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School Accreditation Status and Perception of National Examinations Council

Accreditation Exercises in Nigeria

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Abstract

The accreditation status of schools is an essential determinant of their ability to function as certified educational institutions, and the process leading to a decision on this status placement by accrediting bodies, like the National Examination Council (NECO) in Nigeria, plays a critical role in this regard. This paper examines how schools in Nigeria perceive NECO's accreditation exercise effectiveness in assessing teaching learning activities and infrastructural facilities, and how this perception is influenced by their accreditation status (full, partial and/or failed). Using a mixed-method approach, data were gathered from 1,363 secondary school administrators in 120 secondary schools from six selected states across Nigeria to explore the relationship between schools' accreditation status and perception of these schools' administrators on NECO's accreditation exercise. An analysis of variance revealed a p-value of 0.001 for accreditation as being effective in assessing the quality of teaching-learning and facilities in schools. This means that there is a difference in perception among staff from schools with full, partial and failed accreditation status on NECO accreditation exercises in assessing teaching-learning activities and infrastructural facilities in Nigerian secondary schools. In other words, accreditation status has effect on the school staff's perception of the accreditation exercise. The study therefore recommended that accreditation bodies (NECO) should ensure openness and clarity in the accreditation process, collaborate with educational stakeholders (Ministry of Education, school administrators, and teachers) by organising sensitisation programmes focused on accreditation requirements, standards and quality improvement strategies. Government and development partners, on the other hand, can assist schools in terms of infrastructural development and other resources to meet the quality standard expected by the accreditation bodies, such as NECO.

Key words: School, accreditation, status, perception, NECO accreditation exercises, Nigeria.

School Accreditation Status and Perception of National Examinations Council Accreditation Exercises in Nigeria

The accreditation of schools is a pivotal mechanism in the regulation and standardisation of education quality globally. Therefore, among other indices, the standard and effectiveness of any school in achieving credible teaching and learning outcomes are a function of a well-organised accreditation process. In Nigeria, the role of accreditation bodies like the National Examinations Council (NECO) ensures that schools meet the necessary minimum requirements for preparing students for national examinations such as the Senior School Certificate Examination (SSCE) and Basic Certificate Examination (BECE). Accreditation plays a key role in maintaining educational standards, yet the perception of NECO accreditation exercise effectiveness in assessing teaching learning activities and infrastructural facilities by schools often varies, with some institutions viewing it as a critical quality assurance mechanism to enhance standard while others see it as a bureaucratic hurdle that impede service delivery in educational system.

Accreditation exercise refers to the formal process through which an educational institution meets the required standards set by a national or international authoritative body. It is a process of self-study and an external quality review mechanism used to scrutinise a school/institution's need for quality improvement (Okogie, 2012; Obadara and Alaka, 2013). Similarly, Afemikhe, Omo-Egbekuse and Imobekhai (2013) view school accreditation as a type of school self-evaluation, a systematic and comprehensive evaluation to look out for areas of strengths and weaknesses of the school. The authors maintain that if properly done, school accreditation often brings about positive changes in a school system. In all these, the process is designed to determine which school has met the stipulated standards as enshrined in the National Policy on Education document. The United States Department of Education (USDE) in Obadara and Alaka (2013) divided educational accreditation into two basic types: one identified as "institutional" and the other referred to as "specialised" or "programmatic". Institutional accreditation normally applies to an entire institution, indicating that each of an institution's parts contributes to the achievement of the institution's objectives.

The accreditation exercise conducted by NECO is institutional accreditation. It results in formal recognition that a school meets certain minimum standards established by the Council before such a school can present candidates for its public examinations. According to Harvey and Green (1993), accreditation is both a process and a status. As a process, it involves the evaluation of an institution or programme against a set of predetermined criteria. As a status, it signifies that the institution or programme has met those standards. In Nigeria, accreditation is critical for secondary schools that wish to present students for national examinations conducted by examining bodies such as NECO and the West African Examination Council (WAEC).

One of the major functions of NECO as a public examination body is the accreditation of Secondary schools for both SSCE and BECE. NECO's accreditation exercises serve to ensure that schools meet academic, infrastructural, and operational standards (Okolie & Nwosu, 2020). This accreditation exercise conducted yearly by her is guided by three major specific objectives which are: to ensure that schools attain and maintain minimum standards set to obtain valid continuous assessment scores, schools attain and maintain minimum standards set for school infrastructure facilities that can guarantee smooth conduct of examinations and schools have and maintain adequate number of qualified academic staff in line with the subjects offered.

In the same vein, accreditation has long been linked to the overall reputation and effectiveness of an educational institution. It serves as a form of validation, recognising that a school meets national educational standards. However, schools' status in terms of accreditation can be diverse. Some schools may hold full accreditation status, while others may be temporarily accredited or not accredited at all. The consequences of these statuses are far-reaching, influencing both the academic and administrative functions of the school (Ogunlade, 2018).

NECO accreditation exercise, since inception, is at two levels: Senior School Certificate Examination (SSCE) Accreditation and Basic Education Certificate Examination BECE Accreditation. The latter is for the first three years of the secondary school system, which culminates in BECE, while the former is for the senior secondary school, which is the last three years of secondary school, culminating in SSCE. The mandate to conduct final examinations for

both junior and senior secondary schools is captured in the Act that established the Council. Accrediting either of the two levels is at a school's request and the school's ability to meet the minimum standards as stipulated in the accreditation guidelines. The BECE is primarily for Federal Government Colleges and others willing private and State schools, while SSCE is for all secondary schools, irrespective of ownership.

The accreditation process involves the inspection of schools to ensure they have adequate facilities, qualified staff, the necessary academic programmes in place and if there is effective teaching and learning practice going on in the school. This is not far-fetched, as schools have reported that inadequate facilities affect the smooth teaching and learning process in schools (Olugbenga, 2019). Similarly, Munna and Kalam (2021) noted that teaching and learning is a process that transmits knowledge from teachers to students, hence, they must be adequate both in number and quality. It entails the combination of various elements within the process where an educator identifies and establishes the learning objectives and develops teaching resources, and implements the teaching and learning strategy in the best interest of the learner. Extramarks (2024) went further and identified some key elements of the teaching-learning process, such as teachers, instructional methods, assessment and evaluation and learning resources. The author maintains that by incorporating these elements, educators can create a dynamic and effective teaching-learning environment to facilitate meaningful learning experiences for students.

NECO accreditation exercise also assesses the school leadership and staff on requisite qualifications and cognate experience in teaching and administration to enhance the effectiveness of institutional governance, decision-making processes, leadership and teaching-learning activities. The process also includes checking of various school records such as work plan, diaries, registers, lesson notes and mark books. Continuous Assessment practice is also examined to determine whether it conforms to the stipulated nationally acceptable continuous assessment standards and assess the genuineness of the continuous assessment records. Juneja and Shikha (2019) emphasised that a good assessment practice supports learning by regularly monitoring learning progress and providing teachers with information to understand the next remedial steps.

Therefore, assessing and evaluating these teaching-learning activities through the accreditation exercise conducted by NECO is not out of place. The only issue is carrying out the accreditation exercise correctly to ensure that its aim in educational development in the country is achieved. This can only happen when the selection of accreditation team members is properly constituted by NECO management and the team is also ready to do their work dedicatedly, conscientiously and professionally without prejudice.

Accreditation team simply refer to a group of individuals assigned to carry out the accreditation exercise. The responsibilities of the accreditation team are often divided among several designated experts in various fields such as Humanities, Sciences, Technologies, Commercial and Entrepreneurial subjects, among others. This is premised on the fact that the right composition of an accreditation team enhances the effectiveness of the exercise. This may, in turn, lead to poor coverage of schools on the part of the accreditation officials. Okoro (2017) noted that professionalism and the qualification of team members can pose a weakness in the accreditation process of secondary schools in Nigeria if not properly constituted.

Apart from the professionalism, the integrity of team members also plays a vital role in making the accreditation exercise to achieved its aim. For instance, if the integrity and character of team members are questionable, the result of it will not reflect the reality of teaching-learning activities and infrastructural facilities as witnessed in the schools visited. This may make room for other challenges such as incompetence, poor relationship between NECO and school staff and delivering unreliable assessment results to the Council. However, NECO's management to checkmate some of the excesses of its staff that may compromise the strength and validity of the accreditation process at some points, divisional heads and directors to validate and ratify the accreditation assessment exercise after the team has completed its assessment visit.

Despite these regulations practised by NECO to ensure the effectiveness of accreditation exercise in enhancing teaching and learning outcomes in the school system, the accreditation process of NECO has been criticised by some as lacking transparency and consistency. Ugwoke (2010) suggests that some schools perceive the process as being overly complicated and costly,

while others see it as necessary for maintaining educational standards. This study examined the perception of schools with regard to NECO accreditation exercise on its effectiveness in assessing the quality of the teaching-learning process and infrastructural facilities in Nigerian secondary schools.

The perception of schools of NECO accreditation exercise often varies between different educational institutions. Studies by Okeke and Nwoye (2018) found that private schools tend to view accreditation as an external imposition, whereas public schools, which are generally more familiar with governmental regulations, may view accreditation as a normal and expected procedure. On the other hand, schools' accreditation status may significantly shape the school staff's perception of NECO's role and the value of the accreditation exercise.

In another dimension, the perception of NECO accreditation exercise by schools may vary depending on a variety of factors, including the school administrative competence, external pressures it faces and more importantly, its accreditation status. It is natural for schools with full accreditation status to view the process as credible, transparent, reliable and validation/recognition of their commitment to quality education. On the other hand, schools with partial or failed accreditation status may tend to perceive the process as unfair, unjust and unreliable. They may feel marginalised or unsupported by NECO accreditation process (Ogunlade, 2018). Psychologists aptly capture these scenarios in various psychological theories such as attribution, cognitive dissonance, self-serving or social identity theories (Heider, 1982; Kassim, et al 2010; Tajfel & Turner 1979). These theories explain how individuals and organisations interpret and respond to favourable and unfavourable outcomes and their implications in understanding the complexities that surround human perceptions, behaviours or dispositions toward events and outcomes. Attribution is a term used in psychology which deals with low indices idea of perceiving the causes of everyday experience, as being either external or internal. Models to explain this process are called attribution theory (Kassim, Fein and Markus 2010).

In taking attribution theory into perspective, the theory explores how individuals interpret events, whether their own or others and how this relates to their thinking and behaviour. It is

defined as the way individuals envisage the success or failure of their behaviour or the behaviour of others (Winter, 20223, Robinson et al, 2023). It examines how people interpret the reasons behind actions, attributing them to internal factors (dispositions) or external factors (situational). This framework can be applied to understand how school administrators and teachers perceive the outcomes of the accreditation process. If a school fails to meet the required standard, administrators and teachers might attribute this to external factors such as stringent requirements from the accreditation body or internal factors like insufficient resources. The perception index from such school administrators and teachers would definitely be low. On the other hand, if a school got a full accreditation status, the administrators and teachers might attribute this to external factors such as fairness, transparency and credibility of the exercise or internal factors such as optimum preparation and resourcefulness. Schools with full accreditation tend to have high scores in the school accreditation perception index.

The way schools attribute their accreditation outcomes can influence their future approach to the accreditation process. For instance, schools that attribute failure to external factors such as NECO's procedure might engage in less self-reflection and improvement, while those that internalise the causes of failure may be more motivated to improve (Weiner 1985). Understanding how schools attribute their accreditation outcomes is critical for policymakers and accreditation bodies like NECO, as it influences the willingness of schools to adapt and improve upon their present standard. It also helps policymakers and accreditation bodies to understand the dynamics that shape human behaviour and attitudes, which can help to foster a better and beneficial mutual relationship with schools, irrespective of the accreditation status. The accreditation bodies have to develop strategies to promote self-reflection and accountability among schools, encourage openness by setting clear, unambiguous guidelines and expectations for school accreditation exercises. By setting clear expectations and providing timely constructive feedback, schools with partial and failed accreditation can emerge stronger through self-improvement, learning from failure and by developing problem-solving skills. In essence, NECO can tailor their communication and feedback to foster accurate self-reflection among schools.

Another psychological theory that best explains differences in perceptions of schools with varied accreditation status is social identity theory. Social identity theory was developed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner (1979). It posits that individuals derive part of their identity from their membership in social groups. In the context of schools, accreditation status may play a vital role in how schools perceive their roles and their position within the educational community. Schools with full accreditation may perceive themselves as part of an elite or top group, gaining social status within the educational system. They would also perceive the process through which they earn the status as credible, fair and valid. Conversely, schools with partial or failed accreditation may feel stigmatised and marginalised, which can affect their identity and their perception of the accreditation process as unfair and extreme punitive. The desire to maintain or enhance the social identity within the educational system may motivate those schools to work harder for better accreditation results (Tajfel & Turner 1979). The sense of belonging to a particular social group (maybe a top-rated or low-rated school) can, therefore, influence how schools interpret and react to accreditation outcomes. Consequently, it is not expected that the perception of schools would be the same across the board, irrespective of their accreditation status.

Schools' perceptions of NECO accreditation exercises in Nigeria are shaped by a complex interplay of psychological and social factors. Psychological theories such as attribution and social identity theories provide valuable frameworks for understanding how schools perceive their accreditation outcomes. These theories suggest that schools with different accreditation statuses would perceive NECO accreditation exercises in varied ways, influenced by either internal or external attributions or the need to maintain a positive social identity. However, there is limited empirical and documented research that explores how schools perceive NECO accreditation exercise effectiveness. This research aims to fill this gap by examining the school's accreditation status and perceptions on accreditation exercises.

Although NECO accreditation exercise is intended to ensure that schools meet minimum national standards before presenting candidates for public examination, there have been more concerns about transparency, fairness and effectiveness of the exercise. It has also been established that the accreditation exercises is reliable, valid and effective in measuring various indicators

relating to school accreditation. Moreover, all the major stakeholders: teachers, school administrators and NECO accreditation officials perceived the exercise to be fair and credible. A key issue that remains unresolved is whether there is an effect of schools' accreditation status on their perception of NECO accreditation exercise. Succinctly put, is there any significant difference between schools with varies accreditation statuses on their perception of NECO accreditation exercise? This study seeks to examine whether there is an influence of accreditation status on school staff perception of NECO accreditation exercise.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the perception of schools' staff on NECO accreditation exercise effectiveness in assessing teaching-learning activities and infrastructural facilities.
2. To ascertain the effect of school accreditation status on school staff perception of NECO accreditation exercise.

Hypothesis of the study

The hypothesis formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance:

H_{01} : There is no significant difference among respondents from schools that have Full, Partial and Failed accreditation status on the effectiveness of NECO accreditation exercise.

Method

A descriptive survey research design was used for this study. This was necessitated by the fact that survey research is appropriate when a group of people or items are studied by collecting and analysing data from only a few people or items considered as being representative of the entire group (Akingbade *et al.*,2023; Nwankwo 2024). This type of survey is used in finding out the conditions or relationships that exist and the opinions that are held. The design is considered appropriate for this study because data was collected from the representative sample of the population about their opinion on NECO accreditation exercise. The population of the study comprised principals and teachers in about 18000 schools across the nation that have undergone

NECO accreditation processes.

Several sampling techniques were used to select the samples for the study. Stratified random sampling technique was used for the selection of the six states (Adamawa, Kano, Benue, Oyo, Akwa-Ibom and Abia), one each from the six geopolitical zones. A purposive sampling technique was used to select schools that participated in the study. This was done in such a way that only schools that have previously undergone an accreditation exercise, irrespective of their accreditation status (failed, passed, or partial), were selected. A proportionate random sampling technique was adopted to select schools with varied accreditation status (full, partial and failed). While simple random sampling was used to select the schools that made up the final sample. In all one hundred and eight (108) fully accredited schools and six (6) partially accredited schools, and six (6) failed schools participated in the study. The sample that participated in the study was made up of 1703 school Staff (principals and teachers) from 120 secondary schools from six states in Nigeria. After the data collected were cleaned, 1363 responses, representing 83.67%, were found to be usable for the data analysis.

The instrument used for data collection was a questionnaire tagged “Accreditation Evaluation Questionnaire for Secondary School Staff (AEQSSS)”. This instrument was designed to gather demographic data and quantitative ratings on the effectiveness of accreditation processes. The questionnaire was validated by experts in Test and Measurement, achieving a high reliability coefficient of 0.97, as determined by Cronbach's Alpha (Ahmed et al 2024). The quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) and inferential statistics, including t-tests and ANOVA, to test the study's hypotheses at a 0.05 level of significance. Descriptive statistics provided a summary of the data, while inferential statistics were used to draw conclusions about the population based on the sample (Hazra, 2023).

Results and Discussions

This section essentially focused on data presentation, analysis, and discussion of results obtained from the research study.

Table 1a

Perception of Respondents in Schools with Full Accreditation Status on the Effectiveness of the NECO Accreditation Exercise in Assessing the Quality of Teaching-Learning Activities and

Opinion Statement for School	SA		A		D		SD		Total
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	
The accreditation process adequately assesses the quality of teaching and learning in Secondary Schools.	686	50.78	510	37.75	73	5.40	82	6.07	1351
School accreditation has contributed to improved record keeping activities at the school level.	645	47.74	561	41.52	89	6.59	56	4.15	1351
NECO's accreditation practices have resulted in notable improvement in the academic performance of students from accredited schools.	416	30.79	716	53.00	169	12.51	50	3.70	1351
Accreditation visits have helped schools to lay more emphasis on adequate coverage of the school curriculum.	554	41.01	611	45.23	121	8.96	65	4.81	1351
Periodic accreditation of schools has encouraged and sustained the quality of education at the secondary school level.	487	36.05	680	50.33	143	10.58	41	3.03	1351
Accreditation of schools encourages schools to employ more qualified teachers to enhance their accreditation status.	529	39.16	541	40.04	223	16.51	58	4.29	1351
The quality of teaching staff in schools usually improves as a result of accreditation.	410	30.35	660	48.85	218	16.14	63	4.66	1351
Accreditation exercise is effective in assessing adequacy of teaching and learning activities in schools.	408	30.20	705	52.18	179	13.25	59	4.37	1351
Accreditation of schools have helped schools to procure more school facilities for teaching and learning.	654	48.41	503	37.23	123	9.10	71	5.26	1351
School accreditation helps schools to attain minimum standard in terms of infrastructural facilities.	462	34.20	614	45.45	211	15.62	64	4.74	1351
The quality and quantity of laboratory facilities usually improve because of accreditation.	526	38.93	568	42.04	194	14.36	63	4.66	1351
Schools make efforts to improve on infrastructural facilities to pass accreditation exercise.	523	38.71	595	44.04	154	11.40	79	5.85	1351
NECO accreditation exercise is effective in assessing schools' infrastructural facilities.	396	29.31	737	54.55	169	12.51	49	3.63	1351

Source: Computed from 2023 NECO field data survey. **Note:** Freq = Frequency, SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree

The analysis in Table 1a reveals that a significant majority of school staff perceive the NECO accreditation exercise as positively impacting various aspects of secondary education. Specifically, in record keeping, 89.26% of staff agree that accreditation has enhanced record-keeping practices in the school. Also, in the area of quality of teaching and Learning, about 88.55% affirm that NECO accreditation effectively assesses teaching and learning quality. Furthermore, concerning sustaining quality education, 86.38% believed that periodic accreditation has promoted and sustained quality education. Additionally, in terms of infrastructure development, 85.64% agree that accreditation has facilitated the procurement of school facilities. In the aspect of laboratory facilities, 80.97% support the notion that accreditation improves laboratory facilities. In respect of teacher employment, about 79.20% concur that accreditation encourages schools to

employ more qualified teachers. These findings suggest that the NECO accreditation exercise is perceived as an effective mechanism for enhancing the quality of teaching and learning and improving infrastructure facilities in secondary schools.

Table 1b

Perception of Respondents in Schools that Have Partial Accreditation on the Effectiveness of the NECO Accreditation Exercise in Assessing the Quality of Teaching-Learning Activities and Infrastructural Facilities in Schools.

Opinion Statement for School	SA		A		D		SD		Total
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	
The accreditation process adequately assesses the quality of teaching and learning in Secondary Schools.	2	33.33	2	33.33	2	33.33	0	0.00	6
School accreditation has contributed to improved record keeping activities at the school level.	1	16.67	3	50.00	1	16.67	1	16.67	6
NECO's accreditation practices have resulted in notable improvement in the academic performance of students from accredited schools.	2	33.33	1	16.67	2	33.33	1	16.67	6
Accreditation visits have helped schools to lay more emphasis on adequate coverage of the school curriculum.	1	16.67	1	16.67	2	33.33	2	33.33	6
Periodic accreditation of schools has encouraged and sustained the quality of education at the secondary school level.	3	50.00	2	33.33	1	16.67	0	0.00	6
Accreditation of schools encourages schools to employ more qualified teachers to enhance their accreditation status.	1	16.67	1	16.67	3	50.00	1	16.67	6
The quality of teaching staff in schools usually improves as a result of accreditation.	1	16.67	1	16.67	3	50.00	1	16.67	6
Accreditation exercise is effective in assessing the adequacy of teaching and learning activities in schools.	2	33.33	2	33.33	1	16.67	1	16.67	6
Accreditation of schools has helped schools to procure more school facilities for teaching and learning.	2	33.33	2	33.33	1	16.67	1	16.67	6
School accreditation helps schools to attain minimum standard in terms of infrastructural facilities.	3	50.00	1	16.67	1	16.67	1	16.67	6
The quality and quantity of laboratory facilities usually improve because of accreditation.	2	33.33	2	33.33	2	33.33	0	0.00	6
Schools make efforts to improve on infrastructural facilities to pass accreditation exercise.	4	66.67	2	33.33	0	0.00	0	0.00	6
NECO accreditation exercise is effective in assessing schools' infrastructural facilities.	3	50.00	2	33.33	1	16.67	0	0.00	6

Table 1b shows the school Staff's perception from schools with partial accreditation status on the effectiveness of NECO accreditation exercise in assessing the quality of teaching-learning activities and infrastructural facilities in the school system. The result indicates that the majority of school staff opined that NECO accreditation exercise impact a positive influence on various academic activities of secondary education. Specifically, 100% of respondents believe that Schools make efforts to improve on infrastructural facilities to pass the accreditation exercise, while 83.33% agree that periodic accreditation of schools has encouraged and sustained the

quality of education at the secondary school level. Additionally, 83.33% affirm that NECO accreditation exercise is effective in assessing schools' infrastructural facilities, while 66.67% support the notion that school accreditation helps schools to attain a minimum standard in terms of infrastructural facilities.

In the same vein, 66.66% agree that the accreditation process adequately assesses the quality of teaching and learning in Secondary Schools, while 66.66% support the idea that the quality and quantity of laboratory facilities usually improve because of accreditation. Furthermore, 66.67% support that school accreditation has contributed to improved record-keeping activities at the school level, while 66.66% agree that accreditation of schools have helped schools to procure more school facilities for teaching and learning. The result also reflected that 50.00% members of the school staff concur that NECO's accreditation practices have resulted in notable improvement in the academic performance of students from accredited schools, while 50.00% disagree about it. This suggests a general agreement that NECO accreditation exercise effectively enhances the quality of teaching and learning activities at the secondary school level.

Table 1c

Perception of Respondents in Schools That Have Failed Accreditation on the Effectiveness of the NECO Accreditation Exercise in Assessing the Quality of Teaching-Learning Activities and Infrastructural Facilities in Schools.

Opinion Statement for School	SA		A		D		SD		Total
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	
The accreditation process adequately assesses the quality of teaching and learning in Secondary Schools.	1	16.67	1	16.67	3	50.0	1	16.67	6
School accreditation has contributed to improved record keeping activities at the school level.	2	33.33	1	16.67	2	33.3	1	16.67	6
NECO's accreditation practices have resulted in notable improvement in the academic performance of students from accredited schools.	1	16.67	1	16.67	3	50.0	1	16.67	6
Accreditation visits have helped schools to lay more emphasis on adequate coverage of the school curriculum.	3	50.00	1	16.67	2	33.3	0	0.00	6
Periodic accreditation of schools has encouraged and sustained the quality of education at the secondary school level.	1	16.67	1	16.67	2	33.3	2	33.33	6
Accreditation of schools encourages schools to employ more qualified teachers to enhance accreditation status.	2	33.33	2	33.33	1	16.6	1	16.67	6
The quality of teaching staff in schools usually improves as a result of accreditation.	1	16.67	2	33.33	2	33.3	1	16.67	6
Accreditation exercise is effective in assessing the adequacy of teaching and learning activities in schools.	3	50.00	2	33.33	1	16.6	0	0.00	6
Accreditation of schools has helped schools to procure more school facilities for teaching and learning.	1	16.67	1	16.67	3	50.0	1	16.67	6
School accreditation helps schools attain the minimum standard in terms of infrastructural facilities.	1	16.67	0	0.00	3	50.0	2	33.33	6
The quality and quantity of laboratory facilities usually improve because of accreditation.	0	0.00	2	33.33	2	33.3	2	33.33	6
Schools make efforts to improve on infrastructural facilities to pass the accreditation exercise.	3	50.00	2	33.33	1	16.6	0	0.00	6
NECO accreditation exercise is effective in assessing schools' infrastructural facilities.	2	33.33	2	33.33	1	16.6	1	16.67	6

Source: Computed from 2023 NECO field data survey. **Note:** Freq = Frequency, SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree

The perception of staff in Schools that has failed accreditation on the effectiveness of the NECO accreditation exercise in assessing the quality of teaching-learning activities and infrastructural facilities in school is as illustrated in Table 1c. the perception of respondents indicates that a significant majority of school staff members agree that NECO accreditation exercise effectively enhances the quality of teaching learning activities and infrastructural facilities in secondary school level. This demonstrates a consensus that NECO's accreditation processes significantly contribute to improving the quality of teaching-learning activities and infrastructural facilities in the school system. A substantial 83.33% of staff members concur that accreditation exercise is effective in assessing the adequacy of teaching-learning activities in schools. The same percentage also affirm that one of the primary purposes of school accreditation is to help schools make efforts

to improve on infrastructural facilities in order to pass accreditation evaluation exercise.

Furthermore, 66.67% believe that accreditation visits have helped schools to lay more emphasis on adequate coverage of the school curriculum, while 66.66% of school staff support the opinion that NECO accreditation exercise is effective in assessing schools' infrastructural facilities. In addition, 66.66% uphold that accreditation of schools encourages schools to employ more qualified teachers to enhance accreditation status, and 50.00% of school staff confirm that the quality of teaching staff in schools usually improves as a result of the accreditation exercise. These further reveal that the accreditation exercise is effective in enhancing the quality of teaching-learning activities and infrastructural facilities in the secondary school system.

Hypothesis: There is no significant difference among respondents from schools that have Full, Partial and Failed accreditation status on the effectiveness of NECO accreditation exercise.

Table 2

A One-Way Between-Groups Analysis of Variance of the Mean Responses of Staff From Schools With Full, Partial, and Failed Accreditation Status on the Effectiveness of NECO's Accreditation Exercises.

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	2.282	2	1.141	8.866	.001
Within Groups	5.018	39	.129		
Total	7.300	41			

Note: Df = Degree of freedom, F = F-Ratio, Sig. = Significance Criterion

Table 3

Test of Homogeneity of Variances of the Mean Responses of Staff from Schools With Full, Partial, and Failed Accreditation Status on the Effectiveness of NECO's Accreditation Exercises

Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
7.663	2	39	.002

Note: df1 = degrees of freedom between the groups, df2 = degrees of freedom within the groups, Sig. = Significance Criterion

Table 4

Robust Tests of Equality of Means for the Mean Responses of Staff From Schools With Full, Partial, and Failed Accreditation Status on the Effectiveness of NECO's Accreditation Exercises

	Statistic ^a	df1	df2	Sig.
Welch	13.522	2	18.768	.000
Brown-Forsythe	8.866	2	26.977	.001

a. Asymptotically F distributed. **Note:** df1 = degrees of freedom between the groups, df2 = degrees of freedom within the groups, Sig. = Significance Criterion

Table 5

Post Hoc Tests: Multiple Comparisons of the Mean Responses of Staff from Schools with Full, Partial, and Failed Accreditation Status on the Effectiveness of NECO's Accreditation Exercises.

(I) Group	(J) Group	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Full	Partial	.313547420	.135581901	.066	-.01677182	.64386666
	Failed	.569957676*	.135581901	.000	.23963844	.90027691
Partial	Full	-.313547420	.135581901	.066	-.64386666	.01677182
	Failed	.256410256	.135581901	.155	-.07390898	.58672949
Failed	Full	-.569957676*	.135581901	.000	-.90027691	-.23963844
	Partial	-.256410256	.135581901	.155	-.58672949	.07390898

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level. **Note:** I = first group, J = second group, Std. Error = standard error, Sig. = Significance Criterion

A one-way between-groups analysis of variance was conducted to test the null hypothesis. The results in Table 2 indicated a statistically significant difference in the mean responses among the three accreditation groups, $F(2, 39) = 8.87$, $p = .001$, suggesting that the null hypothesis should be rejected. This implies that perceptions of the effectiveness of the NECO accreditation exercise significantly varied depending on the accreditation outcome of schools. However, Levene's Test for Homogeneity of Variance (Table 3) was significant, $F(2, 39) = 7.66$, $p = .002$, indicating a violation of the assumption of equal variances. As a result, robust tests were conducted to confirm the findings (Table 4). Both Welch's $F(2, 18.77) = 13.52$, $p < .001$ and Brown-Forsythe's $F(2, 26.98) = 8.87$, $p = .001$ supported the conclusion that group differences were statistically significant. The effect size (eta squared) was calculated as .31 ($2.282 / 7.3$), indicating a large

effect, and suggesting that accreditation status accounts for a substantial proportion of the variance in perceived effectiveness. Post-hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test (Table 5) revealed that staff from schools with Full Accreditation ($M = 3.17$, $SD = 0.09$) reported significantly higher mean ratings on the effectiveness of the NECO accreditation exercise compared to those from schools with Failed Accreditation ($M = 2.60$, $SD = 0.45$; $p < .001$). The difference between Full and Partial Accreditation groups ($M = 2.86$, $SD = 0.42$) approached statistical significance ($p = .066$), while the difference between Partial and Failed Accreditation groups was not statistically significant ($p = .155$). In summary, there is a statistically significant difference among respondents from schools that have Full, Partial and Failed accreditation status on the effectiveness of NECO accreditation exercise. The effectiveness of NECO's accreditation exercise was perceived differently across accreditation outcomes, with staff from fully accredited schools expressing more favourable views than those from failed institutions.

Results

The following are the findings from the study:

1. Staff from schools with full, partial and failed accreditation status perceived differently on the NECO accreditation exercise effectiveness in assessing teaching-learning activities and infrastructural facilities in Nigerian secondary schools positively.
2. School accreditation status affects school staff's perception of NECO accreditation exercise.
3. There is a statistically significant difference among respondents from schools that have Full, Partial and Failed accreditation status on the effectiveness of NECO accreditation exercise.

Discussion

The findings from Tables 1a, 1b and 1c disclose that staff from schools with full, partial and failed accreditation status perceived differently on the NECO accreditation exercise effectiveness in assessing teaching-learning activities and infrastructural facilities in Nigerian secondary schools. Although most of their perception were positive but differs from one accreditation status

school to another. This finding is in agreement with attribution theory (Weiner, 2004, Rigo *et al.*, 2023), cognitive dissonance theory (McLeod, 2008, Villines, 2024). The outcome may be due to lack of adequate preparation on the part of school with failed accreditation status, poor funding, lack of experienced and qualified teachers. The study is also in line with self-identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979)

The study also revealed that school accreditation status affects school staff's perception of NECO accreditation exercise as revealed in table 1a, 1b and 1c. there are more favourable responses from staff of school with full accreditation status which may stem from their high level of consistent preparation to attain excellent and quality in education outcome through maintenance of school academic records as a culture, strict adherence to all education policies and programmes to achieve its goals as well as exhibition of good moral practice by school staff. It may also be due to experience acquire by school administrators and teachers in other places of duty as well as excitement derived from direct involvement with team of experts in the accreditation exercise, granting them a deeper understanding of the exercise's criteria, objectives, and outcomes. This insight allows them to appreciate the full impact of the accreditation exercise on educational quality. This finding is in line with the theory of self-serving bias (Cherry, 2018, 2023, Allen *et al.*, 2020).

Notwithstanding the differences in response level, it is important to note that staff from school with varied accreditation status agree on the overall effectiveness of the NECO accreditation exercise in assessing and improving the quality of teaching-learning and infrastructural facilities in secondary school system. This consensus underscores the significance of the accreditation process in enhancing educational standards, particularly in terms of how it influences teaching methodologies and student learning outcomes. These findings are consonant with the conclusions of previous studies by Juneja and Shikha (2019), Orji (2012), Ayeni and Adelabu (2012), Eboka and Inomiesa (2015) who agree that quality has been of local interests to education stakeholders and thus highlighting the exercise as the central role of quality assurance in education. The consistent focus on improving the quality of teaching-learning and facilities across

these studies reflects the widespread yearning among educational institutions, governments, and development partners for continuous improvement and sustainability of educational standards which can be shape through proper accreditation exercise.

The analysis presented in table 2, 3, 4 and 5 revealed that there is a statistically significant difference among respondents from schools that have Full, Partial and Failed accreditation status on the effectiveness of NECO accreditation exercise. This may be due to the fact that many schools administrators do not see accreditation exercise as an important quality assurance mechanism nor take the exercise very serious as a means of measuring standard. Rather, they view it as exercise full of inconsistency, bureaucracy and favouritism. This negative preposition about the accreditation exercise hinders their enthusiasm and progress to deliver excellently on their job functions These findings support the studies of Ugwoke (2010) who reported the perception of some schools on the accreditation process to be overly complicated, stressful and costly, while others perceived it as being a necessary procedure for improving and maintaining educational standards in the school system. The finding also validates theory of attribution (Weiner, 2004, Rigo *et al.*, 2023), and self-serving bias theory (Cherry, 2018, 2023, Allen *et al.*, 2020). Also, Ogunlade, 2018 in his study stressed that the consequences of accreditation statuses always have far-reaching influence on both the academic and administrative functions of the school.

These findings are also in line with the work of Okeke and Nwoye (2018) who found out that various schools tend to view accreditation as an external imposition, whereas many other schools, which are generally more familiar with governmental regulations, may view accreditation as a normal and expected procedure. The authors further stated that school's perception on NECO's accreditation exercise may be influenced by factors such as the school's ownership, location, and financial capability. In the other hand, schools' accreditation status may significantly shape the school staff perception on NECO's role and the value of the accreditation exercise. Based on this, Ajayi and Ekundayo (2018) noted that accreditation processes often involve peer reviews and evaluations, providing valuable feedback to educators for enhancing their teaching methods and curriculum delivery as well as improving on the standard of facilities.

The authors also assert that stakeholders (teachers, educators and administrators) perceive accreditation positively, as it encourages professional development and accountability. In agreement with the current worldwide educational reforms, the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), as cited in Vaccari and Gardinier (2019), has called for and even championed the cause to ensure that education is not only accessible to all but also that the right quality of it is made available. Ultimately, stakeholders generally support accreditation as a mechanism for maintaining educational standards. However, challenges such as: bureaucracy, inconsistency, favouritism and corruption need to be addressed to ensure the sustainability of accreditation's goals and objectives.

Conclusion

This study set out to explore how the accreditation status of secondary schools in Nigeria influences staff perceptions of the effectiveness of the National Examinations Council (NECO) accreditation exercise. By engaging with over 1,300 education professionals across diverse geopolitical contexts, and situating the investigation within psychological frameworks such as attribution theory and social identity theory, this research provides a layered understanding of how institutional outcomes shape evaluative perceptions. The findings point to a discernible pattern: school staff perceptions of NECO's accreditation process are significantly influenced by whether their institutions have received full, partial, or failed accreditation. Those in fully accredited schools tended to view the process as transparent, meaningful, and beneficial to teaching and learning. By contrast, staff from partially accredited or failed institutions were more ambivalent, sometimes questioning the fairness, utility, or consistency of the exercise. These variations speak to deeper institutional dynamics and subjective interpretations, rather than simply technical compliance with accreditation criteria.

At a broader level, the study underscores the relational nature of quality assurance. Accreditation is not merely a checklist of standards, it is also a symbolic and psychological interaction between evaluators and institutions. When schools feel recognised and supported, they are more likely to engage constructively with the process. But where the process is seen as punitive

or opaque, it may reinforce feelings of exclusion or disillusionment. This insight reinforces the importance of fostering trust and transparency in public education governance.

Ultimately, the research confirms that while NECO's accreditation exercises are generally seen as contributing positively to educational quality, this perception is not universal. It varies in line with institutional realities and the lived experiences of school staff. The implication is clear: if accreditation is to serve as a true catalyst for improvement, it must be implemented in a way that acknowledges the diverse contexts and constraints that schools operate within. More than a verdict, it should function as a developmental tool, one that affirms strengths, addresses gaps, and inspires continuous growth.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following are recommended:

1. NECO should always strive to put measures in place to ensure more effectiveness and transparency in her accreditation process, ensuring schools understand requirements and criteria through Collaboration with educational stakeholders (Ministry of Education, school administrators, and teachers).
2. NECO should conduct sensitization programmes for school owners and administrators by organize capacity building workshops and training programmes for school administrators and teachers, focusing on accreditation standards and quality improvement strategies in order to close gap among staff's perception of NECO accreditation exercise.
3. NECO as an accreditation body should adopt a more flexible approach to accreditation exercise that takes into account the unique challenges faced by schools in different regions of Nigeria without jeopardizing standard or quality.

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