Chapter 13
Accreditation and Higher Education: The Case of Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT

The chapter assumes a case approach of one developing nation that boosts of a total of 20 universities affiliated to one national accreditation body. Its content is thus qualitatively developed on the basis of related literature review. The authors seek to clarify and provide rationale for accreditation in higher education, paying much tribute to prerequisites for accreditation that should promote harmonisation of educational programmes through adoption of minimum bodies of knowledge (MBKs). The essence of harmonisation is enhancement of local, regional, and international recognition of qualifications so as to promote mobility and employability of would-be employees and employers in this global village characterised by the need to celebrate human diversity.

INTRODUCTION

While some literature support the view that higher education originated elsewhere, some dispute that it irrefutably originated in Western Europe during the medieval era. According to Alemu (2018), such a conclusion is "the product of the coloniality of power that requires deconstruction". However, what

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matters most in this chapter is not the subject of originality of higher education but of the need for it to be of high quality standards that make it universally accessible and recognised for the global citizenry who are now more fluidal and migratory than before. Similarly, the multiplicity of higher education institutions locally, regionally and internationally has become worrisome with regards to the nature, quality and credibility of the degree programmes offered and whether the programmes are market driven in alignment with the global human market demands. Such institutions include poly-technical colleges, teachers' training colleges as well as universities.

A university is part of the general socioeconomic and political fabric of a given society and era (Alemu, 2018). It is a high level of intellectual development battle ground of ideas expressive of its time and features both in the present and the future, thus, universities are expected to act as centres of societal transformation in accord with changing situations. The idea of a university, as Tilak (2015:56) quoted it, "stands for humanism, for tolerance, for progress, for the adventure of ideas and the search for truth at the same time standing for the onward march of humans towards ever-higher objectives. If universities discharge their duties adequately, then all is well with the nation and the people." In fact, no nation can be better than the quality of its education given that, no nation can develop beyond the quality of its higher education. Thus, Hayward (2006) professed that, 'There is no uncertainty that the quality of higher institution of learning of a country determines the quality of human resources of a country.' This is against the background that, one key purpose of the universities is "to produce a competent, skilled and globally knowledgeable workforce for the labour market of business and industry, which is a critical factor to national growth and development" (Abubakar & Men, 2017:9).

From time immemorial, universities are known for playing three fundamental overlapping obligations, but in several different ways at different times and in diverse places. These roles include teaching new generations; preserving and discovering knowledge; and contributing talent, ideas, advice, and challenge to the wider society (Alemu, 2018). All these are executed informed by research, teaching and the zeal to serve communities. In an era of "non-lieux" (Non-places), universities are best placed to fulfil those roles today by resisting the pressures to uniformity and contributing to an intergenerational dialogue that requires diversity and disputation (Toope, 2014).

In order to fulfil their mandate at the same time producing highly competent and marketable graduates who can serve internationally, universities should seek both internal and external quality assurance and accreditation of both the institution and programmes on offer.

In higher education, quality assurance is a decisive factor in every single nation's developmental trajectory as it enhances the labour market competitiveness in this global village characterised by brain drain and labour fluidity. With increased quality assurance, university graduates become assured of international recognition as they meet international expectations and standards through harmonisation of programmes on offer.

While the definition and approach to quality assurance differs from country to country, special consideration should be on the need to understand the geographical context; the successes and challenges associated with implementing quality higher education in each country (Garwe, 2014). Although the notion of quality has been part of the university culture since the establishment of modern universities, quality assurance has only recently assumed greater importance worldwide because of various reasons (El-Khawas, 2002). Governments have decided that traditional academic controls are inadequate (Hendel and Lewis, 2005). Among some of the reasons are the growth and development of higher education provision characterised by, especially in the developing countries, explosion in enrolment figures (a phenomenon referred to as massification by Mohamedbhai, 2008) without commensurate increase in

resources. Other reasons include cross-border higher education and the emergence of various forms of instruction fuelled by developments in technology. Furthermore, the increased need for social accountability requires leaders of universities to constantly improve quality and promote transparency in order to safeguard public interest and confidence in their awards. According to Garwe (2014), Zimbabwe is among the countries that embraced quality assurance in higher education as far back as 1990 through the establishment of the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) now Zimbabwe Council for Higher Education (ZIMCHE).

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Higher Education

UNESCO's World Conference on Higher Education (1998) defined higher education as 'all types of studies, training or training for research at the post-secondary level, provided by universities or other educational establishments that are approved as institutions of higher education by the expert state authorities.' Differently put, the University of Warwick (2022) defines higher education as 'the furtherance of study post the age of 18 to increase employability chances as well as for personal development.' Thus higher education denotes a more holistic character for all post-secondary or tertiary institutions where research-based training dominates.

Accreditation

While the US Department of Education (2020: 2) views accreditation as "a means of conducting non-governmental, peer evaluation of educational institutions and programs", Ibrahim (2014) regards it as the means through which an association or agency evaluates an educational institution or programme of study and officially recognizes it as having met and fulfilled minimum preset standards of educational eminence. In this chapter, accreditation is all about the process of official recognition by national, regional or international associations or accrediting agencies or state machineries of an institution of higher education's programmes for membership in the association. This process of accreditation is voluntary, thus educational institutions or programs are encouraged to request it for the benefit of their graduates (Congressional Research Service, 2020).

Validation

Validation and accreditation are interchangeable terms yet are different in meaning. While the essence of validation is on learner output criteria including learner portfolios, course work and examination scripts, the thrust in accreditation is on input criteria such as the nature of the curriculum, the quality and quantity of teaching staff and teaching, information and technical resources (Ibrahim, 2014).

Quality Assurance

Quality assurance is a continuous self-assessment whereby educational institutions seek some form of internal and often external validation or accreditation (Ibrahim, 2014). Quality in higher education, as

defined by Gola, is 'specifying worthwhile learning goals and enabling students to achieve them'. While "the quality of higher education is a factor of the relevance (fitness of purpose) of its mission and objectives for the stakeholder(s) and the extent to which the institution/programme/course fulfils the mission and objectives (fitness for purpose), the quality of an institution/programme/course is also determined by the extent to which it satisfies the minimum standard set for inputs, processes and outcomes, which is called the standardbased approach to quality" (Sanyal & Martin, 2006:5).

GENESIS AND HISTORICAL ROLE OF ACCREDITATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Accreditation in higher education can be argued as a culmination of the evolution of the American higher education system and to-date, the United States has no federal ministry of education or any other centralized authority exercising single national control over postsecondary educational institutions (Commission on Dental Accreditation, 2022). Consequently, individual states assume different degrees of control over education. To address this, the practice of accreditation arose in the United States as a means of conducting non-governmental, peer evaluation of educational institutions and programs in order to ensure a basic level of quality. This was necessitated not only by lack of a central body to set and monitor educational standards but by lack of consensus on the content of the educational programs offered by postsecondary educational institutions in the late 19th century (Congressional Research Service, 2020). Accreditation was then first by voluntary associations of postsecondary institutions that were mandated to define the difference between secondary and post-secondary education and develop several guidelines and protocol for peer review as a pre-requisite for membership (American Higher Education, 2011).

With time, several regional associations of postsecondary schools were established whose membership was contingent on accreditation (Harcleroad & Eaton, 2011). The federal government had from time immemorial, an interest in ensuring the quality and integrity of postsecondary education. To this end, every post-secondary institution in the US in general, had to meet three fundamental requirements: state authorization, certification by the Department of Education (ED), and accreditation by an accrediting agency or association recognized by ED (Congressional Research Service, 2020).

While the federal government has some control over the education system, postsecondary institutions have some degree of independence and autonomy resulting in varied character and quality of postsecondary education programs (ED, 2020). The role of accreditation in the US higher education system is to set a yardstick of a level of acceptable quality of post secondary educational programs. The U.S. ED describes the current practice of accreditation as "a means of conducting nongovernmental, peer evaluation of educational institutions and programs" and lists the following as some of the functions of accreditation: assess the quality of academic programs at institutions of higher education; create a culture of continuous improvement of academic quality at colleges and universities and stimulate a general raising of standards among educational institutions; involve the faculty and staff comprehensively in institutional evaluation and planning; and establish criteria for professional certification and licensure and for upgrading courses offering such preparation (Congressional Research Service, 2020: ED, 2020). It is critical to mention here that, the accreditation process is voluntary and must be requested by educational institutions. Similarly, in the event of a denied accreditation, the call for re-visitation for the purpose of accreditation shall come from the University concerned (Abubakar & Men, 2017).

THE PROCESS AND FORMS OF ACCREDITATION

Accreditation is a form of external examination of either an institution and or its programmes. It involves audits, assessment, or standards monitoring. Accreditation utilizes methods and has purposes that have common characteristics with audit, assessment and external examining (Harvey, 2004). The process of accreditation may be of programmes or institutions. It is the establishment and confirmation of the status, legality, suitability or aptness of an institution, programme or module of study. Accreditation involves a set of procedures designed to gather evidence to enable a decision to be made about whether the institution or programme should be granted accredited status and the onus is on the applicants to 'prove' their suitability; that they fulfil minimum criteria (Stensaker, 2003).

Accreditation is an acknowledgement process involving evaluation of standards, guiding principles and measures to ascertain the quality of a particular program by accrediting agencies such as government or professional bodies (Abubakar & Men, 2017). From a Nigerian higher education perspective, Okebukola (2006) opined that accreditation is meant to provide assurance of the provision and attainment of Minimum Academic Standards through examining the obtainability and adequacy of resources, merit rating of resources and programs in order to enhance the quality of output. Accreditation as a process ensures that the curriculum, personnel, infrastructure, learning materials as well as the learning environment satisfy the needs and relevance of a university to achieve their predefined objectives. It is the process of evaluating from time to time, the academic standards of various undergraduate programs in various higher institutions of learning.

Institutional accreditation effectively provides a licence to operate. It is usually based on an evaluation of whether the institution meets specified minimum (input) standards, such as, staff qualifications, research activities, student intake and learning resources. It might also be based on an estimation of the potential for the institution to produce graduates that meet explicit or implicit academic standard or professional competence. Institutional accreditation or re-accreditation, in Europe for example, is usually undertaken by national bodies either government departments or government-initiated agencies that make formal judgements on recognition. In the United States, with a large private sector, accreditation is a self-regulatory process of recognition of institutional viability by non-governmental voluntary associations. However, despite the voluntary nature of the process, there has been a funding link through eligibility for federal aid.

Programmes may be accredited for their academic standing or they may be accredited to produce graduates with professional competence to practice, usually referred to as professional accreditation. Accreditation (and re-accreditation) of courses in North America tends to focus on professional areas. The six non-governmental voluntary associations recognise provision in institutions that have been found to meet stated criteria of quality. In addition there are about 50 disciplinary associations that inter alia judge whether the study programmes appropriately prepare graduates to enter a profession. This is very similar to the role played by the professional and regulatory bodies in the UK, who also control access to the profession by making accreditation of the programme a prerequisite for graduate entry. Perhaps more draconian than their US counterparts, some bodies in the UK set and grade their own examinations (Harvey & Mason, 1995). The newer accreditation in Eastern European countries such as Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia has, at least initially, opted for programme accreditation in all academic fields (Westerheijden, 2001). This appears to be designed principally to provide academic rather than professional accreditation in the wake of the Soviet era. The mushrooming of new programme

accreditation proposals in some Western European countries, linked to bachelor-masters conversion, also predominantly appears to be academic accreditation.

FOCUS AND RATIONALE FOR ACCREDITATION

Accreditation may be focused on inputs, process or outputs or any combination of these. Programme accreditation tends to focus on inputs such as staffing, programme resources, and curricula design and content. Sometimes it addresses the teaching process and the level of student support. Occasionally programme accreditation explores outcomes such as the graduate abilities and employability. In some cases, the medium of delivery might be the key focus, especially when it differs from the norm. The US, Teacher Education Accreditation Council (TEAC), for example, only gives new teacher training programmes pre-accreditation status. Full accreditation follows only when the academics make the case that the 'professional education program has succeeded in preparing competent, caring, and qualified professional educators', that is once students have been through the programme. Here the focus for full accreditation is on the outputs of the programme. This is not untypical of professional programme accreditation undertaken in the UK or US (Harvey & Mason, 1995; Westerheijden, 2001).

Institutional accreditation tends to focus on the overall infrastructure, especially the physical space, along with the IT and library resources and the staffing. It might address this from the point of view of the overall student learning experience. In addition, institutional accreditation might focus on financial arrangements and viability, governance and regulation and administrative support. Where an institution offers distance or on-line learning, the medium of delivery might be a focus of accreditation procedures. Increasingly, the US regional institutional accreditation agencies are focusing on outcomes and effectiveness.

Accreditation is primarily about control of the sector; this is much more explicit in accreditation than in other external quality processes such as audit, assessment or external examining. Although accreditation involves compliance and indirect accountability, its main function is to maintain control of the sector and the programmes offered. Improvement is a sequel from accreditation processes, which some agencies emphasise more than others. According to the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC, 2017:4) of Georgia, "the empowerment flowing from self-regulation and accreditation promotes both innovation and accountability in achieving the goals of educating and training citizens" in any country. Abubakar and Men (2017:9) state five reasons for the need for accreditation: Recent developments such as increasing student enrolments; reduced state funding for public higher education; increasing number of private providers; internationalization cross border education and the need for global competiveness. Institutional accreditation is therefore designed to ensure that institutions of dubious merit do not become established as bona fide higher education institutions. Accreditation also monitors the sector to ensure that accredited institutions continue to fulfil the expectations of a university or college. A key concern is the need to control 'for-profit' organisations, whose motivation is different from the public sector.

In many countries, with a predominant public sector higher education system, there is little or no institutional accreditation per se, but there has been a growing tendency, fuelled by new public management ideology, to require institutions to demonstrate accountability for public funds. Although not the same as accreditation, in the extreme, failure to exhibit satisfactory accountability can result in the 'de-accreditation' in the form of closure or merger of unsatisfactory institutions, as has happened in the

further education college sector in the UK. Accreditation at the programme level is also about control. In Eastern Europe, academic accreditation of programmes is about ensuring adequate standards, a function fulfilled, in effect, in the UK (and some other Commonwealth countries) by the external examining system. Although the latter is not accreditation per se, unsatisfactory examiners reports might lead to the closure or sanctioning of a programme either by the institution management or as a result of other forms of external monitoring such as external subject review or academic audit.

Professional accreditation is even more about ostensive control. It is about an external agency maintaining control of a subject area that links into professional employment, especially where to practice requires certification separate from academic qualification. Although such bodies provide guidelines with which successful accreditees comply, these guidelines are manifestations of the organisation's control of the sector. Sometimes this control is grounded in legislation, such as the British General Medical Council's regulatory function. Sometimes, despite having no regulatory power, the professional body is so well established in the profession that it is impossible to gain work in some areas without it, such as chartered engineering status to work for British local authorities.

Sanyal and Martin (2006:6) concur that the following factors have made the adoption of accreditation a pre-requisite for quality assurance in higher education:

1. As higher education providers become increasingly diversified, the demand for certified education increases. Increasingly, students and their families, but also the labour market, seeks to differentiate between higher education providers. A quality label can make this easier.
2. Threats to quality may come from different sources, including fraudulent providers. A degree awarded by an institution must come with a guarantee. Accreditation is one way of providing that guarantee.
3. The growing number of higher education providers and suppliers of fraudulent documents also boosts the demand for an organization that can accredit institutions in order to maintain the required standards that qualify graduates for admission to higher or more specialized institutions or for professional practice in the employment market.
4. Institutions of higher education are confronted with an ever more competitive world. They have an interest in attracting the best students and transforming their qualifications into a convertible currency (including through credit transfer mechanisms, in order to enhance student mobility). They also have the potential to become learning organizations with ever-improving quality.

Over and above, Sanyal and Martin (2006:6) have concluded that, accreditation guarantees quality control (minimum standards) in higher education; accountability and transparency; quality enhancement; and the facilitation of student mobility

PRE-REQUISITES FOR ACCREDITATION

Consistent with global universities' pursuit for quality higher education and marketability of their graduates, accreditation is best accomplished as both a process and a product, through respect and demonstration of key principles of integrity; thoughtful and principled professional judgment; rigorous application of requirements; and a context of trust (Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on

Colleges, 2017). To this end, the general eligibility criteria for an institution that is applying for accreditation, according to Sanyal and Martin (2006:11) include the following:

(i) established institutions of higher education should already be offering the educational programmes to be accredited, and new institutions should be recognized by the relevant authorities and should already have been offering educational programmes for a specified period of time;
(ii) institutions should be able to demonstrate that they have considered all available strategic options for academic development and that they are committed to continuing improvement in their academic activities;
(iii) institutions should be able to demonstrate that they meet the requirements of a quality audit, that is, they have established systems for internal review and for reporting academic activities, including the means to self-evaluate and commit to effective improvement plans (self-study), and they are prepared to be externally evaluated by relevant experts in the area (peer review).

SPECIFIC ACCREDITATION CRITERIA

The Criteria are designed to seek evidence of continual improvement and aspiration on the part of member institutions rather than to define minimum qualifications. Following, as an essential element of quality assessment, institutions and or programmes should meet the subsequent accreditation criteria as given by the Higher Learning Commission (2013) and Sanyal and Martin (2006):

1. Mission: The institution's mission should be clear and articulated publicly and should guide the institution's operations. Its mission statement should bear planned objectives and a mechanism for reviewing and updating it.
2. Governance and administration: The underlying feature of good governance is observation of ethical and responsible conduct, hence the essence of maintaining integrity. The organizational structure and academic leadership should warrant that policies, systems and practices are efficient and effective, be responsive to changing priorities and emerging diverse needs, and be able to transform the institution into a learning organization.
3. Human resources: Detailed information should be available on both academic and non-academic staff members who are expected to demonstrate institutional effectiveness through effective planning. Such resources, structures, and processes should be sufficient to accomplish institutional mission through improvement of the quality of educational programmes at the same time being responsive to future challenges and opportunities. In its planning, the institution should demonstrate its competence of realizing the institution's objectives simultaneously explaining and justifying staff development policies and practices for meeting up-and-coming challenges.
4. Educational programmes: The institution is obliged to practice responsibility for the quality of its educational programs and its learning environments as well as support services should be evaluated to assess their effectiveness for student learning. The evaluation process should be designed to enhance continuous improvement. In all this, the institution should maintain and exercise authority over the prerequisites for courses, rigor of courses, expectations for student learning, access to learning resources, and faculty qualifications for all its programs. They should also ensure that the bodies responsible for designing and reviewing their programmes have clearly defined roles. Their

monitoring procedures should ensure that students are achieving learning outcomes in accordance with benchmark standards. Institutions should provide detailed statistics (for example number of educational programmes, indicators for admission to the different programmes, number of students registered, number of graduates of each programme, and so on) that identify cases in which they performed better or worse than expected and the factors responsible, and suggest appropriate measures. Institutions should provide details on the number of credit hours or courses per programme, the percentages of courses that make up the different components of each programme's academic structure, the availability of special programmes for outstanding and socially challenged groups, and the curriculum's adaptability to emerging economic, social and cultural needs. Institutions should identify merits and shortcomings and suggest appropriate measures.

5. Academic standards: These criteria ensure: (i) the achievement of academic standards in comparison with reference standards (benchmarks); (ii) the effectiveness of student assessment procedures; (iii) acceptable rates of retention, progression and achievement among students; (iv) the relevance of the programmes, including in terms of employment; and (v) external evaluation of student performance and proposals for remedial measures, if necessary. Above all, the institution's degree programs should be appropriate to higher education. Similarly, the institution's program quality and learning goals should be consistent across all modes of delivery and all locations (on the main campus, at additional locations, by distance delivery etc.
6. Quality of learning opportunities: Institutions should ensure that their facilities and resources are adequate (i) to achieve the intended learning outcomes and enable students to participate in all aspects of academic social life; (ii) to enable socially challenged students to pursue quality higher education; and (iii) to provide adequate facilities for high achievers. They should also provide (i) adequate teaching/learning strategies for different programmes based on benchmarks, and (ii) ensure suitable academic and pastoral support and adequate learning resources (physical facilities including lecture, seminar and tutorial rooms, libraries, laboratories, workshops and computers). They should demonstrate evidence of a suitable feedback and control mechanism used by students and other stakeholders (Sanyal & Martin, 2006:11).
7. Quality management and enhancement: Institutions should demonstrate evidence of a quality enhancement vision and clear strategies for achieving it through a suitable monitoring and control system. They should also demonstrate (i) the extent of their engagement with relevant stakeholders in order to gain their confidence (ii) the effectiveness of the internal-review quality assurance system and (iii) the existence of any policies or procedures for assessing overall student performance. The institution should also have a feasible action plan for quality management and enhancement.
8. Research and other scholastic activities: Institutions should have well-defined policies for creating an environment that enables academic staff to carry out research and a database of research conducted and published and research patents obtained. Each department should have an effective research plan with suitable implementation, evaluation and feedback mechanisms. They should collect information on the participation of teaching staff in research activity, research income from different sources, and ways and means of enhancing the research skills of the teaching staff. They should also have proposals for a future action plan with clearly stated responsibilities and a time frame.
9. Community involvement: Institutions should have clear policies for community services and mechanisms for measuring the real needs of the community and related stakeholders. They should provide information on the number of community service units within the institution, the number

and types of community services at the national and international levels, for example training programmes, workshops and seminars, conferences, technical consultation and services, and other related activities. They should also have mechanisms for evaluating the quality of services provided and increasing their quality and quantity. Finally, they should have a proposal for an action plan with clearly stated responsibilities and a time frame.

10. Consolidated development plans: Institutions should integrate the action plans for each criterion listed above, prioritize them, determine their cost and clearly define their outcomes, responsibilities and time frames (Sanyal & Martin, 2006:11).

This criteria is not exhaustive as it varies from region to region or from accrediting agency to another.

THE ZIMBABWEAN SCENARIO

The world has seen 'an explosion in the number of higher education students' (Garwe, 2014: Sanyal & Martin, 2006). Formal higher education was introduced into Zimbabwe in 1957 at the University of Zimbabwe, formerly the University College of Rhodesia and Nyasaland. The total enrolment of the University of Rhodesia and Nyasaland in 1957 was 57, and out of that enrolment only 8 students were black (Garwe, 2014; Shizha, 2011). At independence in 1980, the new democratically elected Zimbabwean government showed commitment to widening access at all levels of education, that is, at primary, secondary and tertiary levels (Podzo, 2021). In this regard, Zimbabwe embarked on a phenomenal expansion of educational provision upon the installation of a new majority government in 1980 whose immediate focus was to correct the historical imbalances and also promote socio-economic development.

The expansion of higher education started soon after independence when her only university, the University of Zimbabwe's student enrolment rose from 2,240 in 1980 to 9,017 in 1990 (Dzvimbo and Kwandayi, 2020; Garwe, 2014). Due to a multiplicity of factors amongst them being amplified social demand for higher education and amplified economic need for more well-informed and skilled human capital (Sanyal & Martin, 2006). Zimbabwe to-date boosts of more than 20 registered universities (ZIMCHE, 2018), state and private included. This brisk expansion of universities in Zimbabwe has culminated into the establishment of an accreditation body to avert a possible plunge in the standards of university education being offered.

Zimbabwe is among the countries that embraced quality assurance in higher education as far back as 1990 through the establishment of the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) which saw the multiplication of universities in Zimbabwe to 14 registered institutions by 2005 (Garwe, 2014). Given the rapid multiplicity of universities in Zimbabwe, a more aggressive quality assurance entity had to be established to register and accredit these and emerging higher education institutions, hence the formation of the Zimbabwe Council for Higher Education (ZIMCHE). This formation was mandated by the government of Zimbabwe to endorse, advance and synchronize higher education offered by higher education institutions in addition to standardize in determining and maintaining standards of teaching, examinations, academic qualifications and research in institutions of higher education" (ZIMCHE Act, 2006). ZIMCHE as the quality assurance organisation for Zimbabwe's higher education was established by an act of Parliament, Chapter 25:27, promulgated in 2006. Hence, ZIMCHE is the sole "competent authority registering, accrediting, auditing and the holistic quality assurance (QA) of higher education institutions (HEIs) and their programmes" (ZIMCHE, 2018:1)

MAJOR FUNCTIONS OF ZIMCHE

In pursuit for quality education in higher education institutions in Zimbabwe, ZIMCHE is obliged to execute three major functions:

- Regulatory (accreditation, registration, audits and, where necessary, de-registration or closure of institutions);
- Quality promotion (coordinating the development of HE in the country; facilitating the capacity development of HE personnel and cooperation between HE stakeholders; and promoting regional cooperation in higher education); and
- Advisory (advising the Minister, HEIs and HE stakeholders) (ZIMCHE, 2018:7).

According to its Draft Annual Report for the year 2018, ZIMCHE observes and performs the following actions:

(i) Registration: There are two stages of registration for a new institution: Provisional Registration and Full or Final Registration. These ensure that all HEI operate legally in Zimbabwe.
(ii) Institutional self-evaluation: Each established institution is supposed to institutionalise the quality assurance process by self-evaluating its own facilities, equipment, staffing, governing structures, teaching and academic programmes, research and scholarship.
(iii) External review: This is an external validation of the institution's quality and quality assurance system. It takes the form of accreditation visits and quality audits by ZIMCHE in the company of experts/specialists/practitioners referred to as Peer Reviewers. These are derived from HEIs, industry, professional bodies as well as other relevant stakeholders. This requires ZIMCHE to actually visit and verify what the institution claims to have or to be. Consequently, we are always on the move. The Secretariat's recommendations to Council committees are evidence-based.
(iv) Quality Audits: Quality assurance audits investigate the quality assurance mechanisms that an institution has and seeks to validate whether the institution is actually maintaining the quality standards that it claims to have in specific areas of operation such as staffing, facilities, equipment, governance etc. The investigation can be at institutional, faculty or departmental level. Audits can be carried out at any 8 time that the quality assurance agency or other authority deems it necessary for such an investigation to be undertaken.
(v) Accreditation: There are two types of accreditation: Institutional accreditation and Programme accreditation. An accredited institution is an institution that has met the set quality standards in terms of governance, staffing, facilities, equipment etc. For any programme to be taught in Zimbabwe, it must be accredited by ZIMCHE, meaning that ZIMCHE is satisfied that the programme meets the required standards in terms of staffing, facilities, equipment where applicable. Accreditation is therefore a kind of recognition and certification of the fact that an institution or programme meets the set requirements. Whereas audits can be carried out at any time there is a need to do so, accreditation is normally for a specific period, such as five years.
(vi) Compliance visits: ZIMCHE monitors and closes unregistered institutions or registered institutions offering unregistered programmes.

QUALITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION-A ZIMBABWEAN PERSPECTIVE

Quality is a relative term with a wide array of definitions in higher education. Broadly speaking, quality in education is based on the premise that, there should be specificity of an institution's mission and worthwhile learning objectives that enhance student accomplishment (Ibrahim, 2014).

Dzvimbo and Kwandayi (2020:6) concur that, in the spirit of quality enhancement, quality according to ZIMCHE standards is perceived from the following dimensions:

- Fitness for Purpose: Producing graduates who meet the objectives of the institution, of society and of similar institutions
- Value for Money: Satisfying the expectations of Government and other stakeholders
- Transformative Development: Developing and transforming students by empowering them with the requisite skills, attitudes and qualities. In this regard, ZIMCHE expects universities to produce 21st century graduates.
- Fitness of Purpose: Successful execution of institutional mandate. For example, state universities are expected to fulfil their assigned mandates

ZIMBABWE'S HERITAGE-BASED EDUCATION 5.0 PHILOSOPHY

ZIMCHE works in close partnership with the host Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, Innovation, Science and Technology Development (MoHTESITD) to ensure quality and academic sanity prevails in universities. Traditionally, this Ministry's education system mandated university to function guided by its 3.0 philosophy of teaching, community service and research. Currently, the MoHTESITD has put in place a value addition, beneficiating and transformative heritage-based education 5.0 philosophy. To ensure transformation in higher education, this new dimension requires all institutions providing higher education to add to their old mandate, two more functions of innovation and industrialization aimed at promoting production of goods and services by way of establishing and developing on campus Industrial Hubs (Dzvimbo & Kwandayi, 2020).

Informed by these dimensions, the higher education system in Zimbabwe is optimistic for a positive developmental trajectory. To this effect, ZIMCHE as an external quality assurance agency is mandated to carry out two types of accreditation - institutional accreditation and programme accreditation of which both should manifest evidence of prudent and industrious preparedness for quality higher education provision.

In alignment with the international fraternity, both the MoHTESITD and ZIMCHE have adopted what is popularly known as Minimum Body of Knowledge (MBKs) which must be learnt by students who undertake each study programme at all higher education institutions in Zimbabwe. MBKs are believed to assist in achieving comparable standards in what is learnt by students embarking on similar degree programmes at different universities in an effort to enhance "the comparability and compatibility of university curricula for the global higher education community" (Garwe, 2014:5) as discussed in the subsequent sections.

HOW TO IMPROVE HIGHER EDUCATION IN ZIMBABWE THROOUGH ACCREDITATION SYSTEM

We recommend the following measures that are in tandem with Morgan (2018) who asserts that, accreditation is a fundamental measure of consumer protection in higher education, hence the need for provision of 'value for money' by concerned institutions:

- In addition to self-study and peer review, institutions of higher education should have well-spelt out systems in place that enforce implementation of policy on both programme and institutional accreditation. This will enhance provision of quality service.
- Institutions should establish a monitoring and evaluation department since some institutions are lacking in effective implementation.
- Accrediting bodies should effectively and continuously monitor as well as evaluate institutional activities so as to uphold quality education.
- Since the government is the main beneficiary of a viable higher education system, it should therefore provide to both private and public higher education institutions adequate human and financial resources.

HARMONISATION OF THE EDUCATION SYSTEM IN ZIMBABWE

The expansion and mutation of higher education have brought about a shift of emphasis from collegial approaches of horizontal governance by communities of scholars towards models combining greater autonomy with top-down features such as harmonization, transparency and accountability. For example, in Europe, Bologna developments are also illustrative of this shift. Continentally, the Tuning Africa initiative an outcome of the Commission of the European Union and African Union Commission is an effort that strives to harmonise the disparate higher education system (Hahn & Teferra, 2013). Thus, various initiatives have been launched in Africa to develop frameworks for comparable and compatible qualifications. These initiatives date back to the middle 2000 (Onana, Oyewole, Teferra, Beneitone, Gonzalez and Wagenaar, 2014). One such framework is the Arusha Convention adopted on the 5th of December, 1981 and revised at Cape town on the 12th of June 2002 (UNESCO, 2002). In Africa, the Association of African Union (AAU) and the African Union Commission are spearheading quality issues in higher education (Onana et al, 2014). The growing emphasis on quality, internalization, transparency, accountability that characterize the new paradigm has led to increased demands for colleges and universities to engage in harmonization and standardization of academic practices at national, regional and international levels. Garwe and Thondhlana (2019) state that harmonization is a multi-dimensional, collaborative and stakeholder-driven process that addresses challenges associated with intra- and inter-institutional variability in quality delivery of HE. Similarly, Hahn and Teferra (2013) implore that the process ensures transparency, alignment, convergence, coherence, cooperation, partnership, integration, collaboration, compatibility and comparability in HE systems.According to Cahapay (2020) many institutions, nations of regions engaged in the process of harmonizing various aspects of their higher education systems such as structures; policies; regulations; credit systems standards; programmes; competences approaches and activities (Garwe, 2021) .

The pushing factor behind harmonization and development of MBKs has been fostered by the Bologna Process (BP) initiated in the European Union towards the turn of the century (Ndudzo, 2022). Due to variations in university practices, the Zimbabwean higher education system experienced limited inter and intra-learner mobility within the national qualifications' framework, labelling of some institutions as inferior and lack of credibility of some graduates and the institution. In line with regional and international trends in HE, Zimbabwe undertook a comprehensive harmonization process as part of the reform to position HE to better contribute to the needs of the society through continuous quality improvement (Garwe, 2021). The process included many facets inclusive of: developing common frameworks for MBKS for study programmes; staff grading and promotion; common quality assurance and standards; credit accumulation and transfer (CATS); internationalization of HE; HE management information systems (HEMS) and university-industry linkages (see diagram below in Garwe 2021). Thus, ZIMCHE introduced and led the development of the Zimbabwe Credit Accumulation Transfer System (ZIMCATS) and MBKs in 2016 with a view to harmonise curriculum in all universities, bring parity in programme offerings, to make qualifications comparable across the HE sector, internationalization, to allow for horizontal and vertical articulation as well as intra-and inter-learner mobility within the national qualification framework. However, the introduction of MBKS faced resistance by some academics (Dzvimbo and Kwandayi, 2020). Garwe's (2021:9-10) study on tensions associated with the harmonization process in Zimbabwe indicated that some stakeholders had tensions in contextualizing harmonization, tensions arising from the process as well as tensions in some aspects of harmonization namely MBKS and academic grading and promotion.

ZIMBABWE CREDIT ACCUMULATION TRANSFER SYSTEM

Prior to 2016, Zimbabwean higher education institutions had different credit accumulation transfer systems which made it very difficult for students to move from one institution to another during their period of study. CHE (2013:16) defines the credit system of a nation or region as "the process whereby a student's achievements are recognized and contribute to further learning even if the student has not achieved a qualification". In view of this, any credits earned by a student can contribute to the completion of a qualification at national or international level provided the credits are recognized. One of the most important functions of a credit accumulation and transfer system is to enhance and promote quality in programme design (Ngara, 2017). Thus, the regulatory authority ZIMCHE in line with regional and international practices and standards introduced the Zimbabwe Credit Accumulation Transfer System in 2016. Before the harmonization process higher education institutions used the two credit systems namely the credit hour and notional study hour. According to Kumar (2016) a credit is the basic unit of measurement that counts towards the award of a qualification. The ZIMCATS process facilitated adoption of the notional study hour approach in the design and management of curricula. In this regard, 10 notional hours inclusive of contact and independent study hours are equivalent to one credit (Ngara. 2016).

CREDIT SYSTEM APPROACHES

The Credit Hour Approach

This approach is mostly used in the United States of America where credits are usually referred to as "credit hours". A student is expected to complete 120-130 credit hours in order to graduate with a bachelor's degree and 30-84 credit hours for a Master's (Pop, 2016). The approach is based on the number of "contact hours" per week per semester which include lecture and laboratory time. This approach is criticized for being lecturer-centered.

The Notional Study Hour Approach

This credit approach is learner-centered as it recognizes all the learning activities of the student. These activities include lectures, tutorials, practical work, seminars, projects, field work, self-directed learning and assessment (ZIMCHE, 2016). Countries like South Africa, Tanzania, the United Kingdom and Namibia stipulate that 10 motional hours are worth one credit. For undergraduate bachelor's degree (4fours) a minimum of 480credits are awarded and 360 credits for a master's degree. Institutions have the freedom to surpass the minimum benchmark but cannot go beyond the maximum.

THE INTRODUCTION OF MBKs IN ZIMBABWEAN HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

Ngara (2016) views MBKs as curriculum benchmarks and a mechanism that allows for comparability and transfer. The same author further explains that MBKs comprise what is agreed upon by specialists in the field to the minimum that a programme can cover in order for that programme to be accepted as one that is equivalent to similar programmes of reputable institutions. As part of the MBKs development process, several workshops were held with stakeholders. ZIMCHE involved experts or thought leaders and practitioners (subject/programme/trade panels) in the development of MBKs (see the ZIMCHE Hybrid form below) that was/is used to develop MBKs for Bachelors and Masters programmes)

PROPOSED FORMAT FOR THE PRESENTATION OF MINIMUM BODY OF KNOWLEDGE FOR UNIVERSITY ACADEMIC PROGRAMMES

Table 1.

NAME OF DEGREE PROGRAMME (N.B. WRITE ACTUAL NAME OF DEGREE PROGRAMME)	
Duration:	
Minimum Credit Load:	
Maximum Credit Load	
SADC-QF Level:	

Table 2.

Rationale/Justification/
Aims/Objectives/Purpose

Table 3.

Entry Requirements
Normal Entry: **Special Entry:** **Mature Entry:** **Visiting School:** **Other**

Table 4.

Programme Characteristics	
Areas of Study:	
Specialist Focus:	
Orientation:	
Distinctive Features:	
Other	

Table 5.

Programme Competences
Generic: **• Multi-disciplinarity** **• Quantitative and innovative reasoning:** **• Entrepreneurial skills:** **• Communication skills**: **• Analysis and synthesis** **• Ethical commitment:** **• Other**
Discipline specific: **• Deep knowledge:** **• Production skills:** **• Technology development skills:** **• Problem-solving skills** **• Analytical and computational skills**: **• Other**

Table 6.

Market Opportunities and Further Education	
Further Studies:	
Employabilit:	
Entrepreneurship Prospects:	
Other	

Table 7.

Intended Learning Outcomes

Table 8.

Program Delivery	
Teaching and Learning Methods:	
Assessment and Evaluation Methods:	
Other	

Table 9.

Programme Assessment		
Coursework:	Written Assignments	
	Laboratory work	
	Workshops	
	Work related Learning	
	In-Class Tests	
	Other	
Written Examinations		

Table 10.

Determination of Results and Provision for Progression from one level to the next level	

Table 11.

Degree Classification	
Degree weighting	

Table 12.

BASIS OF ALLOCATING CREDITS		
ACTIVITY	**TIME IN HOURS**	**CREDITS**
CONTACT TIME		
Lectures		
Tutorials		
Field Visits		
Laboratory Work		
Workshops		
SCHEDULED ASSESSMENT TIME		
Final written examinations		
In-class tests		
Seminar Presentations		
INDEPENDENT STUDY TIME		
Preparation for scheduled sessions		
Reading		
Written assignments		
Revision Work		
MAXIMUM CREDITS PER COURSE/MODULE		

Table 13.

Minimum Body of Knowledge and Credit Allocation						
Level I Semester I						
Course/Module Description	**Contact Time**			**Non-Contact Time**	**Notional Hours**	**Credits**
	Lectures	**Practical Work**	**Tutorials**			
Level I Semester II Totals						
Level II Semester I						
Level II Semester II Totals						
Level III Semester I						
Level III Semester II						
Grand total for Degree Programme						
Continue to levels IV and V						

Table 14.

Course/Module Synopsis by Level
Level I Semester I
Level I Semester II

Table 15.

Requirements for Registration by Professional Bodies	
Name of Professional body	**Requirements**

The proposed format for the presentation of MBK for university academic programmes above gathers the critical information that addresses the pre-requisites of academic programme accreditation. It encourages high level of commitment and accuracy with regards to its completion.

The approved MBKs comprise 80% and institutions were/are to contribute 20%. The 20% is meant for institutions to display their uniqueness. ZIMCATS, MBKs and ZNQF are now operational and their introduction have facilitated integration and harmonization of the once fragmented higher education system. The approved MBKs were first introduced to first year students in 2020.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The current chapter provided salient aspects that pertain to accreditation and quality assurance in higher education. The rationale for accreditation and pre-requisites for it in higher education were provided so as to enhance harmonization of educational programmes through adoption of MBKs. The MBKs are curriculum benchmarks and a mechanism that allows for comparability and transfer between higher education institutions. to this end, the core of harmonisation has been presented as a way of increasing local, regional and international recognition of qualifications in an attempt to promote and encourage mobility and marketability of institutional graduates. Thus, the growing emphasis on quality, internalization, transparency and accountability in higher education has led to increased demands for colleges and universities to engage in harmonization and standardization of academic practices at national, regional and international levels. A proposed format for the presentation of Minimum Body of Knowledge for university academic programmes was also provided.

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