

# Accreditation of Study Programs on Addictions in Nigerian Universities: Challenges, Opportunities, and the Need for Advocacy

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**INTRODUCTION:** Access to drug treatment services in Nigeria remains low due to a severe shortage in the drug treatment workforce. Plans are underway to address the workforce shortage by introducing drug addiction training programs in Nigerian universities. This paper offers a brief overview of the required conditions for creating accredited degree programs in Nigerian universities, challenges universities face in introducing drug addiction programs, and current opportunities for such programs. The findings of this study serve as a guide to pursuing the accreditation of an addiction studies degree program in Nigerian universities. **SAMPLE:** Fifteen lecturers (nine male and six female) participated in the study. All participants were former and current department heads who have been involved in program accreditation at the Niger-Delta University. **METHODS:** This study compiles details on relevant conditions stipulated by the National Universities Commission (NUC) for an accreditation exercise and experiences of Nigerian degree-awarding institutions seeking accreditation of their degree programs. The author compiled these details by reviewing relevant documents on the accreditation of new programs in Nigerian

universities. Selected university lecturers who have served department heads for at least four years were also interviewed. This length of time is sufficient for acquiring relevant information on new course accreditation requirements. **RESULT:** Results revealed that formal stipulated conditions such as program curriculum, quantity and quality of teaching staff, and facilities such as textbooks and journals are essential for new program accreditation. However, informal advocacy also has a significant impact on the process of seeking accreditation for new programs from the NUC. **CONCLUSION:** Nigerian university authorities seeking to introduce drug addiction programs should investigate the NUC accreditation criteria and release funds promptly to upgrade physical facilities to the accreditation standard. The university authority should also engage national and global drug addiction treatment and prevention trainers to instruct selected university lecturers to meet the NUC academic staff criteria for drug addiction training. In addition, advocacy for the drug training program to the NUC by the International Consortium for Drug Demand Reduction (ICUDDR) and other relevant Nigerian drug control stakeholders is essential.

**Keywords | Accreditation – Study Programs on Addictions – Nigerian Universities – Challenges – Advocacy**

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

A recent report by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, the first-ever survey of drug use in Nigeria, revealed a prevalence of 14.4%—more than twice the global average of 5.6% (UNODC, 2018). However, despite this high prevalence, access to drug treatment services remains low due to the cost of drug treatment, the stigma attached to drug use, unavailability of information about local drug treatment services, absence of drug treatment services partly due to the lack of a drug addiction workforce, and other factors.

The workforce shortage affects all institutions in Nigeria, but the shortage of the addiction treatment workforce is unmatched in its severity. This shortage is due to the absence of Nigerian academic institutions offering drug addiction training programs. Nigeria has been experiencing a lack of medical doctors in hospitals and other health care institutions. However, the situation is improving gradually as universities graduate medical doctors yearly. In contrast, no Nigerian university trains and graduates the addiction treatment workforce.

To address the drug treatment workforce shortage, tertiary institutions, especially universities, have been called upon to introduce drug addiction education programs, as they are in other parts of the world, to address a workforce shortage. For example, Miovsky et al. (2019) observed an exponential growth in addiction-specific academic degree programs at different universities worldwide. The situation is different in Nigeria, as no university currently offers any drug addiction program (Lososová et al., 2020). The challenge to the universities in introducing drug addiction programs is tied to the stringent accreditation conditions for new courses established by the National Universities Commission (NUC), the government commission established to promote quality higher education in Nigeria.

Accreditation is part of the university system in Nigeria, and new courses are subjected to the same accreditation procedures (Gani & Ibrahim, 2014). The legal foundation for accreditation of academic programs in Nigerian universities derives from NUC Act CAP N81, Law of the Federation of Nigeria and Education (National Minimum Standard and Establishment of Institution), and Act CAP E3 Law of the Federation of Nigeria, 2004 (NUC, 2012). The legal provisions above empowered the NUC to establish minimum standards for all universities in the federation and accredit their degrees and other academic awards. NUC accreditation is carried out to ensure that the provisions of the Benchmark Minimum Academic Standard (BMAS) document are attained, maintained, and enhanced. NUC accreditation also assures employers and other community members that Nigerian graduates of all academic programs have attained an acceptable level of competency in their areas of specialization. In addition, NUC accreditation certifies to the international community that Nigerian universities offer programs of high standards, and their graduates are adequate for employment and further studies nationally and internationally (Tersoo, 2018). Studies have shown that since the introduction of accreditation exercises, Nigerian university facilities and the quality of graduates have improved (Joseph & Urhiewhu, 2016).

Successful accreditation of a new program requires a university to follow the NUC requirements strictly. For example, the NUC requires that the curriculum of any program for accreditation must be adequate to prepare practitioners at an appropriate level in their field of study. By this, the curriculum is required to provide adequate theoretical knowledge and skills to fulfill the requirements of specific job objectives (NUC, 2018). Furthermore, the accreditation requirement for academic staff is judged on academic or professional background, degree of staff participation in professional associations, related teaching experience, and professional work.

Akomolafe & Adesua (2000) posit that because some university administrators could not adequately employ staff or adjunct lecturers to address the challenges of inadequate personnel, some universities in the country fall short of this NUC requirement. Bamiro (2012) reiterated that Nigerian university administrators should pay attention to the quality and quantity of academic staff, while Alachenu (2012) also reported disparities in the ratio of academic staff to students.

The NUC requirements also stipulate that universities provide adequate classrooms, equipment, and books to give students learning experiences essential to achieving the program's educational philosophy and objectives (Bayo, 2018). Seeing a significant relationship between accreditation and resource input into Nigerian universities and quality of output, Obadara & Alakka (2013) recommended that human capacities be built in to quality assurance to ensure quality.

Accreditation requirements are not unique to Nigerian universities and are standard worldwide. In the U.S., the Council on Education for Public Health (2016) recommends that schools or programs have information and technology resources and physical resources adequate to fulfill their stated mission and goals and support instructional programs. Physical resources should include faculty and staff office space, classroom space, student shared space, and laboratories. The program should also have a robust curriculum with general education, liberal learning, essential knowledge, and competencies.

The Middle States Commission on Higher Education criteria for accreditation (2015) insists that institutions offer curricula designed such that students acquire and demonstrate essential skills, including oral and written communication, scientific and quantitative reasoning, critical analysis and reasoning, technological competency, and information literacy. In addition, the World Health Organization Accreditation Guidelines for Educational/Training Institutions and Programs in Public Health (2002) demand that institutions provide sufficient educational resources for the student population and the delivery of the curriculum, including libraries, lecture halls, tutorial rooms, laboratories, and computers.

During the accreditation of the energy and environmental engineering degree program at Finland's Tampere University of Applied Sciences, the accreditation team requested a list of program courses and curriculum analysis, budget, and curriculum vitae of key teaching staff. Upon reviewing the accreditation exercise, the team highlighted key strengths and good practice: a)

The program is learner-centered and instills a strong sense of co-responsibility for learning in students early in their studies; b). The physical and virtual learning infrastructure is high-quality and well maintained, leading to an excellent working environment and work ethic culture; c). The staff are highly committed and enthusiastic, supported by good training opportunities to develop their digital teaching skills and pedagogy; d) Technical staff includes professional engineers with a great commitment to the student learning experience (Richardson et al., 2018). The NUC's accreditation requirements force Nigerian universities to examine their programs before approaching the NUC for the accreditation exercise to avoid disappointment. Meeting the NUC conditions poses a serious challenge to universities that face the added challenges of shortages of staff, books, and journals; inadequate funding, obsolete facilities, and excessive paper documentation requirements (Ekpoh & Edet, 2017; Joseph & Urhiewhu, 2016; Alokun & Busayo, 2009).

Despite these challenges, many universities take the informal approach of advocacy to the NUC to proceed with accreditation. For example, to re-introduce Spanish language instruction into the Nigerian university system in 2018, a Spanish delegation visited the NUC to facilitate the process. Similarly, also in 2018, a delegation from Air Force Institute of Technology (AFIT) in Kaduna, Nigeria, led by the commandant, paid a courtesy visit to the NUC Executive Secretary to seek professional assistance and guidance in upgrading its status to a degree-awarding institution, as AFIT intends to launch specialized undergraduate programs (NUC, 2018). Advocacy has been very effective in securing accreditation for new programs in Nigerian universities.

## 2 METHODS

This study included three methods. The first involved a document review of secondary sources on the required conditions for NUC accreditation of new courses. Second, the researcher administered a structured questionnaire to 15 Niger-Delta University lecturers outside the university campus. The questionnaire consisted of six questions, including both ranked and listing-of-factors questions. Subjects were chosen as a convenience sample of key informants who could be interviewed face-to-face. Participants received an informed consent document prior to the data collection. They were allowed to read it and ask questions for clarification before submitting their signed consent to the research assistant. All 15 copies of the questionnaire were retrieved, ensuring a 100% return rate. Third, a brief semi-structured interview was conducted with the same 15 lecturers by asking the same questions as in the questionnaire but in an open-ended form. The interview aimed to validate some of the information obtained through a Google search and a review of secondary sources on conditions for the accreditation of degree programs in Nigerian universities. Also, the *vis-à-vis* interviews tapped views on current challenges and opportunities for introducing and accrediting addiction studies degree programs in Nigerian universities that the questionnaire might not have captured.

Questions posed by the study include the following:

1. What are the required conditions of more concern for the accreditation of drug addiction programs in Nigerian universities?
2. What are the difficult challenges for securing accreditation for drug addiction programs by Nigerian universities?
3. What are the present opportunities for securing drug addiction programs by Nigerian universities?

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. This study design is appropriate because the information was gathered from a population sample familiar with the information relating to the study's purpose. All 15 questionnaires were retrieved, found to be completed correctly, and then coded and analyzed using simple arithmetic. The researcher synthesized information from the semi-structured interviews with information from the Internet search and the questionnaires.

## 3 RESULTS

*Table 1* showed that adequate curriculum, quantity (number), and quality of relevant staff and physical facilities (e.g., libraries, lecture halls) were considered major factors of concern to the university for accreditation of new programs. From the requirements listed above, more participants (13) agreed that their university would show more concern on quantity and quality of staff requirement as most critical to address adequately before inviting the accreditation team to the university. The second requirement of high concern was physical facilities, endorsed by 12 participants. Six study participants endorsed the curriculum requirement. The questionnaire results demonstrate that the strict accreditation exercise does not allow for unfulfilled requirements. Therefore, Nigerian universities must ensure that all requirements are in place to prepare for the accreditation of a degree program in addiction.

*Table 2* showed that the complex challenges Nigerian universities face in introducing and securing accreditation for drug addiction programs include: staff shortage, curriculum development, physical facilities, poor funding, and prolonged paper documentation. From the table above, most of the participants (13) viewed staff shortage as the most difficult challenge universities will face in the introduction and accreditation of an addiction studies degree program. In addition, 12 participants endorsed the challenge of physical facilities, including books and journals, and 12 participants endorsed the curriculum factor.

In *Table 3*, participants listed factors making it easier to secure addiction program accreditation in Nigerian universities: The current disturbing level of drug use in the country, the current response of the federal government to addressing the rising level of drug use in Nigeria, the recent presence of drug education organizations in the country such as the Colombo Plan, the International Society of Substance Use Professionals (ISSUP), and ICUDDR, the growing number of substance use

**Table 1 |** Selected NUC requirements of major concern to the university for accreditation of degree programs in Nigeria.

S/N	NUC Requirements:	The number of participants agreeing on the university's major concern on NUC requirements is listed below.
	<b>Question:</b> In preparation for the introduction of the addiction program in Nigerian universities, list what you think will constitute the major concern of your university in terms of NUC accreditation requirements.	
1	Physical facilities	12 Participants
2	Quantity and quality of staff	13 Participants
3	Curriculum	06 Participants

**Table 2 |** Participants' agreement on the level of difficulty associated with factors faced by Nigerian universities in introducing and securing accreditation for degree programs in addiction studies.

S/N	Factors:	The number of participants agreeing on the different levels of difficulty associated with the factors is listed below.	
	<b>Question:</b> By estimation from your experience, what level of difficulty do you think your university will encounter in relation to the following factors during the NUC accreditation of addiction program?		
		Low-level difficulty	High-level difficulty
1	Staff shortage	Zero	13 Participants
2	Curriculum	Zero	12 Participants
3	Physical facilities	Zero	12 Participants
4	Poor funding	Zero	12 Participants
5	Prolonged paper documentation	Zero	09 Participants

**Table 3 |** Level of agreement on factors that can serve as opportunities for securing accreditation for addiction programs in Nigerian universities.

S/N	Opportunistic factors:	The number of people who agreed on the factors is listed below.
	<b>Question:</b> Please list some factors at present that you think can serve as opportunities for securing the accreditation for addiction programs in Nigerian universities.	
1	Disturbing high level of drug use in the country	12
2	Current response of the Federal government	13
3	Sudden presence of drug education organizations such as the Colombo Plan, ISSUP, ICUDDR, and growing substance use professional membership	11
4	Advocacy	12

professionals, and the available option of advocacy. Information from Table 3 showed that most of the participants (13) considered the present federal government response to Nigeria's high level of drug use as a unique opportunity to overcome the challenge of the introduction and accreditation of addiction studies degree programs. Twelve participants agreed that the high level of drug use presents an opportunity to accelerate the introduction and accreditation of addiction studies. Also, 12 participants believed that advocacy is instrumental in scaling through the NUC accreditation when combined with relevant measures. Table 3 suggests the high level of drug use in the country, which has forced the federal government to seek possible solutions, now present a unique opportunity to accelerate the accreditation process for addiction programs. Establishing addiction studies programs in Nigerian universities is a strategic solution to the country's drug use problem.

## 4 DISCUSSION

Nigeria is experiencing a high level of problematic drug use yet lacks the workforce needed to address this problem. Nigerian universities have been called upon to rise to the challenge of developing an addiction treatment workforce that can address this problem. However, NUC requirements for the accreditation of new programs have slowed the Nigerian universities' response to this public outcry. With plans underway to build the addiction prevention and treatment workforce by introducing an addiction studies programs, this paper examined the NUC requirements for accreditation of addiction studies as a new degree program in Nigerian universities. The paper also examined current factors that offer unique opportunities to ease the process of securing accreditation of addiction programs in Nigerian universities. This study's findings serve as a guide on how to pursue addiction studies degree program accreditation in Nigerian universities.

The study results showed that universities seeking accreditation must have adequate staff, physical facilities, and program curriculum in place. These requirements are not unique to Nigerian schools but are also observed by universities in other countries. For example, the World Health Organization accreditation guidelines (2002) demand that institutions must ensure they have sufficient educational resources for the student population and for the delivery of the curriculum, including libraries, lecture halls, tutorial rooms, laboratories, and computers. Accreditation of courses in Nigerian universities began in 1990 to address public complaints, including perceived structural decay and the low quality of graduates produced. Since the introduction of accreditation of programs, studies have shown that there has been some improvement in Nigerian universities (Joseph & Urhiewhu, 2016). In view of this, accreditation has come to stay. Universities need to strive to meet these requirements to secure accreditation and improve the quality of their graduates.

The NUC requires universities to provide an adequate and internationally competitive curriculum. Unfortunately, no Nigerian university has developed a comprehensive drug abuse prevention and treatment curriculum to date. Meeting

this condition requires an exchange of professional experience between Nigerians and their international professional counterpart in the drug abuse field.

The key informant interviews identified staff shortage, poor physical facilities, poor funding, and the prolonged paper documentation process as challenges to the accreditation of drug addiction studies programs in Nigerian universities. It is important to state here that this situation affects the drug addiction studies programs being developed as well as existing programs in Nigerian universities. On the issue of shortage or unavailability of drug addiction staff, the challenge can be traced to the fact that there is no degree program offered in addiction studies in Nigerian universities where such personnel could have been trained and readily available. Therefore, we cannot talk of having sufficient teaching staff, given that Nigerian universities have not offered addiction studies training programs. In addition, the quality of the few addiction studies teachers in Nigeria is such that many cannot meet the NUC accreditation standard for cognate teaching experience.

The challenge of staff shortage has been a long-standing problem. According to Joseph & Urhiewhu (2016), one of the factors that determines the success of any university during accreditation exercise is personnel. It is, however, worrisome that staff shortage continues to plague Nigerian universities. On the NUC books requirement, 12 participants agreed that physical facilities, including books, constitute a serious challenge to the universities in the accreditation process. This finding is consistent with Joseph & Urhiewhu (2016), who found in their study on the roles of academic libraries in university accreditation that many academic libraries in Nigeria lack current titles in all fields of studies that their collections cover. While Joseph & Urhiewhu (2016) obtained this information solely from secondary sources, the present study obtained similar information through both literature and data obtained from participants during semi-structured interviews. Alokun and Busayo (2009) also observed that most Nigerian university libraries lack current books, journals, and audio-visual materials for readers. The few resources available in the libraries are outdated and cannot meet the minimum standard set by the NUC.

Findings from the study revealed that despite the challenging factors universities face, the current level of drug use in Nigeria presents an excellent opportunity to promote the introduction and accreditation of addiction studies programs. Problematic drug use is a concern to all citizens and the current government. For example, in response to the 2018 UNODC report, a presidential committee on drug use was established to address the problem. The chairman of the presidential committee on drug abuse made several calls to the universities to do everything possible to introduce addiction studies programs. In addition, the president of Nigeria has appointed a chairman of the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA)—an agency that coordinates all drug control activities in Nigeria. Therefore, addiction professionals in the country and universities can seize this opportunity through teamwork with the Chairman of NDLEA to facilitate the accreditation of addiction programs in Nigerian universities. This teamwork could take the form of a joint stakeholder's advocacy visit to the NUC.

## Limitation

Due to limited resources, the researcher could not visit many Nigerian universities. Therefore, it is beyond the scope of this study to mention specific Nigerian universities that are willing to introduce addiction programs but hindered by the NUC conditions. It is also beyond the scope of this study to investigate university lecturers' capacity to design and deliver required training on drug addiction studies to the students, which may be one of the serious challenges universities face. Therefore, future studies should identify specific universities willing to introduce addiction studies programs and note specific challenges related to introducing these programs and their accreditation by the NUC.

## 5 CONCLUSION

For any new program at degree level to receive accreditation in Nigerian universities, the program must meet the NUC accreditation requirements such as adequate staff, physical facilities, and program curriculum. These constitute a challenge to the Nigerian universities that cannot meet these requirements without assistance. In view of the required accreditation conditions set by the NUC and the complex challenges Nigerian universities face, this study suggests the following as a way forward:

Physical facilities have been identified as a significant barrier to accreditation, underscoring the need for university authorities to work with NUC to address these issues. University authorities also need to engage the services of national and global trainers in drug addiction prevention and treatment to prepare selected university lecturers to meet the NUC criteria for academic staff. Furthermore, international bodies such as ICUDDR are seen by interviewees as providing curricula materials but may need to adapt to meet the NUC criteria. Finally, joint advocacy visits to the NUC by the ICUDDR team, National Drug Law Enforcement Agency, and other relevant stakeholders are recommended. Other international bodies seeking to introduce their courses in Nigerian universities have made similar courtesy visits (NUC, 2018). The international backing exhibited by these visits will draw more internal support for this cause. Thus, efforts to implement and accredit drug addiction programs in Nigerian universities will receive the urgent attention they deserve.

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### Declaration of interest:

None.

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