The Impact of Accreditation Exercise on University Libraries in Kenya

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Abstract

This paper is the result of an exploratory study of the impact of accreditation - a process of external quality assurance on university libraries in Kenya. The paper also sought the perceptions of university librarians regarding external quality assurance. The mixed research method was used for data collection. The population of the study constituted all the universities in Kenya recognised by the Commission for Higher Education. The sample frame was drawn from the list of private universities authorised to award degrees in Kenya. Based on the findings from the questionnaire survey, four purposively selected heads of university libraries were interviewed. A total of 22 (92%) out of 24 potential university librarians completed and returned the questionnaire. The results show that university librarians were aware of the purpose of accreditation as it pertains to licensing, while conformity to standards was the greatest strength of accreditation. The university librarians suggested ways of improving the accreditation process. The findings show that there were positive and negative perceptions about the accreditation process. The findings reveal that despite the differences in the universities, majority of the librarians were positive that the accreditation process had brought about significant changes in their institutions. The paper concludes with a number of recommendations for improvement of the accreditation process.

Keywords

External quality assurance, accreditation, impact assessment, academic libraries, Kenya

Introduction

Globalisation and commercialisation have affected higher education systems and brought about the need for the establishment of national accreditation and quality assurance systems, along with the promotion of networking among them (UNESCO, 2010:5). These challenges have also created an increased need for improvement of the quality assurance processes and procedures in higher education institutions and external quality assurance agencies. There is an increased interest in quality and standards the world over reflecting the rapid growth of higher education and its cost to the public and the private purse (UNESCO, 2010:3; ENQA, 2005:9; UNESCO, 2006:6; Materu, 2007: xiii).

The new phenomenon of globalisation has brought growing concern worldwide regarding the quality of higher education inputs, processes and outcomes. Many countries have created new mechanisms for external quality assurance. This has resulted in quality criteria that reflect the overall objectives of higher education, notably the aim of cultivating in students critical and independent thought and the capacity to learn throughout life. Increasing emphasis has been placed on outcomes of higher education and evaluators are looking for new data and indicators that demonstrate that students have mastered specific objectives because of their education (Altbach, Reisberg and Rumbley, 2009: ix).

Quality requires the establishment of both quality assurance systems and patterns of evaluation as well as promoting a quality culture within institutions (UNESCO, 2010:3).

One of the major trends that emerged to address the challenges of globalisation and commercialisation of higher education was the setting up of regional quality assurance agencies around the world. These organisations are integrating national, regional and international initiatives to coordinate quality assurance activities in the world and include the World Bank, UNESCO, the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education and the African Association of Universities (Altbach, Reisberg & Rumbley, 2009:ix; Sanyal & Martin, 2007:4).

The European Bologna Process and the MERCOSUR (Common Market of South America) initiatives on accreditation have established new trends at both the national and international levels in higher education quality assurance systems (Altbach, Reisberg & Rumbley, 2009:ix; Martin & Stella, 2007:25; UNESCO, 2006:9). Regional initiatives have been created in Africa and Asia following the Bologna process. They include the Communaute Econmique et Monetaire de L'Afrique Centrale (CEMAC) M, The Asia Pacific Quality Network (AAQN) and African Quality Assurance Network (AfriQan) (Materu, 2007:12; Martin & Stella, 2007:25; UNESCO, 2006:9).

Academic librarians should also cope with the current changes in higher education, that is, they need to identify what changes are occurring externally, what changes need to occur internally and to manage the change process to reconcile the internal with the external (Cullen, 2003:1).

Literature Review

Quality assurance is a generic term used as shorthand for all forms of external quality monitoring, evaluation or reviews and defined as a process of establishing stakeholder confidence whose provision (inputs, processes and outcomes) fulfill expectations or measures up to the minimum requirements (Martin & Stella, 2007:34). Quality assurance is also defined 'to relate to a continuous process of evaluating (assessing, monitoring, guaranteeing, maintaining, and improving) the quality of a higher

education system, institutions or programmes. As a regulatory mechanism, quality assurance focuses on both accountability and improvement, providing information and judgment, not ranking through an agreed process and well-established criteria. Many systems make a distinction between internal quality assurance (i.e. intra-institutional practices in view of monitoring and improving the quality of higher education) and external quality assurance (i.e. inter- or supra institutional schemes of assuring the quality of higher education institutions and programmes). The Quale shape and the size of higher education system determine the scope of quality assurance. Quality assurance varies from accreditation, in the sense that the former is only a prerequisite for the latter. Quality assurance is often considered as a part of the quality management of higher education, while sometimes the two terms are used synonymously" (Vlasceanu, Grunberg & Parlea, 2004:48).

Various authors define the term accreditation as the outcome of a process by which a government, parastatal or private body (accreditation agency) evaluates the quality of higher education. This includes the institution as a whole, or a specific higher education programme, in order to formerly recognize it as having met certain predetermined criteria or standards and award a quality label (Martin & Stella, 2007:36; Sanyal & Martin, 2007:6; Harvey, 2004:5; CHEA, 2002:1). Accreditation ensures quality control (minimum standards) in higher education, quality enhancement and facilitation of student mobility (Sanyal & Martin, 2007:6).

There are three main methods of external quality assurance in higher education institutions. These are quality audit, quality assessment and accreditation. A quality audit examines an institution or one of its units. According to Sanyal and Martin (2007), quality audits are the first step in the quality assurance procedure. Norway, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa practise the quality audit approach of external quality assurance. Quality assessment involves evaluating the quality of higher education processes, practices, programmes and services using appropriate techniques, mechanisms and activities. France uses quality assessment to judge quality in higher education institutions.

According to CHEA (2002), accreditation is the process of external quality review used in higher education to scrutinise colleges, universities and

higher education programmes for quality assurance and quality improvement. Success results in an accredited institution or a programme. Accreditation is the most widely used method of external quality assurance. Accreditation is the common system in India, USA, Nigeria, Colombia, Germany, Japan, Philippines, Hungary, Chile, Portugal, North and South America and Kenya. This study was limited to accreditation as a method of external quality assurance.

In South Africa, accreditation refers only to institutions and their authority to offer specific programmes. In the United States of America, accreditation involves a collegial process of self-study and external peer review for quality assurance, accountability and quality improvement of an institution or program designed to determine whether it has met or exceeded the published standards of its accrediting association and it's achieving its mission and stated purpose. In Western Europe, it involves an evaluation and assessment of an institution or its programmes in relation to its aims and objectives, its recognised standards and its own goals. In Kenya, it means compliance with standards and award of status.

Over the last ten years, the demand for higher education has increased in Kenya just like in other developing countries due to the social demand for higher education. This led to the expansion of public higher education institutions from three in 1997 to seven in 2007, with 15 constituent colleges and 13 private universities. To control private higher education institutions, the Commission for Higher Education (CHE) was established in 1985 through an Act of parliament (Kenya Republic of, 1985:144).

However, Materu (2007) argues that the main reasons for setting up quality assurance agencies in Africa have been regulation of the development sector rather than to enhance accountability and improve quality. The author further states that "a stronger link between the results of quality assurance processes and funding allocations, as well as learning outcomes (quality of graduates) in order to promote accountability is needed."

The external quality assurance method used in Kenya is accreditation. In Kenya, accreditation is compulsory for private universities, but not for public universities. In fulfilling its mandate through institutional and programme accreditation, which is compulsory for all private universities, CHE conducts external quality evaluation (accreditation and re-inspection/audit). CHE uses standards and peer evaluators for quality assurance. External evaluation of academic libraries falls within this mandate.

Purposes of Accreditation

According to Martin and Stella (2007), the purposes of accreditation in higher education institutions are quality control, accountability/public assurance and improvement in teaching/learning. Bogue and Hall (2003) pointed out that accreditation performs two functions: quality assurance and institutional improvement. According to Dalrymple (2001), people perceive the quality assurance or accountability functions as wielding more influence, while at the same time functioning as a directive or a lowest common denominator. The continuous quality improvement function is seen as a positive, but without authority. Therefore, it tends to be viewed as discretionary and not required.

When accreditation functions as a quality assurance mechanism, it serves many constituencies, attesting that an institution or program has met established standards. When accreditation focuses on institutional improvement, it uses peer review to stimulate and assist educational programs to move toward achieving self-determined goals (Eaton, 2009; Bogue & Hall, 2003:23; Mathews, 2007:20; NEASC, 2006:20). According to Harvey (2004:8), accreditation is a form of control of the higher education sector. However, Hartley and Virkus (2003:32) noted that in many European universities, accreditation is seen as an opportunity to strengthen their image by demonstrating quality and to improve their market position internationally.

In the USA, accreditation has also been a force in reassuring the public of the quality of education offered within the country. A stated aim of higher education accreditation is to provide both quality and public assurance through the processes of comprehensive self-study and peer evaluation, which are guided by standards conceived by professionals in the field (NEASC, 2006:124).

Accreditation of an institution or program tells the public in general, and the institutional constituencies in particular, that it has the appropriate mission and purposes, the resources necessary to achieve those purposes, and a history and record

implying that it will continue to achieve its purposes (Bogue & Hall, 2003:23; INQAAHE, 2007:7; UNESCO, 2006:19). The accreditation process appears to generate cohesion, long-term direction and stability. The process also has profound impact on decision-making and strategic planning and is often described as a "blue-print" or a "frame-work" for future planning (NEASC, 2006:24).

Accreditation Methods and Mechanisms and its Role in University Libraries

Accreditation involves a set of procedures designed to gather evidence to enable a decision to be made as to whether the institution or programme should be granted accreditation status. The component methods include self-assessment, document analysis, scrutiny of performance indicators, peer visits, inspection, specially constituted panels, delegated responsibility to internal panels, often via proxy, entrustment to external examiners or advisors, stakeholder surveys such as student satisfaction surveys, alumni and employer surveys, direct intervention such as direct observation of classroom teaching or grading of student work (Harvey, 2004:9).

Quality assurance agencies (QAA) have developed instruments that may consist of open-ended questions to focus on qualitative analysis, or request the collection of a set of statistics. Peer review is a phase where qualitative judgment is the prevailing mode. Many quality agencies use both quantitative and qualitative data during the quality assurance process. However, human judgment is always applied to these methods of data collection (Martin & Stella, 2007:60).

An accreditation agency normally uses a three-step process; the first step involves provision by the institution of the relevant information related to pre-determined well publicised criteria. Self-assessment is the most central element in most external quality assurance systems. A set of standards and criteria determined by the QAA forms the basis of self-assessment. The second step is a site visit by an external review team to validate the self-assessment or the institutional report that results in the report. The third step is the report based on the outcome of the site visit (Martin & Stella, 2007:63). Brophy (2008) states that the use of independent assessment through external examination and peer review

provides balance, as well as credibility to third parties, such as senior management. In the literature, different terms such as self-study, self-evaluation, internal quality assurance, internal review are used. This study will use the term self-assessment.

Accreditation influences university libraries generally because of the provision and use of library materials and services to support the teaching, learning and research environments of the higher education institutions. According to Dalrymple (2001), accreditation offers an opportunity for librarians to contribute to institutional self-assessment and continuous improvement. Hiller, Kyrillidou and Self (2008), Mathews (2007) and Dalyrmple (2001) have noted that the primary external motivators for engaging in assessment is accountability and accreditation, while the internal ones were for measuring achievement and improving library resources and services. Assessment has also grown in importance as libraries have become more customer-oriented.

Dano and Stensaker (2007) argued that critical issues are related to how accreditation is actually implemented as a method, what kinds of procedures are developed, and how these relate to institutional attempts to develop their own quality processes in academic libraries. According to Lindauer (1998), this includes how the meetings are set up, the types of questions asked, how they are asked, and the time reserved for discussion and feedbacks and how data and supporting documentation is organised. Dalrymple (2001) noted that:

> The task of implementing an assessment of the academic library does not include articulating a mission and determining goals, but also having a commitment to what is often called a culture of evidence. Having a working knowledge of such basic evaluation techniques as user surveys, focus groups, interviews, sampling, citation patterns and bibliometrics is necessary for a library to operate in such a culture.

Mathews (2007) stated that among the topics that must be addressed typically by a library's self-assessment are:

- Access, availability, and use of library collections;

- Collections and learning resources;

- Information literacy; information technology;

- Collaboration with faculty and other academic staff; and

- Library staff and outcome assessment.

The advent of new measurement initiatives, especially by The Association of Research Libraries (ARL), helped refocus libraries on customer outcomes and to collect data that could assist libraries in improving services and adding value to the work of their communities (Hiller, Kyrillidou & Self, 2008:226).

The implication for academic libraries is that the organisations awarding accreditation are less concerned about measuring traditional library inputs and are moving to asking for measurements that focus on the impact of the library on the lives of students, faculties, researchers and others. This shift towards determining outcomes is evidenced by the use of such phrases as "evaluation of student performance" and "evidence of student learning", found in some of the regional accreditation standards in the United States (Matthews, 2007:20).

Therefore, this paper does not attempt to assess the impact of the quality of the university library systems but to analyse how university librarians perceive the effects of accreditation on their institutions and their attitude towards external quality assurance as practised by the Commission for Higher Education.

Methodology

The study was based on the philosophy of pragmatism, and the mixed method research approach was used for data collection and analysis. During reviews of the literature on mixed method designs, parallels have been noted between the typologies discussed by Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004), Cameron (2009), and Creswell and Clark (2007). Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) developed two mixed method research typologies, that is mixed model designs and mixed method designs. The mixed model designs are constructed by mixing qualitative and quantitative approaches within and across the stages of research. Mixed method design is based on crossing of paradigm emphasis and time ordering of the quantitative and qualitative phases.

The population of the first phase of the study constituted all the 24 recognised private universities in Kenya. The sampling units included the heads of all the eleven private chartered universities, nine private universities with letters of interim authority and four registered private universities. A questionnaire designed for this study was sent to all the universities. That included every member of the population (Kothari, 2004:14; O'Leary, 2004:103; and Sapsford, 2007:7). The selected sample for the first phase of the study reflected the characteristics of the entire population and it was therefore possible to draw concrete inferences. The sample frame was drawn from the list of universities authorised to award degrees in Kenya, accessible at http://www.che.or.ke/status.html. Based on the findings from the questionnaire survey, selected heads of university libraries were interviewed.

During the second phase of the data collection, a subset of four respondents who participated in the initial phase was purposively selected for interview. They included university librarians from two private chartered universities and two private universities with letters of interim authority (LIA). Sample size for the interview survey was much smaller than that of the questionnaire survey. This study adopted a sequential mixed model design because more than one methodology was used and data was collected in two phases. The sequential mixed model design applied in this study was based on the typology of the mixed model design discussed by Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004).

In this study, multiple research methods were combined to help interpret the perceptions of university librarians towards accreditation. Triangulation was used to secure in-depth-understanding of the impact of accreditation a process of external quality assurance on university libraries in Kenya. The data collected using the questionnaire, which consisted of both closed and open-ended questions, were analysed to provide information regarding the reliability and validity of the questionnaires and as a starting point for follow up questions for the interviews.

The data analysis type for this study adopted

the multi-analysis approach. The set of data collected during the first phase was analysed prior to analysing the other data set, that is, the analysis was done sequentially (Creswell & Tashakkori, 2007:306; Johnson, Onwegbuzie & Turner, 2007:115; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2007:11). The mixed model design adopted for this study allowed for the research questions for the second phase to emerge from inferences of the first phase. The first phase of the study was exploratory while the second phase was confirmatory (Cameron, 2009:146). During the first phase of study the data collected was first reduced using descriptive and inferential statistics. Open-ended and closed-ended questions were included to gather facts on the accreditation process in Kenyan university libraries. Likert scale a format in which university librarians were asked to strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree or strongly approve, approve, was used in designing the questionnaire questions to measure university librarians attitudes towards the process of accreditation. The data from the questionnaire was analysed and the key results that needed explanation identified for a follow-up interview.

The results from phases one and two of the study were triangulated to form the basis for the conclusions and recommendations of this study. This involved qualitative data being correlated with quantitative data. It was followed by data consolidation, where both quantitative and qualitative data were combined. The next step involved data comparison, that is, findings from quantitative and qualitative sources. Data integration followed wherein both qualitative and quantitative findings were integrated into a coherent whole as recommended by Onwuebuzie et al (2007:12). The data from the two phases was analysed using descriptive and correlation coefficient statistical data analysis.

Results

A total of 22 (92%) out of 24 potential university librarians completed and returned the questionnaire. The overall response rate of 92% was high and ensured that the survey results were representative to the survey population. The total response rate included all the 11 (100%) private chartered universities, seven (78%) of the nine universities with letters of interim authority (LIA) and all the four (100%) registered private universities.

Table 1: Purpose of accreditation as cited by private universities

Private Universities	Role of Accreditation			
	Quality Assurance	Public Accountability	Award of Status	Funding
Private Chartered	10	3	8	2
Private with LIA	7	1	6	1
Private Registered	2	1	4	3
Total	19	5	18	6

Purpose of Accreditation

The most frequently cited purpose of accreditation in university libraries was "quality assurance", reported by 19 (86%) out of the 22 respondents, as shown in table 1. The respondents were from 10 out of the 11 private chartered universities, all the 7 private universities with LIA and 2 of the 4 private registered universities, as shown in table 1.

Award of status was the second most cited purpose of accreditation, reported by 18 (82%) of the 22 respondents.

Strengths of Accreditation

In response to an open-ended question, "Can you describe the strengths of accreditation?" 21 (95%) of the 22 respondents cited conformity with standards as the greatest strength of accreditation, as shown in table 2. They were from 10 private chartered universities, seven private universities with LIA and all the registered private universities, as shown in table 2. One of the respondents noted that accreditation "sets standards that a library should attain in providing resources and services that support learning and instruction that it provides". Another one noted "Accreditation sets benchmarks in terms of collection and infrastructure building."

Table 2: Strength of Accreditation in University Libraries in Kenya

Private Universities	Strength of accreditation in university libraries in Kenya					
	Conformity with standards	Quality assurance	Increased funding	Improvement of library services	Public accountability	Enhanced reputation of library staff
Private Chartered	10	7	2	2	3	2
Private with LIA	7	4	2	-	1	-
Private Registered	4	2	2	2	1	1
Total	21	13	6	4	5	3

Quality assurance was the second most cited strength of accreditation, mentioned by 13 (59%) of the 22 respondents, as shown in table 2. One of the respondents reported that "Accreditation ensures that the institution has adequate resources and staff in the library, which leads to quality education." Increased funding was cited by six (26%) of the 22 respondents as strength of accreditation, some reported that "accreditation helped institutions appreciate libraries and also invest in them.". Only 5 (24%) of the 22 respondents indicated that public accountability was also strength of accreditation. One respondent reported that accreditation increased "credibility, recognition and donor confidence".

Enhanced reputation of library staff was reported by only five (24%) of the 22 respondents as being one of the strengths of accreditation. The respondents were from two private chartered universities and one registered university, as shown in table 2.

Improvement of the Accreditation Process

An open-ended question "What needs to be improved about the accreditation process?" was answered by 19(86%) out of the 22 university librarians. Nine (47%) out of the 19 university librarians noted that more time should be spent in the library during visits by CHE in order to improve accreditation process, as shown in table 3.

One university librarian reported, "More time should be spent in the library to enable more refinement and thorough inspection because aspects such as their strategic plans and action plans conformity with these documents, annual reports need to be looked at."

One of the respondents reported that accreditation "certifies the library's competency in its role of ensuring adequacy, relevance and quality of information resources and facilities to facilitate quality learning and teaching in various academic programs".

Table 3: Improvement of the Accreditation Process

Private Universities	Improvement of accreditation process				
	More time should be spent in the library during the visits	Regular follow-ups	Consider changing information environment	Avoid conflict of interest by peer evaluators	Appreciate efforts of institutions
Private Chartered	6	4	-	-	-
Private with LIA	2	-	1	1	-
Private Registered	1	-	2	1	1
Total	9	4	3	4	1

Table 3 also shows that four of the 22 respondents reported that regular follow-ups should be conducted by CHE to ensure that recommendations made during previous visits were implemented. Three respondents reported that CHE should consider the changing environment of information communication technologies when evaluating libraries.

Two respondents reported that peer evaluators should be selected properly to avoid conflict of interest. One respondent from a private university with LIA said that the "little efforts that libraries make should be appreciated by the CHE".

Perception of University Librarians on Accreditation

The findings show that majority of the respondents agreed with the perception of university librarians on accreditation except that institutions were adequately trained on how to prepare for accreditation. The perception that accreditation process is short term was moderately accepted, as only 50% accepted the perception as revealed in table 4.

Table 4: Perception of university librarians on accreditation

No	Statements	Agreed
1	The University library staff participated in preparing for the visit/inspection	95%
2	The accreditation process has led to the physical development of the university library.	90%
3	Recommendations of the visiting/inspection team are usually valid.	90%
4	The benefits of accreditation process are long-term.	87%
5	Participation of experienced university librarians during the site-visit stimulates and assists the university library towards achieving self-determined goals	86%
6	Preparation for the accreditation visit/inspection was time consuming.	86%
7	The Commission provided guidance and support following the accreditation visit/inspection	81%
8	The accreditation has enhanced the quality of library and information services at my institution	78%
9	Participation in the accreditation process has led to improvements in the work environment for the staff.	72%
10	Participation in accreditation process has led to professional staff development training.	68%
11	The institutions are adequately trained on how to prepare for the accreditation visit.	22.5%
12	The benefits of accreditation process are short-term	50%

Discussions

The findings showed that the majority of university librarians (86%) were aware that the key purpose of accreditation was quality assurance as indicated in table 4. Award of status was also considered a major purpose of accreditation by 82% of the university librarians. The other purposes they cited were public accountability (24%) and funding (14%). The findings are in agreement with the one of the purposes of accreditation that is quality control, as suggested by several authors in the reviewed literature including Eaton (2009:2), Martin and Stella (2007:41), Materu (2007:iv), NEASC (2006:124), and Bogue and Hal (2003:23). However the university librarians were not aware of the primary purposes of accreditation that is public accountability and improvement as stated by Martin and Stella (2007:41), Materu (2007: iv).

The findings also showed that the majority of the university librarians (95%) considered conformity with standards the greatest strength of accreditation. Most of the university librarians (59%) cited quality assurance as the second strength of accreditation. The findings are contrary to a study conducted in the USA by NEASC in (2006), which revealed that the greatest value of accreditation was peer-review

and self-study processes (NEASC, 2006:124). This is not surprising because, unlike in Kenya where accreditation is compulsory for private universities, in the USA it is voluntary and based on self-regulation.

The findings further revealed that the university librarians were aware of accreditation as it pertained to award of status in Kenya that is for licensing. Based on the findings, it is important that CHE considers other methods of external quality assurance, such as quality audit and quality assessment.

Overall, the university librarians had high opinions of the impact of accreditation on the quality of libraries. This was reflected in the high ratings in their attitudes towards accreditation, as shown in table 4. Out of the 12 statements on accreditation, the librarians agreed with 10. This agreement with the 10 statements showed that the accreditation process had a positive long term impact on university libraries in Kenya such as:

- Promoting the physical development of university libraries;

- Assisting the university libraries to achieve self-determined goals;

- Enhancing the quality of library and information services in the universities;

- Improving the work environment for library staff; and

- Helping in the professional development of staff.

The benefits of accreditation process were found to be of short term benefit by involving peer reviewers during site visits, thus providing advice to universities and as NEASC (2006) stated, "the accreditation process appears to generate cohesion, long-term direction and stability. The process also has profound impact on decision-making and strategic planning and is often described as a "blue-print" or a "frame-work" for future planning".

The findings also showed that there were positive and negative perceptions about the accreditation process. The majority of the librarians agreed that recommendations made during the accreditation site/visit were valid, the benefits of accreditation were long-term, and that CHE provided guidance and support following the accreditation visit/inspection. These findings also revealed that, despite the differences in the universities, majority of the librarians were positive that accreditation process had brought about significant changes in their institutions.

Contrary to the positive perceptions on the post-accreditation visit/inspection, the findings also showed that the weakest aspect of in the accreditation process was how CHE prepared the institutions for the accreditation visit/inspection. The majority of the university librarians (86%) agreed that preparation for the accreditation site visit/inspection was time-consuming. Most of them (64%) also agreed that the institutions were not adequately trained prior to the accreditation site visit/inspection. The findings also suggested that the university librarians did not understand their role prior to the site visit/inspection.

Conclusion

The university librarians were not aware of other purposes of external quality assurance such as accountability and quality improvement. They were only aware of accreditation as it pertained to the award of status in Kenya, that is, for licensing.

Accreditation had made tremendous impact on university libraries, ensuring that the institutions had met the minimum standards such as physical development of libraries, improvement of the work environment for library staff, professional development of library staff and provision of adequate information resources. Accreditation had also made significant impact by involving peer evaluators during the site visit/inspection of university libraries. The university librarians did not practise self-evaluation (internal quality assurance). There was no evidence in the information provided by the university librarians in the self-evaluation reports. The CHE did not adequately prepare the institutions prior to the site/visit inspection nor did it conduct regular follow-ups of institutions after the site visit/inspection.

The challenge to the university librarian in Kenya was ensuring that the quality criteria reflected the overall objectives of higher education, notably the aim of cultivating in students critical and independent thought and the capacity to learn throughout life.

Accreditation offered an opportunity for

librarians to contribute to institutional self-assessment; current trends in accreditation also challenge librarians to examine the criteria by which they measure success. Accreditation had affected university librarians because the provision and use of library materials and services influence the quality of the students' educational experience (Dalrymple, 2001:23).

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of accreditation on university libraries. Although the population of this study was limited to private university libraries, the findings from the study were significant. The study was also significant because, for the first time research was undertaken on the impact of accreditation, a process, of external quality assurance, on university libraries in Kenya. However, it was evident from the findings that accreditation was mainly focused on compliance with minimum standards, as opposed to accountability or guidance and improvement of university libraries. The university librarians were only aware of accreditation as it pertained to award of status.

It was evident that accreditation, a process of external quality assurance, had made significant impact in university libraries, in Kenya. The impact on university libraries was due to the eligibility requirements for the award of status. However, it was clear from the findings that the university librarians did not conduct self-assessment prior to the accreditation visit. The reason for lack of self-assessment was that the standards of CHE focused on inputs, with little attention to process, output and outcomes.

Recommendations

CHE should create new mechanisms for external quality assurance. It should also promote accountability and quality improvement during the accreditation process of institutions instead of only regulating the higher education sector based on conformity with minimum standards (Materu, 2007:iv). This might result in quality criteria that reflect the overall objectives of higher education, notably the aim of cultivating in students critical and independent thought and the capacity to learn throughout life.

CHE should consider improving the way it prepares institutions prior to the accreditation site visit/inspection. The Commission should prepare a site visit/inspection manual, indicating how the institutions should prepare before the accreditation visit. CHE should also advocate the use of self-evaluation in university libraries in Kenya. The libraries should consider developing internal quality assurance systems. As stated by Materu (2007), regular self-assessment at the institutional and unit levels is the backbone of a viable quality assurance system.

The study, through its findings, identified areas that required further research in the evaluation of university libraries. This study explored the impact of external quality assurance on university libraries and not the institutions internal systems. Further research on the how university libraries undertake internal quality assurance is required. This would show how university libraries are fulfilling the purposes and standards that apply to higher education as defined in the institutions internal policies.

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