# TOWARDS ACCREDITATION OF EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION LIBRARIES

**By**

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**Abstract**

The paper examined the essence of educational institution libraries, the place of institutional and programme accreditation, the role of libraries in institutional and programme accreditation, and advance reasons why educational institution libraries need to be periodically accredited by an accreditation body. Library accreditation indicators were proposed. It concluded that considering the relevance of libraries in educational institutions, they need to be externally assessed periodically to determine their readiness and competence to support and respond effective and efficiently to the continued changing milieu of the institutions' strategic areas of interest.

## Introduction

Generally, educational institution libraries, especially those of the tertiary educational institutions such as the Universities, Polytechnics and Colleges of Education are established to support the teaching, learning, research and

community development functions of the institutions. Such support is provided through:

- Acquisition, processing and storage of variety of information resources in different formats for easy access, retrieval and utilization;
- Provision of variety of off-line and on-line information services to meet continually the increasing and varied needs and demands of the customers;
- Employing, training and re-training the staff to be more qualified and competent to provide effective and efficient services demanded of them by the teaming customers;
- Co-operation, collaboration and networking with other relevant institutions, organizations and systems to enhance the profile of the cooperating bodies/establishments; especially in areas of information resources development, staffing, service provision, training and education, finance/funding, and facilities enhancement/ upgrading; to effectively cope with the exigencies of the time and also meet up to the expectations of the proprietor/management and customers;
- Securing human, material and financial support/ assistance from institutions, organizations and individuals to enhance the capacity of the library to perform its functions more effectively and efficiently at least effort and costs;
- Maintain a bilateral and multilateral agreement/arrangement especially on library and information services with relevant institutions, agencies and organizations within and outside the country to increase its national and international profile, credibility and rating in the art of providing the state-of-the-art library and information services;

- Registering the library with national and international professional bodies and institutions to place it in the committee of professionally recognized and registered member of such bodies and institutions with statutory capacity to enjoy all the rights and privileges arising there from for the benefit of the library systems, resources, services and customers; and
- Employing strategic strategies to enhance the financial base of the Library to cope with its financial needs and demands in the provision of the much needed library and information services.

However, the extent to which the library is able and capable to support the parent institution in performing its functions especially through employing the above mentioned strategies will largely depend upon the extent to which the proprietor of the institution and indeed the management are willing and ready to provide continually the needed human, material and financial support for the library to succeed in its planned endeavours. Also, it will depend on the extent of the librarian's ability to employ entrepreneurial skills and capacity to adopt the concept of 'positive change' or rather 'paradigm shift' as the ultimate option to cope with the increasing and varied demands and needs of the variety of its teaming customers without negating the established national and international Norms, Standards and Benchmarks. As a social entrepreneur, the librarian should be pre-occupied with the provision of goods and services for the overall benefit of the teaming customers through any legally acceptable means in business-like approach to satisfy their yearnings in return for acknowledgement of social mission accomplished. Essentially, the librarian and indeed other library and information service providers/professionals,

as social entrepreneurs, have to factor their systems and services into business-like ventures and environments that will key in the customers and the proprietors as well as the management to pay; even more, for goods and services provided in return for better and efficient services provision.

By nature and characteristics, tertiary educational institutions are dynamic and responsive to the dictates of the time and moments in their teaching, learning, research and community development functions so as to break through in all their existing and projected programmes of activities and plans. This is manifested in the periodic changes in their curriculum content; introduction of new programmes and courses; changes in staff competency needs and requirements; introduction of new instructional materials for teaching, learning and research; improvement of learning, research and teaching facilities; and maintenance of national and international Benchmarks/Standards in its functions and responsibilities.

**ACCREDITATION**

Since time immemorial, academic institutions; especially the tertiary educational institutions such the Colleges of Education, Polytechnics and Universities, are faced with the challenges of maintaining quality, competence, acceptability and reliance with regards to the quality of their academic programmes, competence of their products, acceptability of their certificates and reliance to upon them to deliver and meet up to the expectations of the labour. The extent to which they overcome the challenges are translated into the rates at which applicants seek for admission into their programmes at all levels; the

marketability of their products for employment; the acceptability of their certificates by employers of labour; their capacity and ability to easily attract financial and material assistances from individuals, organisations and donor agencies within and outside the country; their achievement of academic excellence among their peers; and the extent of the impact of their corporate social responsibility on their respective communities and beyond. Hence the essence of the philosophy behind the external assessment of educational institutions, their academic programmes and indeed their libraries is to determine their quality and competencies for accreditation by a given statutory accrediting body based on approved minimum standard/benchmark. Thus, the status of an educational institution's national and international rating is dictated by the extent to which it has met the approved mini standards/benchmarks.

In Nigeria, the accrediting bodies for the tertiary education institutions are: the National Universities Commission (NUC) for the Universities; the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) for the Polytechnics and mono-technics; and the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) for Colleges of Education. Among other functions, they are saddled with the responsibility of accrediting the respective educational institutions within their mandate and ensure compliance with the set minimum standards/benchmark. However, the body responsible for accrediting the library profession, practices and education and training as well as ensure compliance with set minimum standards/benchmark is the Librarians' Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN).

By and large, the essence of accreditation exercises in educational institutions would include: promotion of competence and ability to churn out quality and competent graduates; assurance of providing quality education and

training; provision of quality teaching, learning, research and community development facilities; acquisition and maintenance of high national and international accreditation ratings among contemporary institutions; assurance of employers' acceptance of the graduates and certificates for employment; assurance of meeting the employers of labour professional minimum standards requirements for employment/practice; increased credibility and recognition of the institution in the society; and assurance of improved curriculum as well as teaching, learning and research facilities; assurance of quality and competent staff; etc.

The vogue across the globe is the accreditation of educational institution; their respective academic programs and likewise their respective libraries. The institutional accreditation programme is aimed at assessing externally the quantity, quality, competence and performances of the institution's organs, systems, policies, and other statutory and non statutory activities in compliance with the set national and international mini standards/benchmark. On the other hand, the programme accreditation exercise is aimed as assessing externally the quality of the academic programmes and their compliances with the set national and international minimum benchmarks/standards. Similarly, the library accreditation programme is aimed at determining the quality of the educational institution's library systems, operations, services and facilities as well as the extent of its compliance with approved national and international minimum standards/benchmarks. Thus, an institution is said to be accredited when it has met the approved minimum institutional accreditation requirements scores set by an accreditation body. Similarly, the academic programmes of an educational institution is said to be accredited and its certification acknowledged as worth

accepting wherever when it has met the approved minimum academic benchmark/standards requirement scores set by an accrediting body. In the same vein, an educational institution's library is said to be accredited when its systems, operations, services, and facilities complied with the approved minimum accreditation requirements scores as determined by the accrediting body.

Implicitly, the library being the major and strategic organ upon which all tertiary education academic programmes and functions rest, features very prominently in the accreditation of an institution and its academic programmes. This is to the extent that failure to secure the requisite minimum accreditation scores in such segment will rarely earn an institution's institutional and academic programme accreditations full accreditation status. This points to the fact that and indeed the need for educational institution libraries particularly those of the tertiary educational institutions to be externally accredited in the same manner as the institutional and programme accreditations. This is to assess externally, their operational performances; quality, suitability and quantity of information resources, systems, facilities and service delivery; competences of staff; Customers' impression/perception about the quality, suitability and quantity of library systems, resources and services; etc with the view to determine the extent to which they can or able to support effectively and efficiently the teaching, learning, research and community development functions of their respective institutions.

It is expected that the periodic assessment of library systems, resources and services will assist in identifying the strength and weakness of the library, compare its performances over a period of time (trend study) and determine the way forward to reposition it for better performance and enhanced services

delivery. Van House (1990) remarked that not only do library and information systems administrators benefit from and require performance evaluation data; but also others such as 'governing bodies'; library staff members; and patrons, accrediting agencies. Essentially, the library functions to be evaluated should include: Management Structure and functions ; internal operations such as cataloguing, classification, indexing, abstracting, digitizing, etc; Library customers' satisfaction assessment; service delivery programmes; technological support services; alternative options of operations; and functions of the systems prior to change. Sali (2011) suggested the areas of library quality assurance assessment to include: information resources;, Library systems; information services; library furniture, equipment and facilities; library customers and staff; financial resources; and internal and external quality assurance mechanisms, she concluded that the overall performance of a library under review should be graded as (i) Excellent (A) = 70-100%; (ii) Good (B) = 60-69%; (iii) Fair (C) = 50-59%; and (iv) Poor (D) = Less than 50%. The critical questions on library performance measurement, according to Van House (1995), are: a) What is an effective library? B) How do we determine (library) effectiveness? and c) What makes a library effective? –

The fore goings presuppose that the critical factor in educational institution library accreditation programme is the librarian and the staff upon whose shoulders rest all the good, the bad and the ugly state of the library in meeting up to expectations. The extent of the library's capacity and ability to cope with the challenges of external assessment of peer reviewers/assessors is to some extent dependent upon the librarian's dexterity in exploiting entrepreneurship skills and know-how. Entrepreneurship according to Mohammed (2011) is the art

and science of systematic application of ingenious methods, processes, strategies and approaches to initiate, nurture, manage, administer, advance and sustain a system, an enterprise and an endeavour. He observed that entrepreneurship concept should not be conceived to be applied solely on and for economic purposes. Rather, it should also be seen to be applied for social purposes especially when it centres on the issue of social services provision by individuals, group of individuals, institutions and organisations. Institutions and agencies such as library and information services centres and outfits are also prone to be creative, innovative and risk taking comparable to the economic sector entrepreneurs. Thus, as an information service provider/professional, the librarian can be viewed from the perspectives of (a) economic entrepreneur who has to look for all monies legally possible and available through business-like approaches to manage and sustain the library systems and services for economic returns; and (b) social entrepreneur whose pre-occupation is to provide social goods and services for the benefit of mankind and indeed the customers and proprietors/management through legally acceptable means in business-like approaches to satisfy their yearnings in return for acknowledgement of social mission accomplished – get the institution/library full accreditation status. Acknowledgeable, entrepreneurship stimulates and promotes effectiveness, efficiency, smartness, progress and goal achievement using optimally the available scarce human and material resources and facilities wisely, It is thus necessary that librarians of all types of the libraries and information centres should require and possess typical entrepreneurship characteristics, qualities and competencies such as curiosity; cleverness, goal-orientation; innovation; initiation, intuition, adoption, adaption; imagination; change; transformation;

diversification, creativeness, skillfulness; tactfulness; venturesomeness; resourcefulness; risk taking, diplomacy and persuasion. This possession of such entrepreneurial attributes by tertiary education institution librarians and staff will assist to ensure the successes of the institution and indeed the library at institutional, academic programme and library accreditation exercises to earn full accreditation status respectively. Consequence upon this premise is the need for the inclusion of entrepreneurship education and the training in the curriculum of library and information science schools.

**Library Accreditation Indicators**

Paradoxically, it has been observed that library and information services in educational institution and indeed elsewhere are rarely externally assessed and reviewed separately as an entity of programme/activity per se. Rather, they are incorporated in the external assessment of academic programmes and that of the institutions as the case may be. Being a life-wire of all the academic programmes functions of an educational institution on which it strives to exist and survive, educational institution library and information systems, resources and services should be accredited solely as it were with the academic programme and institutional accreditations by an accreditation body. In this case in Nigeria, it should be by the LRCN due to the powers vested on it by the ACT no.12 of 1995 to regulate the library profession, practices, and education and training.

Ideally, the accreditation of educational institution's libraries should be **preceded by the development of self study form that is based on the** strategic information related to the identified variables on strategic library **programmes of activity; operations, services; management structure and** functions; plans;

objectives and performance indicators. What is therefore required and needed in library assessment for accreditation which both the accrediting body and the library to be assessed for accreditation need to take note of for consideration should include identification and securing of information related to:

- the type, nature, quality, quantity, suitability and relevance of the library systems, resources, facilities and services;
- the type, category and perception/impression of the library staff and customers, especially on the quantity, quality and suitability of library systems,. resources, services, operations and facilities;
- the capacity and competence of the library staff and customers;
- the sources and management of the library financial resources and systems;
- the library management structure, style and competencies;
- the library strategic plans, policies and implementation strategies;
- the library quantity and quality performance indicators/parameters and implementation strategies;
- the library public relations systems, programmes, plans and implementation strategies;
- the Human Resource Development plans, strategies and capacity building programmes of the library;
- the customer relation plans, programmes and implementation strategies of the library;
- the internal and external quality assurance mechanisms for monitoring and regulating performance and compliance with set

national and international minimum accreditation benchmarks/standards;

- the extent of the application of ICTs to library systems, resources and services; and
- the management structure, functions, strategies, initiatives, processes and styles of the library.

The above indicators/parameters for assessing the performance of a library to determine its accreditation status in terms of whether it has obtained full, interim or denial accreditation; presuppose that the indicators/parameters should be measurable and quantifiable to ensure fairness of assessment and grading. It also goes without saying that the members of accrediting team should be of good character and high integrity. In addition, the body should decide on what should be the cut-off marks obtainable for the final grading of a library to determine its accreditation status as being full, interim or denial accreditation.

**Conclusion**

There is no doubt in the fact that educational institution libraries are vital organs that should be invigorated to facilitate the strategic functions of the institutions. Beside the provision of what is required and needed to make the libraries operate and function meaningfully, it is equally very necessary and important that they are periodically assessed, especially externally, to determine their readiness and competence to support and respond effectively and efficiently to the continued changing milieu of the institutions' areas of strategic interests.

Certainly, considering the strategic role of educational institution libraries, their possession of full accreditation status will have a multiplier effect on the intuitional and programme accreditation status of their respective institutions and a higher national and international rating among their peers.

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