

Digitalization and the National Universities Commission in Nigeria

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Abstract: This paper is a review study. It systematically explores the benefits of digitalization of the operations of the National Universities Commission (NUC) which is the apex regulatory agency of university education in Nigeria. The study employed secondary data collected from print resources and online publication. Content analysis was used for the selected literatures. The paper concluded that effective operations, data dissemination, accreditation, effective decision making, cost minimization, elimination of resources wastage and support data security are the benefits of digitalization of the operations of the National Universities Commission. Arising from the conclusion, the paper recommends that the Federal Government of Nigeria should prioritize the digitalization of the operations of the National Universities Commission by increasing the budgetary allocation to the Commission and ensuring effective monitoring and evaluation of the digitalized system of the Commission. The Federal Government should also ensure that all facilities needed by the Commission for the full digitalization of its operations are provided. Private institutions and international organizations should support the Commission in the area of provision of capital and capacity building for the staff in the commission.

Keywords: Digitalization, National Universities Commission, Universities.

1.0 Introduction

The National Universities Commission is a parastatal under the Federal Ministry of Education. It was established in 1962 as an advisory unit in the Cabinet Office with the responsibility of advising the Federal Government of Nigeria on the development of University Education. However, in 1974, it became a statutory body following the promulgation of Decree No. 1 of 1974, (now Act No. 1 of 1974) and the first Executive Secretary, in the person of Professor Jubril Aminu was then appointed. In contemporary times, the powers of the NUC are derived from the National Universities Commission Act, CAP. N81, Laws of the Federation of Nigeria, 2004, and, Education (National Minimum Standards and Establishment of Institutions) Act, Laws of the Federation of Nigeria, 2004 (As Amended). These Laws are in simple parlance referred to as NUC's Establishing and Operational Acts, respectively. According to Bisong, J. N (2025) , the functions of NUC include to: advise the President, States Governors and Private Proprietors through the Minister of Education on the creation of new universities and other

degree awarding institutions in Nigeria; prepare, after consultation with all the State Governors, the universities, the National Manpower Board and such other bodies as it considers appropriate, periodic master plans for the balanced and coordinated development of all universities in Nigeria, and such plans shall include: the general programmes to be offered by the universities in order to ensure that they are fully adequate to meet the national needs and objectives; undertake periodic reviews of the terms and conditions of service of personnel engaged in the universities and to make recommendation thereon to the Federal Government where appropriate; lay down Minimum Standards for all universities in the Federation and to accredit their degrees and other academic awards after obtaining prior approval therefor, through the Minister from the President; be the regulatory agency responsible for the work related to the proper conduct of the affairs of universities, provided that the accreditation of degrees and other academic awards shall be in accordance with such guidelines as may be laid down and approved by the Commission from time to time. Derivable from its functions, the mandates of NUC according to Olaleye, & Oyewole, (2016), and Ogunode, & Samuel (2022) are as follows: determination and maintenance of Minimum Academic Standards (MAS) in the NUS; approval of programmes and courses in Nigerian Universities and other degree-awarding institutions; accreditation of academic programmes run in the NUS; monitoring of universities; and the provision of guidelines and processing of applications for the establishment of private universities in Nigeria.

Interestingly, from a humble background of 5 universities at its inception in 1962, NUC presently superintends over 298 Nigerian Universities (72 Federal Universities, 67 State Universities, and 159 Private Universities), 4 Inter-university Centers, 104 Affiliate Institutions and the emerging 19 Dual Mode Federal Colleges of Education (Bisong, J. N, 2025). The Commission has thirteen Directorates namely; i. Directorate of Academic Planning (DAP); ii. Directorate of Inspection and Monitoring (DIM); iii. Directorate of Human Resource (DHR); iv. Directorate of Student (DoS); v. Directorate of Research, Innovations and Information Technology (DRIIT); vi. Directorate of Executive Secretary's Office (DESO); vii. Directorate of Accreditation (DA); viii. Directorate for the Establishment of Private Universities (DEPU); ix. Directorate of Skills Development and Entrepreneurship (DSDE); x. Directorate of Open, Distance and e-Learning (DODEL); xi. Directorate of Finance and Accounts (DFA); xii. Directorate of Special Projects (DSP); and Directorate of Public Administration (DPA).

The National Universities Commission, as the apex body for overseeing university education in Nigeria, plays a crucial role in the orderly development of the Nigerian University System (NUS) for the production of quality graduates and research output relevant to national development in the face of global competitiveness. In doing so, the determination and regulation of benchmark standards and quality is pivotal to its mandate. With the increasing trend towards digitization in various industries, it is important to assess the potential impact of digitalization on the Commission vis-à-vis its associated Universities. This paper explores the role of digitization in the Nigerian education system, specifically on the National Universities Commission. Thus, the aim of this research is to explore the import of digitalizing the National Universities Commission in Nigeria.

Its functions include: granting approval for all academic programmes in Nigerian universities; granting approval for the establishment of all higher educational institutions offering degree programmes; and ensuring quality assurance, through regular accreditation, of all academic programmes in universities.

Theoretical Framework

This paper is anchored on role theory that was developed by Ralph Linton in sociology and George Herbert Mead in social psychology. A social role refers to the behaviours and responsibilities expected of individuals in society. In terms of gender, social roles prescribe certain behaviours to men and to women. These roles are known as gender roles. Women's gender roles, or social roles for women, include mother, caretaker, and helper. Men's gender roles or social roles for men include breadwinner, protector, and leader. Role theory is the theory

that individuals' behavior is actually the performance of roles that are organized into categories defined by society. Individuals aim to meet these roles, which encompass certain expectations, responsibilities, and behaviours. People perform gender roles on a daily basis, meaning that their behaviours are shaped by societal expectations from them depending on their gender (S.M 2022).

The role theory is derived from the concept of role as first used by psychologists and anthropologists in distinguishing individual or group role perceptions and actual performance in any social gathering. Originally, the role theory is a perspective in social psychology that considers most of everyday activity to be living up to the roles, or expectations, of others. It posits to the following propositions about social behaviour:

1. People spend much of their lives in groups.
2. Within these groups, people often take distinct positions.
3. Each of these positions can be called a role, with a whole set of functions that are molded by the expectations of others.
4. Formalized expectations become norms when enough people feel comfortable in providing punishments and rewards for the expected behaviour.
5. Individuals are generally conformists, and in so far as that is true, they conform to group roles.
6. The anticipation of rewards and punishments inspire this conformity.

Different categories of social roles have also been identified (Blatner, 2006; Rowen, 1990; Jackson, 1972; Bertrand, 1977). These are;

- cultural roles- that is roles given by culture, e.g. a chief priest
- social differentiation- that is roles given by profession, e.g. teacher, taxi driver
- situation-specific roles- that is roles given by witnessing a development, e.g. eye witness
- bio-sociological roles- roles given by physiological composition e.g. a blonde woman, a pregnant mother
- gender roles- roles given by sex, e.g. a male chauvinist, a feminist.

The implication of this theory on this paper is that, the government has a specific role to play in ensuring the provision of adequate funding of the National Universities Commission towards the transformation of the Commission into a digital driven agency to enhance effectiveness in the areas of supervision, programme establishment, accreditation and data collection for timely planning, policy formulation and decision making, for the collective good of Nigerian universities in line with the 21st Century realities.

2.0 Review of Literature

2.1 Concept of Digitization

Digitization is the process of converting the content of physical media (e.g., periodical articles, books, manuscripts, cards, photographs, vinyl disks, among others) to digital formats (Ananolous). Digitization refers to the process of translating a piece of information such as a book, journal articles, sound recordings, pictures, audio tapes or videos recordings. into bits. Bits are the fundamental units of information in a computer system. Converting information into these binary digits is called digitization, which can be achieved through a variety of existing technologies. A digital image, in turn, is composed of a set of pixels (picture elements), arranged according to a pre-defined ratio of columns and rows. An image file can be managed as a regular computer file and can be retrieved, printed and modified using appropriate software. Further, textual images can be OCRed so as to make its contents searchable. (Machekhina 2017) defined

digitalization as the translation of all information kinds, such as text, audio, pictures, video, and other data from multiple sources into digital language.

Furthermore, digitalization implies the transformation of all information types (texts, sounds, visuals, video and other data from various sources) into the digital language. While discussing the phenomenon of digitalization, it should be noted that various analysts and forecast experts (mostly British, including Tim Berners-Lee (who is one of the inventors of the World Wide Web), consider the transition of education process into the digital stage as the turning point in the history of education (Mark, 2020). Digitalization enables educational institutions to adapt to rapidly changing school environment, meet parent and students' expectations, and optimize school resources processes for greater efficiency and productivity. Using digitized information, digitalization makes workflows and processes easier and more efficient (Walkme 2022). Digitalization is also the act of transforming information data into digital format for easy transmission that support effectiveness and efficiency in service delivery in an organization, and according to Ogunode, Ayoko, & Orifah 2023). digitalization involves the process of converting analog information into digital formats through the use of digital tools to enhance services delivery in organizations.

Implicitly, digitization means: no new buildings are required; improvement in information sharing and redundancy of collections reduced; the development of Internet in digitalized based institutions. Digitalization also connotes that digital materials can be transmitted, sorted and retrieved easily and quickly. It is cheaper to access electronic information than its print counterpart when storing files in an electronic device with compatible facilities and equipment. Digital texts can be linked, made interactive; and improves the retrieval of more information (Ding, 2000). Digitalization is the process of leveraging digital technologies to transform a school business model, thereby creating new teaching and learning models and value-producing learning opportunities for students. These involve integrating digital tools and systems into various aspects of a school business's operations, from management and communication to production and customer service. . Several national and international policy frameworks support this digital shift. For example, the Nigerian National Policy on Education, the Digital Protocol Network, the National Digital Policy launched by the World Economic Forum, and the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development all promote technology integration in education. Additionally, the National Policy on Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in School Education emphasizes digital learning as a key pathway for equipping students with labor market- relevant skills (Adegboyega, Asemota & Edinoh, 2025).

2.2 Concept of Digitization of the National Universities Commission (NUC)

The digitization of the National Universities Commission is a process that involves converting physical documents and records into digital formats. This allows for easier storage, retrieval, and sharing of information within the Commission. Digitizing the NUC also allows for the implementation of digital processes and systems, improving efficiency and accuracy in operations. Furthermore, it enables the commission to keep up with the fast-paced digital world and adapt to new technologies and advancements. Overall, digitizing the NUC is crucial for streamlining operations and modernizing the Commission's practices among its numerous Directorates and between the Commission and its associated higher education institutions.

3.0 Method

This paper discussed benefits of digitalization of the National Universities Commission in Nigeria. The study utilized quantitative approach, with focus on quantitative data collection methods. Quantitative data were collected from the National Universities Commission and some Nigerian Universities websites, journals, books and reports. Other quantitative data were gathered through surveys and document analysis. International journals such as CEON, Elsevier, Hindawi, JSTOR, IEEE, Learn Techlib SAGE, Nebraska and Springer were also consulted. Content analysis was used in the study.

4.0 Result and Discussion on the Benefits of Digitalisation of the National Universities Commission

Effective operations

Automating processes and tasks in education can bring numerous benefits to institutions such as the National Universities Commission. Digitalizing the NUC can improve efficiency in managing and accessing academic records, synchronizing data between faculties, departments and other stakeholders, and streamlining administrative tasks (Bello, 2025).

Data dissemination and management

By going digital, the NUC can also improve communication between universities and other educational institutions, as well as between students and faculty members. It can also enable universities to analyze data and make data-driven decisions to enhance their academic programmes and overall performance. Ogunode, and Ineye-Briggs, (2025) observed that through the use of digital tools and platforms, regulating institutions are able to gather and analyze data more efficiently, making the accreditation process more accurate and timelier. This trend has been seen as a positive step towards modernizing higher education system in Nigeria. With the implementation of digitalization in accreditation, institutions are able to easily carry out accreditation by tracking, supervision, inspecting, verifying and monitor academic program resources and data sent in by institutions. This process will aid fast data-driven decisions making that will enhance the quality of accreditation in the various tertiary institution. Also, digitalization of accreditation allows for more transparency and accountability in the accreditation process, leading to a more credible and reliable system. There would be improvement in the system through the digitalization process (Goericke, 2020). Digitalization of educational institutions aids quality in the data collection processes and assists to improve the quality of decision (Perrin, & Wang, 2021; Psomas, & Antony, 2017).

Effective accreditation

Digitalization of accreditation in NUC and in tertiary institutions in Nigeria will improve and increase efficiency in resource allocation, utilization and optimization. Digitalizing and automating accreditation process will support smooth data collection, analysis and storage for decision making. Streamlining processes of data collection and distribution in accreditation process will lead to reduced costs, increase productivity and improve the speed and accuracy of the processes (Ogunode, et al 2025). Also, Venkatapur *et al.*, (2023) noted that time efficiency allows institutions to allocate resources more effectively and administrative staff can focus on analysis and evaluation in lengthy administrative processes. Improving the productivity of the accreditation and other quality assurance teams contribute to the quality of the evaluations carried out. Digitalization has become increasingly important in the management of tertiary institutions and especially in the accreditation process. By digitizing the accreditation process, academic institutions are able to streamline their processes and improve efficiency. This will not only benefit the institutions themselves, but also the students of such institutions who rely on their credentials for future opportunities. With digitalization, the accreditation process and other quality assurance process such as NUC's resource verification visits for programme establishment becomes more transparent and accessible.

Effective decision making

Furthermore, digitization can facilitate remote learning and increase accessibility to resources and materials for students and stakeholders. The overall, digitalization of the National Universities Commission can lead to a more modern, productive, and connected education system, improves accountability and transparency (Ramírez, & Tejada, 2018). With a clear understanding of the situation, decision-makers can make informed decisions based on their views of the current contexts. These decisions consider objectives and potential courses of action, emphasizing both speed and impact.

Cost minimization

Academic programme accreditation is very expensive. It requires a lot of resources. The financial requirement for the conduct of programme accreditation in Nigerian Universities and indeed in other tertiary institutions is both shared by the regulating institutions and the academic institutions themselves. With digitization of accreditation in the tertiary institutions in Nigeria, less funds will be needed to carry out the functions by the respective institutions. Digitization of accreditation permits less movement of officials from Abuja to the institutions; digitization of accreditation reduces high number of staff needed for accreditation responsibilities and processes and reduces time wastage during accreditation. (Ogunode, et al, 2025). Ogunode, and Okwudinma (2024) noted that increasing efficiency via digitalization also has implications for reducing operational costs so that institutions do not need to spend large budgets to manage long accreditation processes. Cost savings can be allocated to other programmes that support improving the quality of education.

Elimination of resources wastage

The digitalization of NUC operations in Nigeria will no doubt help to reduce the huge resources wastage associated with manual accreditation processes and programme establishment in the various institutions. These resources wastages include materials resources wastage, time resources wastage and financial wastages. With the deployment of digital facilities for the accreditation of academic programme in the tertiary institution's resources, wastages will be eliminated and less resources will be used (Ogunode, et al 2025). Digitalization of institutions according to Lubis and Daryanto (2019) can help in the improvement of internal quality and reduce waste in the system. Digitalization of institutions can support quality assurance that will help to cut down waste of resources (Farida, Prabowo, & Vidayanti, 2019).

Support data security

Data security, according to Mayulu, and Tricahyadinata, (2024) is a major concern in accreditation automation systems. Implementing encryption and two-factor authentication protects sensitive information from unauthorized access. Security is very important in the maintenance of the integrity of accreditation data and for building trust among stakeholders. This is so because a secure system prevents potential misuse of data that could harm an institution's reputation. Strong data protection enables institutions to guarantee that the information provided to the public is accurate and reliable. A sense of security for all parties involved in the accreditation process will be created and better monitoring of data access via automation will be the benefit of the entire system. The use of strict access controls allows only authorized individuals to access sensitive information. This creates a safer environment for managing accreditation data. The automation system periodically performs security audits to ensure that data remains protected. Digitization of institutions support and promote accountability in the data collection and dissemination (Memarian, & Doleck, 2023; Ramírez, & Tejada, 2018)

Finding

The results show that digitization has the potential to greatly benefit the National Universities Commission and its universities as well as other higher education institutions within the Commission's regulatory purview. With the implementation of digital tools and resources, the Commission can improve its efficiency in regulating universities, enhance communication and collaboration among stakeholders, and provide easier access to information for students and faculty. Specifically, effective operations, data dissemination, accreditation, effective decision making, cost minimization, elimination of resources wastage and support data security are the benefits of digitalization of the National Universities Commission in Nigeria.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper discussed the benefits of digitalization of the National Universities Commission in Nigeria. The paper concluded that effective operations, data dissemination, accreditation,

effective decision making, cost minimization, elimination of resources wastage and support data security are the benefits of digitalization of the National Universities Commission in Nigeria.

Based on above, the paper recommends that the Federal Government of Nigeria, should prioritize the digitalization of the National Universities Commission by increasing the budgetary allocation and budgetary releases to the Commission and ensuring effective monitoring and evaluation of the digitalized system of the Commission. The Federal Government should ensure that all digital facilities needed by the commission for full digitalization are provided. Private institutions and international organizations should support the Commission in the area of provision of capital building for the staff in the commission.

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