

NIGERIAN UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES AND THE CHALLENGES OF ACCREDITATION

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Abstract

The cardinal objectives of university libraries are to support their parent organisations to fulfil their mandates and to consistently ensure that the accreditation requirements of all programmes run by the universities are adequately met. In an attempt to meet these compelling requirements, the libraries usually face a lot of challenges. The paper highlights the aims of universities and their relationship with libraries. The purposes of accreditation and the agencies that conduct accreditation were highlighted. The libraries' requirements for accreditation were discussed. The challenges faced by the libraries in meeting the requirements of accreditation were also highlighted. The paper concluded by offering some suggestions on how to address the challenges faced by the university libraries with a view to ensuring effective services and meeting the requirements for successful accreditation exercises.

Keywords: Nigeria, University Libraries, Challenges, Accreditation

Introduction

Accreditation has been a regular exercise in Nigerian universities. Apart from the National Universities Commission (NUC) which is charged with the responsibility of monitoring and ensuring the standard and quality of university education in Nigeria, several professional associations also conduct accreditation of their professions. The essence of the exercise is to maintain standard and ensure that the Nigerian university system is comparable with global best practices. Accreditation is the mechanism used for a holistic approach in evaluating the numerous parameters that determine the acceptability or otherwise of any programmes being run by the university. The library, being the central organ of the university is always involved in the accreditation exercise. The number of the programmes to be presented for accreditation and the frequency of the accreditation exercises pose a serious challenge to university libraries. This is further compounded by the expanding academic programmes, increasing student enrolments, escalating cost of library materials and shrinking budgetary allocation. Against all this, the library is always expected to adequately meet the numerous accreditation requirements for all programmes. These compelling demands have been a source of serious concern to university libraries as the success or otherwise of any accreditation exercise is determined by the success or otherwise of the library. In support of the above Nkiko, Ilo, Idiegbeyan-Ose, and Segun-Adeniran (2015) buttress that the state-of-the-art academic libraries confer prestige on the institutions and have tremendous impact on student retention, ranking, and high profiling of parent institution during accreditation.

Universities and Libraries

Globally, universities are the highest institutions of learning. They are established to train high level manpower, conduct research, create new knowledge and disseminate it to the nation for sustainable national development. According to Okezie (2019), the major role of universities and other tertiary institutions revolve round the development of the society through research, teaching and community service. Arove (2020: 81) posits that the influence of universities has its footprint in the political, economic and social transformation of nations through production of highly specialized skilled personnel and influencing the establishment of standards of education with outstanding intellectualism and character. In nations where education is prioritized, universities are not only viewed as the greatest assets but are also seen as the most flourishing and most distinguishing national resources. They are charged with the responsibilities of devising mechanisms for training great learners, great scholars, great thinkers, great leaders and great patriots who will propel as pillars of national development in all fronts. Universities are centres where intellect is sharpened, talent is brightened, reasoning is widened and vision is broadened. They are the academic hubs and the peak of intellectualism. They redefine and redirect nations' visions, support nation-building and lead in the realization of the national dreams and aspirations. Where education is at the top of national priorities, the universities' vital roles in nation-building earned them unique position in the national development plan. In view of the above, Imeremba (2020) suggests that Nigeria needs to recognize higher education as an important factor for the continued national prosperity of the nation.

On the other hand, the university libraries are integral parts of their parent organizations. They are concurrently established with universities to support teaching, learning, research and community service with a view to realizing the missions and visions of the institutions. They are responsible for identifying, selecting, acquiring, organizing, preserving and making the library resources available to staff and students across all programmes and all levels. The libraries are charged with the responsibilities of meeting the increasing and varying information needs of all members of the academic community. They are always expected to keep their collections up-to-date, professionally organized and easily accessible to all users. Commenting on the roles of the libraries in support of education and national development, Akidi and Okezie (2020) view them as major instruments in the actualization of the goals of education, through the provision of adequate resources and effective services that enable individuals develop their full potentials, widen their horizons of perception, interests, understand social values, and improve their knowledge and skills, which are germane for national development.

In addition to meeting the information needs of staff and students, the libraries are also expected to meet the numerous demands of accreditation exercises from the regulatory agencies and various professional associations. Men and Israel (2017) reveal that libraries are actively involved in all accreditation process since they make available and accessible information resources that are necessary and critical for accreditation. In fact, in all universities, libraries are principally the determinants of standard and quality assurance. They are equally the determinants of success in all accreditation exercises. Nkiko, C., *et al* (2015) attest that the quality of teaching, learning, research, and general scholarship in any higher or tertiary education is proportionately related to the quality of its academic library. It is against this incontrovertible perspective that all accrediting agencies place high premium on library provision and services in determining the status of respective programmes and institutions. It is therefore not surprising to observe that most of the accreditation teams are more interested in visiting the library on their arrival before going to the departments for the exercise. These compelling demands have made the task of the libraries in consistently and adequately meeting the expanding and changing needs expected of them a daunting challenge.

Purposes of Accreditation

Scholars have given many reasons for conducting accreditation exercises in Nigerian universities. Some of the main reasons for accreditation exercises include:

1. **Maintenance of Standard:** The first purpose of accreditation exercise is maintenance of standard in all institutional operations ranging from admission to graduation. It is the duty of the regulatory agencies or professional associations to ensure that all the laid down requirements, procedures and processes are strictly followed in each academic programme of the university. Adetula and Familusi (2017) observe that the process of programme accreditation in Nigerian universities is to ensure a uniform Maximum Academic Standard (MAS.) Maintenance of standard includes admission requirements, teaching, coverage of syllabus, examination/evaluation, requirements for graduation, etc.
2. **Quality Assurance:** Another important purpose of accreditation is quality assurance. Quality entails the composition and in-depth of experiences, competencies and skills that students acquire during the training programme. It is through accreditation exercise that it can be ascertained that students are adequately exposed to all aspects of training that they are expected to undergo.
3. **Provision of Adequate and Appropriate Facilities:** Accreditation exercise also aimed at ensuring that adequate and appropriate teaching, learning and research facilities/equipment are provided for all programmes. The facilities include but not limited to physical infrastructure, laboratory and workshop equipment, library facilities, sources of energy and student welfare.
4. **Provision of Conducive Environment:** Provision of a conducive environment for teaching, learning and research is another purpose of accreditation. This is necessary because even if all facilities, equipment and personnel are provided, effective teaching, learning and research will not take place without a conducive environment. It is always the purpose of the accreditation exercise to ensure that enabling environment is provided for effective teaching, learning and research.
5. **Provision of Qualified and Skilled Personnel:** Accreditation exercise is also aimed at ensuring the right caliber of academic and non-academic staff are recruited for each programme. On the part of academic staff, their qualifications, progression, output in terms of teaching and research are evaluated. The staffing is also evaluated to ensure that the staff mix is neither top-heavy nor bottom-heavy. The qualifications and progression of the non-academic staff are also evaluated to ensure that the right caliber of administrative staff, technologists, technicians, etc. are recruited.
6. **Maintenance of Relevance and Global Competitiveness:** Maintenance of relevance and global competitiveness of each programme is another purpose of accreditation exercise in Nigerian universities. All the programmes run by the universities are accredited to ensure that they are relevant in addressing the national problems and contributing to national development of the country. Accreditation is also conducted to ensure the experiences, competences and skills imparted to students guarantee global competitiveness such that the graduands can globally compete for admission or employment in the labour market.
7. **Public/Consumer Protection:** Another important purpose of accreditation exercise is public/consumer protection. In other words, accreditation is conducted to ensure that the graduates have acquired the experiences, competencies and appropriate skills to effectively practice their profession either in public or private sectors. This prevents production of quack graduates from the university and guarantees employability after graduation.

8. **Promotion of Institutional Reputation:** Undoubtedly, successful accreditation rises the reputation of the universities. The universities become more recognized nationally and internationally. This promotes the marketability of the institutions as parents, guardians and candidates will make the institutions their preference in search for admission.
9. **Training of Skilled Manpower:** Ensuring that all categories of staff are trained to acquire the necessary skills and competences is another purpose of accreditation exercise. Usually, staff are sent for further training and retraining not only for advanced certification but also for meeting accreditation requirements.

Agencies that Conduct Accreditation

To ensure that the standard and quality of Nigerian university education are sustainably maintained, different regulatory agencies conduct accreditation. These agencies include but not limited to the following:

1. National Universities Commission (NUC): The National Universities Commission is the apex governmental universities regulatory agency in Nigeria. It was established as an advisory agency in the Cabinet Office in 1962 but became a statutory body in 1974. Presently, the NUC is a parastatal under the Federal Ministry of Education and is an important arm of government in the area of development and management of university education in Nigeria Oyeweso and Amusa (2020). The mandates of the Commission were to give approval for the establishment of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, monitor, supervise and evaluate/accredit the programmes from time to time to ensure that the standard and quality are maintained and to close any programme that does not meet the Minimum Academic Standard (MAS) among others. In other words, the NUC is solely responsible for regulating all programmes being run in Nigerian universities.

2. Council for the Regulation of Engineering in Nigeria (COREN): Apart from the accreditation conducted by the NUC, COREN as a professional body also conducts accreditation of Engineering programmes run in Nigerian universities from time to time to ensure that all the requirements that are needed for training of qualified engineers are adequately provided.

3. Nigerian Medical and Dental Council (NMDC): Accreditation is also conducted by the Medical and Dental Council of Nigeria to ensure that all the requirements that are needed for the training of qualified medical doctors are adequately provided.

4. Nursing and Midwifery Council of Nigeria (NMCN): Nursing and Midwifery Council of Nigeria conducts accreditation to ensure that all the requirements that are needed for the training of qualified nurses and midwives are adequately provided.

5. Council of Legal Education (CLE): Council of Legal Education conducts accreditation to ensure that all the requirements that are needed for training qualified lawyers are adequately provided.

6. Nigerian Institute of Architecture (NIA): Nigerian Institute of Architecture conducts regular accreditation to ensure that all the requirements that are needed for the training of qualified architects are adequately provided.

7. Institute of Chartered Accountants of Nigeria (ICAN): Institute of Chartered Accountants of Nigeria conducts accreditation to also ensure that all the requirements that are needed for the training of qualified accountants are adequately provided.

8. Librarians' Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN): The librarians' Registration Council of Nigeria conducts accreditation to ensure that all requirements that are

needed for the training of qualified library and information scientists are also adequately provided.

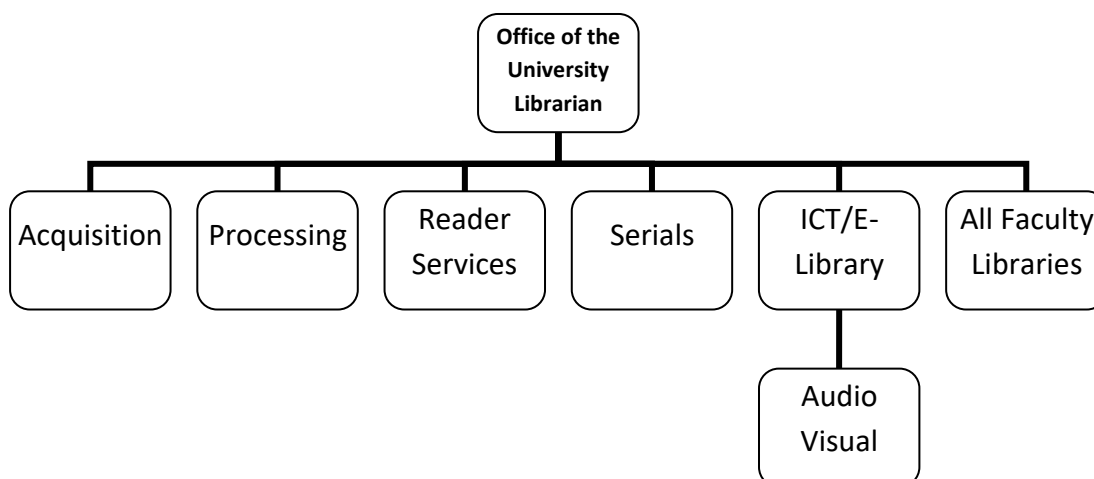
What is so unique about the accreditation exercises conducted by the professional bodies is their intense, rigorous and thorough evaluation of all the requirements that are expected to be provided for the training of highly manpower in the various professions. Essentially, the professional bodies leave no stone unturned to ensure that all the requirements expected to be met by the library are easily made available and accessible to both staff and students at the right time. Nkiko, *et al* (2015) reveal that all accreditation agencies place a high premium on library provisions as a major component of requisite bench mark in determining the status of the programme or institution being assessed. What is more challenging is that, some of the professional bodies, such as Council of Legal education and Nigerian Medical and Dental Council have made provision of a specialized library a mandatory requirement for accreditation.

Libraries' Requirements for Accreditation

1. **Name, designation and salary grade level of the highest officer in-charge of the central library:** Here, the officer in-charge of the central library is expected to provide his name, designation; whether on substantive or on acting capacity as well as his/her grade level. This information is pertinent, because, the status of the head of the library is a determinant of his competence and managerial capacity to provide the desired services that will lead to the attainment of the desired result. According to Ekoja (2020:67), the librarian is expected to effectively coordinate the professional, administrative, and academic activities of the library in terms of collection management, organization, preservation and dissemination of information resources and services as well as strategic planning, budgeting, academic guidance and mentorship for the library to succeed in its mandate.
2. **Usable floor in m2:** Here, the head of the library will indicate the size of usable area of the library including office accommodation, stock area, reading space, etc.
3. **Students population served:** Here, the overall total number of students enrolled by the university is indicated. This will enable the accreditation team to compare the carrying capacity of the library and the total number of students admitted by the university.
4. **Sitting capacity:** Here, the librarian is expected to indicate the number of readers that the library can accommodate at a time. This determines the adequacy or otherwise of the library's sitting capacity compared to the number of students admitted by the university.
5. **Library opening and closing hours:** Here the hours that the library is open for use are indicated. This will determine the adequacy or otherwise of the time students are allowed to use the library facilities for reading, learning, research and recreation.
6. **Lending policy:** Here, the requirements for loan, numbers of textbooks, journals or other facilities that the students can borrow at a time as well as the period of the loan are indicated.
7. **List of textbooks, journals and related facilities:** Here, the librarian is expected to provide a comprehensive list of textbooks, journals and other facilities that are related to teaching, learning and research facilities. The list of books is expected to indicate the authors, titles, quantities and dates of publication. The list determines the reputation of the authors, the coverage of the programme, the relevance and adequacy of the books as well as their currency. The lists of journals and other facilities also indicate their adequacy, relevance and currency. Adeola (2014:45)

observes that providing the list is necessary because accreditation teams place emphasis on the library holdings, their quantity, quality and currency. This will enable the accreditation team to have a general picture of the library facilities in relation to the programme being accredited.

8. **ICT facilities and e-resources subscriptions:** Here, the librarian is expected to indicate the ICT facilities that are available in the library. Such facilities include, computers, Internet, wired and wireless networks, printers, photocopiers, etc. The librarian is also expected to indicate the e-resources subscribed to by the library. Examples of such e-resources include but not limited to ScienceDirect, Medline, Emerald Insights, AGORA, ARDI, HINARI, OARE, Agricola, etc. This is very necessary because, provision of ICT facilities and subscriptions to e-resources is the most strategic and most effective means of making the most current, most adequate and most relevant teaching, learning and research materials to both staff and students. In fact, provision of ICT facilities and e-resources is a fundamental determinant of the success of any accreditation exercise in Nigerian universities. Similarly, provision of automated library services is also one of the emerging trends in providing efficient services to the academic community. For example, integration of KOHA and turnstile gate support in many aspects of library operation ranging from acquisition, processing, book loan, and security.
9. **Acquisition policy:** In this section, the librarian is expected to indicate how the library materials are acquired and organised to effectively discharge its administrative functions as well as cope with teaming and varying users' needs.
10. **Management and organisation of the library:** Here, the librarian is expected to indicate how the library is organised and managed for smooth operation and efficient and effective service delivery. The schedules of duty and working relationship among various divisions/units are clearly spelt out as shown below:



11. **Professional services offered by the library:** Here, all the professional services provided by the library to ensure maximum use of its resources by staff as well as returning and new students are indicated. Some of these services include but not limited to membership registration, library orientation, provision of library guide/handbook, reference services, book loan, photocopying services and e-library services.
12. **Budgetary allocation and expenditure on the library for the last three years:** Here, the budgetary allocations and expenditure on the library for the last three years are indicated. The components of the information to be provided include total

financial provision, details of annual expenditure on staff salaries and allowances, textbooks, periodicals, professional journals, audio-visual materials and other miscellaneous expenses. This will enable the accreditation team to determine the adequacy or otherwise of the annual budgetary allocations to the library as well as the judicious utilization of the funds by the authority.

In addition to the above, the librarian is usually subjected to some questions or enquiries for more details on some issues that have to do with funding, collections, staffing and other matters affecting the library.

xiii NUC scoring criteria for library resources

According to NUC scoring criteria, marks are allocated to different parameters as shown below:

S/N	Criteria	% Score
1.	Staffing	32%
2.	Academic content	23%
3.	Physical facilities	25%
4.	Library	12%
5.	Funding	5%
6.	Employers rating	3%
TOTAL		100%

Here, the scoring criteria indicates that out of 100%, staffing has 32%, academic content 23%, physical facilities 25%, library 12%, while funding and employers' rating have 5% and 3% respectively. In view of the importance of the library, the scoring criteria for the library holdings has further been allocated as follows:

Holdings: Number and Quality

Library books, journals and other facilities are:	Maximum Score
(a) Adequate in number and of good quality	8
(b) Largely adequate in number and of good quality	6
(c) Fairly adequate in number and of good quality	4
(d) Inadequate in number but of good quality	2
(e) Inadequate in number and of poor quality	0

In this criteria, the library is expected to score at least 5.6% being 70% of the 8% to pass accreditation.

Currency of Holdings

Library holdings are:	Maximum Score
1. Very current for both books and journals	4
2. Very current for books but fairly current for journals or vice versa	3
3. Fairly current for books and journals	2

In this criteria, the library is expected to score at least 2.8% being 70% of 4% to pass accreditation.

To sum up, therefore, the library is expected to score at least 8.4% out of 12% for any programmes to pass accreditation. Scoring this marks for all programmes has consistently been a very serious challenge to Nigerian university libraries.

Challenges of Accreditation

In their efforts to continuously meet the compelling demands of accreditation, the university libraries face the following challenges.

1. Inadequate attention from the authority: Although, it is well-known that the university libraries are an integral parts of the institutions, some university managements do not pay the desired attention to them. Instead of giving continuous attention to the libraries, the managements give more attention to certain things that are of less importance. In this situation, the libraries are always left in the state of trying to catch up. Joseph and Urhiewhu (2016) buttress that accreditation exercise exposes the vulnerability of many university libraries in Nigeria as this is the time universities turn attention to their libraries after long abandonment. What most proprietors of universities and managements fail to always bear in mind is that, when libraries fail accreditation, all the programmes being accredited also fails and when the programmes fail, the libraries will have to be reaccredited together with the programmes regardless of the high score obtained by the libraries during the previous exercise.

2. Inadequate funding: Inadequate funding is a general problem affecting all Nigerian universities. The libraries seem to be worst hit by this problem because of the pressing and increasing needs to always meet the numerous demands of the expanding academic community. Okogwu and Ekere (2019) posit that libraries in the developing countries are challenged by a lot of factors which range from poor funding, poor communication system, lack of Information and Communication Technology and qualified librarians. Elaborating further, Imeremba (2020) laments that Nigerian libraries are seriously feeling the economic crunch as they suffer from dwindling budgets and competition from other information service providers. Adetunla and Familusi (201) regret that the optimum performance of Nigerian academic libraries is natively affected because funds are only released when accreditation is approaching. In fact, inadequate funding is the most serious challenge that has devastating effects on all aspects of Nigerian university library services.

3. Inconsistent Resources acquisition: Poor acquisition of textbooks, journals, subscription to electronic resources and other teaching, learning and research materials is another very serious challenge faced by Nigerian university libraries. Ordinarily, apart from, adequacy, currency and relevance, the library acquisitions are expected to cut across all programmes, all levels and all courses in the programmes. Unfortunately, however, in most Nigerian university libraries, the current and relevant textbooks and professional journals are grossly inadequate and subscription to electronic resources is hardly renewed. Joseph and Urhiewhu (2016) lament that more often than not, accreditation exercise expose the dearth of information resources needed to accomplish the core mandate of establishing the university.

4. Inadequate professional staff: Another serious challenge faced by some Nigerian university libraries is inadequate professional staff. In many university libraries, the staff that provide most of the professional services are non-professionals. This problem affects the efficiency and effectiveness of the services provided to users.

5. Expanding academic programmes: Expanding academic programmes is another serious challenge faced by Nigerian university libraries. New academic programmes are continuously established without taking cognizance of the implication of this on the library. This trend seems to be unstoppable because in most cases, the success of every vice-chancellor is determined by the number of new programmes he/she is able to establish during his/her tenure in office. Apart from undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, Aloyede (2020) observes that Nigerian universities admit candidates into numerous one or two-year Post-Secondary Diploma and Certificate courses. What is most disturbing is that, these expansions are not commensurate with expansion of the libraries.

Consequently, most university libraries are always overcrowded, the facilities are overstretched and the staff are overworked.

6. Increasing student enrolments: Another challenge faced by the Nigerian university libraries is increasing student enrolments. In addition to expanding academic programmes, the success of vice-chancellors is also determined by increase in admission quota they are able to obtain for each programme. Thus, student enrolments are also increasing without taking the capacity of the library into consideration.

7. Inadequate reading space: Inadequate reading space mostly because of the expanding academic programmes and increasing student enrolments is another challenge faced by Nigerian university libraries. In most cases, the reading space is grossly inadequate for readers. In some cases, students sit on the floor to read or to write assignments. This challenge is more glaring towards the the end of semester when students are preparing for examinations.

8. Unconducive environment: Unconducive environment for learning, reading and research is another challenge faced by university libraries. Basically, the libraries are not conducive because of congestion, erratic power supply, noise and distractions.

9. Erratic source of energy: Erratic source of energy is one of the challenges faced by libraries. The instability and unreliability of the national grid are regular. Men and Israel (2017:2) observe that a number of constraints such as inadequate funding and erratic power supply affect libraries' role in accreditation. This instability consistently disrupts the services of the library and sometime affects some electronic appliances.

10. Poor bandwidth/internet connectivity: In fact, cost of bandwidth/poor internet connectivity is a serious challenge faced by Nigerian university libraries. The prohibitive cost of the bandwidth has made access to electronic information resources very difficult. Staff and students are usually frustrated due poor internet connectivity. This problem is further compounded by the attitude of the service providers who in most cases allocate shared instead of dedicated bandwidth to institutions. On several occasions, libraries are disappointed during accreditation as result of poor bandwidth/internet connectivity.

11. Time constraint: Most importantly, inadequate time to prepare for accreditation is another very serious challenge faced by most Nigerian university libraries. This is because in most cases, the notice for accreditation is given without taking into cognizance of the time required by the libraries to adequately prepare for the exercise. This happens because in most cases, the authorities are not very conversant with the extent and intensity of preparations expected of the libraries to pass accreditation. For instance, the National Universities Commission usually gives three-month notice of accreditation to institutions. In a situation where a university gets three-month notice and the institution has thirty programmes to present for the exercise, each department has complete three months to prepare for the accreditation while the library has only three days per programme to prepare. As such, whenever a notice of accreditation is received, the libraries are always under intense pressure due to time constraint. In some cases, accreditations are failed not necessarily because of inadequate resources and other facilities but because of time constraint.

Conclusion

Obviously, the roles played by universities in nation-building are vital, the services provided by libraries to enable the universities achieve their mandates are numerous and the challenges faced by the libraries are enormous. For the university libraries to effectively discharge their statutory responsibilities by supporting teaching, learning, research and community service as well as consistently meet the compelling demands of accreditation, the need for adequate funding is imperative. This is fundamental because funds are the pivot around which all

demands for effectively library services and meeting the requirements for accreditation revolve. Adequate timing is also vital because it takes time to adequately prepare for every accreditation exercise. With adequate funding and adequate timing, the challenges faced by university libraries would be addressed and successful accreditation exercise would also be assured.

Recommendations

From the foregoing, it can be observed that university libraries faced numerous challenges in their attempts to meet the changing and diverging needs of the ever-increasing academic community as well as the compelling accreditation requirements. In order to enable the libraries to discharge their responsibilities efficiently and effectively as well as continuously meet the challenges of accreditation, the following suggestions are hereby offered:

1. The proprietors of the universities and managements should give the desired attention to the libraries by funding their resources and services adequately.
2. The libraries should consistently update their collections to satisfactorily meet the increasing needs of users as well as the requirements of all accreditation agencies.
3. The libraries should recruit more professional staff for efficient and effective service delivery.
4. The libraries should flexibly and futuristically be designed to cope with expanding academic programmes and increasing student enrolments.
5. The libraries should create enabling environment for reading, learning, research and recreation.
6. The libraries should provide alternative source of energy such as generator or solar system to ensure uninterrupted energy supply.
7. The libraries should subscribe to dedicated bandwidth to ensure uninterrupted internet connectivity.
8. Considering the number of the programmes and the enormity of preparation expected of the libraries, adequate time should always be given by the accreditation agencies to enable the libraries prepare adequately.

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