Okebukola, 2014; Shabani & Mohammedbai, 2014). In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, universities experiencing budget deficits, decreased student enrollment, or declining government funding may find it challenging to meet accreditation requirements related to financial management, making financial stability an increasingly important concern in the accreditation process (Müller et al., 2022).

**Irregular institutional accreditation and Massification of higher education:** It was observed that the selected countries focused more on programme accreditation than institutional accreditation. This challenge is peculiar to the three countries. There is an increase in student enrolment, an increase in the number of programs in higher institutions, and an increase in the number of private universities, without corresponding quality assurance. Hence, a need to assure

quality assurance and standards in the face of substantially increased enrolment without expansion in facilities. The expansion in student enrolment was not well planned and prepared for. The expansion in student numbers cum poor funding by the government, resulted in a lower unit of resource per student and high staff-student ratios.

**Sharp practices in accreditation exercise:** There are situations where the university embarks on the recruitment of fake staff mainly for accreditation purposes as cover-up staff shortages. Fake backdated letters of appointment are issued to such staff. Meanwhile, the staff so recruited would be unable to provide answers to basic questions concerning the courses they claim to facilitate and would be at sea with regard to the operations of the Department. Sometimes the department would deliberately distort (reduce) the total number of students admitted into the various programmes in order to meet up with the staff-student ratio. The solution is that the team should check the student population on the portal and the details of the total number of students that registered for courses on a semester basis, the number of examination scripts, and the results of courses at all levels to confirm the correctness of the records covering three consecutive sessions. This challenge is peculiar to Nigeria.

Universities may falsify accreditation papers to give their programs a more positive appearance. Ige (2019) described how the NUC frequently failed to take corrective action when a number of universities used bribery to expedite certification and get around essential quality assurance checks. Institutions with inadequate facilities, teaching staff, or resources may be accredited as a result of such tactics.

In Malawi, the accreditation system has been criticised for having inadequate regulatory oversight, which has resulted in some institutions offering unaccredited programs; in Egypt, Mahmoud and Gamal (2020) reported cases where university administrators offered accreditation teams bribes during site visits, which led to less rigorous evaluations of the universities' programs and facilities; and in Malawi, some universities have been reported to continue offering degree programs that have not been accredited by the NCHE (Nyirenda, 2020).

**Reviewers' capacity deficit:** The deficiency of honesty, experience, knowledge, and skills in quality assurance and accreditation exercise on the part of the personnel in the institutions and the reviewers will negatively impact the goal of quality assurance and credible accreditation. This challenge is peculiar to all the countries. The elimination of the foregoing challenges to the accreditation process in higher institutions is imperative for achieving quality assurance of programme and institutional accreditations.

**Resource Intensive and Costly Process:** The high cost and resource-intensive nature of the evaluation is one of the biggest obstacles universities faces in the accreditation process. Many smaller or less resourced institutions struggle with the financial burden associated with accreditation, particularly when accreditation fees are high or when multiple programs require independent evaluation (Chawla & Gunter, 2021). The accreditation process typically involves self-assessment reports, data collection, site visits, and follow-up evaluations, which require significant administrative effort, time, and financial resources from the institution (Douglas & Oppen, 2022).

### **Prospects and Future Direction of University Accreditation**

This section provides solutions to the challenges by way of prospects and forecasts the future of accreditation for the three countries collectively and by extension other countries in Africa.

**Virtual based accreditation:** Technologies serve both as tools and methodologies for transferring knowledge. As such, technologically based assessment strategies need to be developed by regulatory agencies and higher institutions, which the assessors must be conversant with. Using digital know-how in the design, delivery, and assessment of courses and programs is a common challenge (NCAAC, 2021). The way that universities provide education has been significantly altered by the broad use of remote and hybrid learning in response to the COVID-19 epidemic. Following the pandemic, universities have continued to offer entirely online and hybrid programs, forcing accrediting bodies to modify their evaluation standards to take into consideration these new modes of instruction.

**Adequate funding of institutions and accrediting agencies:** Adequate funding of higher institutions and regulatory agencies is an impetus for quality assurance and quality accreditation sustainability. The government and proprietors of private universities must increase budget allocation to the institutions. Higher education is capital-intensive and requires adequate funding on a regular basis. Academic quality has traditionally been the primary focus of accrediting organizations, but there is growing awareness that institutional sustainability and long-term success depend heavily on financial health. In the wake of the epidemic, accrediting agencies will probably give financial sustainability more weight, forcing colleges to show that they can both provide high-quality instruction and continue to operate even in the face of financial strain.

**Combination of programme and institutional accreditation:** Institutional accreditation promotes quality, and accountability and enhances proprietor funding. World's best 200 universities in 2017 are in the regions where both programme and institutional accreditations are practised. Nigeria needs to move from pilot institutional accreditation conducted in 2011 to regular institutional accreditation.

**Solving massification of higher education:** Higher education massification is a process of adapting to the needs of the average and mass student at the undergraduate level. Because of the rise in enrolment in higher education institutions around the world, the massification of university education has become an unavoidable trend. In 2016, the total number of students in the world was estimated to be 150 million, which is twice as numerous as it was a few decades before. By 2020, the number of pupils is predicted to increase by another 100 million (Selyutin, et al., 2017). In light of this, massive knowledge transfer is urgently needed to cope with the teeming population of youth and adults seeking education. Technology is the solution to this problem through e-learning, open and distance learning courses, e-libraries, etc. Higher education institutions must embrace remote computer learning technologies to solve the problem of massification.

**Eradication of academic and accreditation corruption:** The regulatory agencies must watch out for this in the accreditation exercise. Ethical issues must be addressed while training accreditors or evaluation teams. The accreditation team should extend their searchlight to the minutes of the

departmental meetings, course allocation, and the university payroll covering three consecutive sessions to confirm the genuineness of such staff. Also, an external auditor's report of the institution's financial statement should be requested. Impromptu visits by the agency to institutions for further verification should be encouraged. Adequate funding of accrediting agencies will enable them to remunerate accreditors appropriately and carry out credible accreditation.

**Recruitment of qualified and well-trained reviewers:** Skilled and knowledgeable reviewers who are well versed in quality assurance are required for accreditation. Training and re-training accreditors will enhance credible accreditation and quality assurance. Accrediting agencies should cultivate the idea of engaging international reviewers. Regular capacity building for the reviewers is required.

### **The future prospect of university accreditation**

First, technological innovation in education as a factor necessitates incorporating technological content into the curriculum in response to the requirements of the world of work which the students are being prepared. This invariably demands requisite skills from the assessors to judge the sufficiency and appropriateness of academic curriculum and programmes and to appraise academic staff efficiency. This process would impact the qualifications of the assessors who would be required to unlearn, up-skill, and reskill to capacitate them for the accreditation exercise. This would impact the quality of programmes being accredited and resource verification towards improvement.

Secondly, the need for blended learning as against absolute reliance on traditional face-to-face modes of teaching and learning is another challenge. Technologies serve both as tools and methodology for transferring knowledge and as such, the assessment strategies that are technological in nature need to be developed by regulatory agencies and higher institutions which the assessors must be conversant with.

Third, there is a high demand for competency-based university education/learning. Promoting competency-based education or learning should be a priority in all the higher institutions so as to produce graduates who are competent in their discipline. The university accreditation system should look deeply at the competency-based delivery of all the programmes. The selection of students by the team to assess their competency in the area of their discipline is imperative in accreditation. This aspect is very important for future accreditations. Quality accreditation aims at providing skilled and employable graduates and raising responsible citizens to meet the needs of the labour market (locally and internationally) in many different areas. Thus, the fulfilling the requirements of the labour market is the goal that each institution needs to aim for. (Hanh, et al., 2019, Okebukola, 2021, Eid, 2021).

Fourth, there is a demand for increased public trust in our universities. The public is no longer trusting our institution to deliver quality university education. Therefore, programme and institutional accreditation must respond to this force. The regulatory agencies must improve the standards cum effective and efficient accreditation mechanism.

In addition, the impact of technology on the accreditation process now and in the future. The technology that is moving at a dazzling pace will continue to transform the way universities are structured and deliver the curriculum. The increase in technological devices and information technology has led to many changes in study requirements, lecture delivery, learning, the conduct of examinations, research and innovation, and university administration. There is a paradigm shift to the use of multimedia strategies for promoting teaching and learning. This calls for the review of the traditional ways of programme and institutional accreditations.

Six, the emergence of non-traditional providers of higher education. There is a new dimension in the provision of higher education all over the world with the increase in non-traditional providers such as eLearning, open and distance learning, the growth of private institutions, growth of multi-campus and transnational institutions. These will shape the future of accreditation in the coming years. It is imperative for accrediting agencies to prepare adequately to develop programme and institutional accreditation mechanisms that can stand the test of time.

Seventh, there is a high rate of global competitiveness. The enrolment of international students enhances global ranking; each institution now faces an international environment in which success depends on the quality of teaching, learning, and research. This can be achieved through credible accreditation of programmes and institutions. Eight, there is an increase in demand for higher education. The appeal of education to young people, their motivation, and the accessibility of education to people from various social groups are all important elements in determining the population's future level of education, the number of skilled employees, and the quality of their education. In terms of modern world trends, this is quite important.

Ninth, eliminate academic and accreditation corruption. Some universities imbibed a culture of corrupt practices which compromised the accreditation process. The effort to eliminate both academic and accreditation corruption is a force that must be addressed by the accrediting agencies in order to achieve the goals of accreditation exercises. There are some elements of compromise during the accreditation exercise on the part of the accreditors and the institution being accredited. For example, manipulation of student enrolment, financial gratification, borrowing equipment and chemicals from neighbouring universities or relevant departments, presentation of fake financial records, and hiring of lecturers from other institutions.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The study examined the issues and challenges of university accreditation systems in Nigeria, Egypt, and Malawi in the post-COVID-19 era. Higher institutions are operating in a volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) world that possesses many challenges that have only been compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic. The study identified some challenges confronting the university accreditation system in the selected countries; some are peculiar and others general. The challenges that are common to the three countries studied are dwindling public resources for institutions, massification of higher education, and reviewer's capacity deficit. The peculiar challenges identified are paper-based accreditation (Nigeria, Malawi), irregular institutional accreditation (Nigeria), and sharp practices in accreditation exercise (Nigeria).



The study revealed the prospects (solution to challenges) and future directions for accreditation in the three countries. The solutions to the challenges are virtual-based accreditation, regular programme and institutional accreditation, solving the massification of higher education through technology, eradication of academic and accreditation corruption, and recruiting qualified and well-trained reviewers. Accreditation agencies of university accreditation are expected to undergo significant change in the post-COVID-19 era due to the acceleration of digital learning, the shift toward competency-based education, and the need for cross-border accreditation. To meet these challenges, they must implement new frameworks that address student-centered approaches, digital learning, and financial sustainability.

In conclusion credible and quality accreditation across higher education institutions are no longer a luxury, but a must for every institution that desires high global ranking, competence-based education, global labour market penetration, and public trust. Digitalisation of accreditation is not optional in the face of high development in information technology. The regulatory agencies must prepare for the digitalisation of the accreditation process.

## REFERENCES

- Ajadi, T. O. (2010). Private universities in Nigeria: The challenges ahead. *American Journal of Scientific Research*, 7, 15-24. <http://www.eurojournals.com/ajsr.htm>
- Amira, M. (2017). Higher education and development in Egypt. *The African Symposium (TAS) Journal*, 16(1), 63-73. [www.tas.africanresearch.org](http://www.tas.africanresearch.org).
- Carnegie, D. (2023). *The future of accreditation in higher education*. Harvard Education Press.
- Chawla, S. & Gunter, D. (2021). The challenges of accreditation in a pandemic-impacted world: A global perspective. *Higher Education Review*, 38(2), 67-85.
- Chawla, S., & Gunter, D. (2021). Financial sustainability and accreditation in post-pandemic higher education. *Journal of Higher Education Policy*, 45(2), 112-131.
- Dill, D.D. (2000) Designing Academic Audit: lessons learned in Europe and Asia, *Quality in Higher Education*, 6(3). 187-207. DOI: [10.1080/13538320020005945](https://doi.org/10.1080/13538320020005945)
- Douglas, D., & Opper, M. (2022). Cross-border accreditation and the globalization of higher education. *Educational Policy Journal*, 15(3), 89-107.
- Eid, Y. Y. (2021, August 31 and October 11). *Quality Assurance and Accreditation: Perspectives from Egypt* [Paper presentation]. Virtual Institute for Capacity Building in Higher Education, Module 2: Fundamental, current practice and future directions of accreditation in higher education, Abuja, Nigeria.
- Hanh, N. D., Nga, N. T., Loan, V Q., & Viet, N. M. (2019). "Role of Quality Assurance and Quality Accreditation in Higher Education in Some Developing Countries and Vietnam."

- American Journal of Educational Research*, 7(9), 649-653.  
<https://doi.org/10.12691/education-7-9-8>.
- Harclerod, F. F. (1980). The context of academic program evaluation. In E.C. Craveh (ed.), *New directions for institutional research: Academic program evaluation* (no 27). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Hayward, F. M. (2006, June 13-15). Quality assurance and accreditation of higher education in Africa. [Paper presentation]. The Conference on Higher Education Reform in Francophone Africa: Understanding the keys of success, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso.
- Hernandez, J., & Tucker, M. (2022). The shift to hybrid learning: Accreditation in the post-pandemic world. *Journal of Educational Leadership*, 39(4), 87-104.
- Ibrahim, H. A. (2014). Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Education. *Open Journal of Education*, 2(2), 106-110. [Htt://doi.org/10.12966/oje.06.06.2014](http://doi.org/10.12966/oje.06.06.2014)
- Ige, A. (2019). Corruption in university accreditation in Nigeria: A study of the role of NUC. *Journal of Nigerian Educational Administration*, 12(1), 121-134
- Kajawoi, S. C. R. & Dong, X. (2020). The Accreditation issues of private universities in Malawi, *Advance Journal of Social Sciences*, 7(1), 125-137. <https://doi.org/10.21467/ajss.7.1.125-137>.
- Lenn, M. P. (2003). Strengthening World Bank support for quality assurance and accreditation in higher education in East Asia and the Pacific. World Bank.
- Lozano, R., & Lema, M. (2022). New assessment strategies and accreditation: Challenges in the post-COVID education system. *Higher Education Quarterly*, 77(2), 189-206.
- Lundahl, C., & Gilewicz, M. (2022). Accreditation and quality assurance in a changing higher education landscape. *Journal of Higher Education Policy*, 48(3), 355-373.
- Lyamtane, E. C. (2013). Assessment of the implementation of Inter-University Council for East Africa quality assurance guidelines in faculties of education of chartered universities in Tanzania (Doctoral dissertation, The Catholic University of Eastern Africa, Tanzania).
- Mahmoud, M., & Gamal, S. (2020). Sharp practices in accreditation processes in Egyptian universities. *Egyptian Journal of Educational Reform*, 45(3), 50-67.
- Marmolejo, F. (2011, March 31). African higher education in the World: Are they (and we) ready? *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. <https://www.chronicle.com/blogs/worldwise/african-higher-education-in-the-world-are-they-and-we-ready>.



- Müller, M., et al. (2022). Financial health and accreditation: Navigating financial challenges in post-COVID higher education. *Education Finance Review*, 29(1), 65-82.
- Mohamedbhai, G. (2014). Quality in higher education sacrificed for quantity. *University World News*, 324.
- National Council for Higher Education. (2018). *Registered institutions*. NCHE. <http://www.nche.ac.mw/index.php/resources/registeredinstitutions>
- National Council for Higher Education. (2020). *Registered and accredited higher education institutions in Malawi*. NCHE. <https://hec.ac.mw/post/nche-releases-new-list-accredited-institutions-and-programmes>.
- National Council for Higher Education. (2015). *Minimum Standards for Higher Education Institutions in Malawi*. <http://www.nche.ac.mw/downloads/minimum%20standards.pdf>
- Obadara, O. E. & Alaka, A. A. (2013). Accreditation and Quality Assurance in Nigerian Universities, *Journal of Education and Practice*, 4(8), 34-41.
- Ochwa-echel, J. (2016). Private universities in Uganda: Issues and challenges. *International Journal of Education and Social Science*, 3(3). [https://works.bepress.com/james\\_ochwa-echel/5/download/](https://works.bepress.com/james_ochwa-echel/5/download/)
- Okebukola, P. A. (2014). *Quality assurance in higher education in Africa*. Lagos: OSF Press.
- Okebukola, P. A. (2021, August 31 and October 11). Fundamentals of Accreditation in Higher Education [Paper presentation]. Virtual Institute for Capacity Building in Higher Education, Module 2: Fundamental, current practice and future directions of accreditation in higher education, Abuja, Nigeria.
- Okojie, J. (2011). *NUC Briefing document for the Honourable Minister of Education*. Abuja: NUC
- Phiri, A. N. (2021, August 31 and October 11). *The process of accreditation in Malawi* [Paper presentation]. Virtual Institute for Capacity Building in Higher Education, Module 2: Fundamental, current practice and future directions of accreditation in higher education, Abuja, Nigeria.
- Ramon-Yusuf, (2013). *State of quality assurance in university education in Nigeria*. Abuja: NUC.
- Salawu, M. K. (2023). Post-COVID-19 Era and the Challenges of Online Learning in Nigerian Public Higher Institutions, *Eur. Chem. Bull*, 12(12), 39-54. DOI: [10.48047/ecb/2023.12.12.03](https://doi.org/10.48047/ecb/2023.12.12.03).
- Salawu, R., O., Salawu, M., K., Bolatito, Aina-Obe., S. (2023). Comparative Analysis of University Accreditation Systems in Nigeria, Egypt, Malawi and Japan: Lessons for

- Regulatory Authorities, *Journal of Law and Sustainable Development*, 11(11), 01-29, e01550. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.55908/sdgs.v11i11.1550>.
- Saliu, N. B. (2021, August 31 and October 11). *Practicum on completing self-study form* [Paper presentation]. Virtual Institute for Capacity Building in Higher Education, Module 2: Fundamental, current practice and future directions of accreditation in higher education, Abuja, Nigeria.
- Saliu, N. B. (2021, August 31 and October 11). *The Nigerian experience in institutional accreditation* [Paper presentation]. Virtual Institute for Capacity Building in Higher Education, Module 2: Fundamental, current practice and future directions of accreditation in higher education, Abuja, Nigeria.
- Selyutin, A. A., Kalashnikova, T. V., Danilova, N. E. & Frolova, N. V. (2017). *Massification of the Higher Education as a Way to Individual Subjective Wellbeing* [Conference session]. The European proceeding of social and behavioural sciencesWELLSO 2016 - III International Scientific Symposium on Lifelong Wellbeing in the World. <http://dx.doi.org/10.15405/epsbs.2017.01.35>.
- Shankar, A. (2016). Role of private sector in higher education. [http://www.prindia.org/administrator/uploads/general/1453203086\\_Role%20of%20Private%20Sector%20in%20Higher%20Education.pdf](http://www.prindia.org/administrator/uploads/general/1453203086_Role%20of%20Private%20Sector%20in%20Higher%20Education.pdf)
- Shawa, L. B. (2014). The Quest for a Quality Delivery of University Education in Malawi. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 5(20), 1176-1183. DOI: [10.5901/mjss.2014.v5n20p1176](https://doi.org/10.5901/mjss.2014.v5n20p1176)
- The National Quality Assurance and Accreditation Committee (2004). *The Quality Assurance and Accreditation Handbook for Higher Education in Egypt*. The National Quality Assurance and Accreditation Committee, Egypt.
- The National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) website. (2021). <http://www.nche.ac.mw/index.php#>