

The Role of the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) in Addressing Accreditation and Quality Assurance Challenges in Uganda: A Critical Analysis

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Abstract: In this review, our main purpose was to examine the role of the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) in Uganda in addressing accreditation and quality assurance challenges in Uganda through the lens of a critical analysis. Through qualitative approach we adopted systematic review. Our analysis was based on 20 corpus derived from Google Scholar, book chapters from JSTOR and the Uganda National Library database with inclusion criteria of peer reviewed articles published from 2015-2025 and centred on addressing our subject of concern, that is, accreditation, quality assurance, higher education all with reference to NCHE as regulatory body. During analysis, thematic and content analysis was adopted by extracting themes and subthemes from each paper collected and then engaged in debate with every theme to ensure they were well grounded in the study and gaps were identified and literature well synthesized forming the base for our conclusion and recommendations. The study results showed that all these challenges arise as a result of bureaucratic inefficiencies, resource limitations and inadequate training. Also, this study uncovered that quality assurance mechanisms are challenged within NCHE because of rigid evaluation criteria, insufficient stakeholder engagement and technological impact. Collectively, these factors are obstacles hampering NCHE ability to successfully evaluate and accredit institutions. Collaborative efforts among stakeholders, policy reforms, and a commitment to improve educational standards are recommended. Ultimately, the outcome of this review underlines the great significance of an all-inclusive approach to accreditation which accommodate the different needs of institutions and the larger educational background.

Keywords: National Council for Higher Education, accreditation, quality assurance, Uganda, higher education challenges.

INTRODUCTION

Accreditation authorities such as National Council for Higher Education, develop and maintain the criteria which serve as the benchmarks that institutions must reach or exceed to be recognized as trustworthy and legitimate providers of higher education (Kayyali, 2024). Unfortunately, there is outcry of the quality of education being provided by institutions of higher learning as many universities emerge and with some not chartered yet they are in operation and training the citizens which has brought a lot of public doubt lately on the quality of education received from those institutions. This made us to inquire about the role of NCHE in addressing such challenges.

More to this, higher education role is indispensable especially in the socio-economic development of Uganda. It stands as a pillar to equip individuals with knowledge and skills necessary for personal and national advancement (Ndibuuza, Langa & Bisaso, 2021). Generally, higher education has an important role in the development of individuals and society, shaping future leaders, professionals, and citizens. Kayyali (2024) construed that this is a foundation of progress, innovation and intellectual progression.

In Uganda, the only body charged to oversee higher education institutions is the National

Council for Higher Education (NCHE) and it's mandated to ensure that these institutions meet the established standards of quality and accreditation (Kasozi, 2017). This goes above just compliance. It extends to credibility impact of educational qualifications, covers the employability of graduates and in turn ensure that there is necessary human capital for the growth and development of the nation.

With all these critical roles, we have identified that NCHE still battles with countless issues of which the study by Bakkabulindi (2024) affirmed that it hampers its effectiveness in upholding educational standards. These problems have been attributed to over expansion of higher education institutions in the country as this keeps the NCHE on its toes due to the rigorous processes involved in accreditation. The more the institutional growth, the more the complexities of trying to make sure that quality standards arise thus justify why our study is timely and significant to address this lag within the NCHE.

More so, accreditation process is the bedrock to attain quality in higher education. Unfortunately, what happens if the body charged to regulate these affairs suffers bureaucratic inefficiencies, inadequate resources, and limited stakeholder

involvement (Kayyali, 2024), such foundation is doomed in its accreditation protocols and compromise the overall quality of education that institutions for higher learning are providing, thus breeding ground for corruption. This justifies more why our review is critical at this moment to address the role of NCHE in tackling these challenges.

In a study conducted by Bichia (2025) it expanded that ineffectual accreditation processes diminish the quality of education and half backed graduates produced for the job market. When this happens both students and the economy of the country is affected, thus the reason why it is very important that this problem is addressed to improve the quality of education in Uganda.

According to Imolong, Adesola and Nwakaego (2025) they are of the opinion that when accountability is boosted in higher education management both resource utilization, governance and competent graduates thrive. Also, with such human capital, they are better in position to drive technological and industrial innovation. Once these accountability criteria are implemented, higher education institutions can now stand as a transformative agent of sustainable national development.

Notwithstanding, the significance of this review is engraved on its implications for policymakers, educators, and researchers. They will likely to benefit from the findings especially on the accreditation challenges identified and the recommendations that are action driven to help improve the quality of education in Uganda. Again, quality assurance mechanisms results may act as a road map for educational reforms. It might also play a solid background for future research on accreditation process for developing countries that might be battling with similar institutional challenges.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

We have adopted qualitative approach through a systematic review of the literature in our study. The reason for this was to enable us explore the role of the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) in addressing accreditation and quality assurance challenges in Uganda through a critical analysis. The search strategy we used were mainly on identifying only related research, reports and scholarly articles which were in line with our inquiry on the subject of concern, the role of the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) in

addressing accreditation and quality assurance challenges in Uganda.

The major databases from which our corpus used for analysis were derived from Google Scholar, book chapters from JSTOR and the Uganda National Library database.

The main key terms we searched were "NCHE Uganda," "accreditation challenges," "quality assurance," "higher education," and "Uganda education system." We made our inclusion criteria to only use peer reviewed articles published from 2015-2025 and must be centred on addressing our subject of concern, which is, accreditation, quality assurance, higher education all with reference to NCHE as regulatory body. On the exclusion criteria, we ensured no inclusion of non-peer reviewed articles, outdated sources not within the time frame we chose to assess.

During the screening protocol, we crossed checked each article and books picked to ascertain its relevance and quality and this helped us eliminate those that were not of concern and that is how we came to a total number of 20 articles out of the 72 papers we had gathered for screening and critical analysis.

Ethically, though there was no direct data collection from humans or respondents that required informed consent, we maintained research ethics by ensuring that all sources used in this study are verifiable and every author were cited and appended in the reference list to maintain credibility of this work.

We did thematic and content analysis by extracting themes and subthemes from each paper collected and then engaged in debate with every theme to ensure they are well grounded in the study and gaps were identified and literature well synthesized forming the base for our conclusion and recommendations. Ultimately, this thematic approach was suitable as it helped us make a structured analysis in our study findings.

FINDINGS

Theme 1: Challenges in Accreditation Processes

The first crucial theme that we addressed was to do with the challenges in accreditation process. This is because accreditation process in Uganda is a very important aspect of maintaining quality education of higher institutions. Regrettably, the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) battles with so many challenges which further complicate this process. Major challenges

identified arises from bureaucratic inefficiencies, resource limitations and inadequate training. So, all these limitations contribute to the impediments of NCHE ability to effectively evaluate and accredit institutions. For this reason, we delve deeper to unpacking these complexities by focusing on each subtheme with evidences from other scholars engaged in this debate in a bid to develop policy recommendations that addresses these concerns.

Subtheme 1.1: Bureaucratic Hurdles

The first subtheme discovered falls under bureaucratic hurdles during the accreditation process in Uganda. From report, we saw institutions not happy with lengthy approval process and this has been said to happen due to delays which take months and as well amount to frustration among the institutional heads and students alike. National Council for Higher Education (2023) report confirms this finding that in some cases institutions which submitted their application get perplexed of their accreditation status and uncertainty that erupts as a result of no feedback for long period of time on the side of NCHE.

Furthermore, this process brings about lack of transparency as uncovered by (Bohlens, 2025; Pambudi, Haryaningsih, Andriani & Berliyanti, 2025). This is because many institutions showed feelings of uncertainty of the criteria used for accreditation decisions and this makes their efforts futile in meeting the required standard. So, it is very crucial to promote transparent criteria in helping these institutions meet the standard and bridge the long protocol of no feedback to applications.

According Roberts Otyola, Sam, Joseph, Peter, Hanns and Peter (2025) study, it also shows that one of the major challenges is the rapid expansion of higher education institutions, particularly in the private sector. This has made it difficult to maintain consistent oversight. Their statistics showed that in the 2020/21 academic year alone, the number of HEIs increased from 227 in 2019/20 to 246. With private institutions comprising approximately 74% of all HEIs. This further highlight that the capacity of NCHE to regularly monitor and assess these institutions is often stretched.

Roberts Otyola *et al.*, (2025) unveils that another challenge in the nature of accreditation process lies in regional disparities. It showed that the central

region, especially the greater Kampala area and districts such as Wakiso, Mukono, Mpigi, and Masaka has high dominance in higher education with 56% of HEIs. Whereas, the northern region has only 11%. This confirms an unembellished disproportion in access to higher education. This urban concentration not only affects equitable education distribution but also limits NCHE's ability to promote national educational development evenly across all regions.

According to Ndibuza, Langa and Bisaso (2021) the challenge is attributed to less or little commitment at the national level to implement this policy. This study shows a clear discrepancy between policy and practices at institutional level. By and large, there is need to strike equilibrium in institutional concentration in regions in Uganda, and avoidance of rhetorics at implementation level so as to ensure that policy matches practice at all institutional levels.

Subtheme 1.2: Resource Limitations

The second subtheme discussed shows that resource limitation is a constraining factor that hamper NCHE ability to act effectively in their roles of addressing accreditation and quality assurance to higher education institutions. In the absence of adequate financial recourse or underfunding, NCHE is constrained in their evaluation conduct and support for institutions to meet the accreditation standard. According to a study by Parikh and Rupani (2025) affirms that they pass through a lot of hurdles to comply with accreditation requirements because of insufficient funding for essential progresses like infrastructure upgrades, faculty training, and curriculum development to meet accreditation criteria. Our findings attest that many institutions face a draw back because they lacked the financial means to do so.

Subtheme 1.3: Inadequate Training and Capacity Building

The third challenge this review uncovered was to do with inadequate training and capacity building by NCHE. We looked at it from the perspective of NCHE staff and other higher institutions it oversees. A study by Bakkabulindi (2024) shows that staff members at NCHE reported feeling unprepared to handle the complexities of the accreditation process as a result of inadequate training. We see this challenge arising as a result of inconsistency in the application of accreditation standard or procedures and incompetence on the

side of institutional stakeholders in reference to the accreditation process.

For Roberts Otyola, *et al.*, (2025) issues such as limited staffing and resistance from some institutions during inspections or compliance processes continues to impede the effectiveness of NCHE's regulatory efforts. On this note, these challenges call for increased government support, regional policy reforms and improved institutional cooperation to enable NCHE to fully deliver on its mandate.

This study challenged this status quo and propose that this gap in training and capacity building should be handled appropriately because it will help to facilitate accreditation process in various institutions in Uganda. Therefore, it is key to develop a comprehensive training program for the NCHE staff and also institutional heads should work on their part to understand fully the accreditation requirements to avoid further delays.

Theme 2: Quality Assurance Mechanisms

This theme is another aspect that played a great importance in our inquiry. Quality assurance mechanisms help to ensure that high standard of education is maintained. Also, that educational providers maintain the high quality of the services they provide. Sadly, our findings shows that these mechanisms have been challenged within NCHE due to factors like rigid evaluation criteria, insufficient stakeholder engagement and technological impact. In order to develop effective strategies for better quality assurance practices in the institutions for higher learning in Uganda, it is significant to address these limiting factors.

Subtheme 2.1: Evaluation Criteria

The issue of evaluation criteria was a major recurring theme among the stakeholders. A study by Becher and Kogan (2025) offers that some educators do say that the criteria is overly rigid and not context conscious despite the criteria being made to enhance quality education. This rigidity can hinder innovation and adaptability in higher education as institutions may feel pressured to comply to measure that are not favorable to their strength and context challenges.

More concerns shows that evaluation criteria favor quantitative matrices than qualitative assessment which makes them leave out crucial information that could have been beneficial in the evaluation process. Marzouk (2025) gave a good example that institutions were frequently evaluated based on student enrollment numbers and graduation rates.

Substantively, this only cannot wholesomely qualify quality education though enrolment and graduation rate counts. We argue in favour of inclusivity especially qualitative assessment such as student satisfaction surveys and alumni success stories as this could show the employability rate of the graduates and economic growth, they are contributing in our work force instead of just depending on how many were enrolled and graduated and no one cares what happens to them after. Adopting this measure will help provide a more holistic view of institutional performance.

In line with the above, Basheer, Ahmed, Bahroun and Anane (2025) study conjectured that there is lack of feedback integration from the various educational stakeholders in the evaluation criteria. This further hints on problem of inclusivity. Side by side, this issue poses a question of the relevance and application to the real-world situation. More participatory approach is required to enhance quality of education in this country.

Subtheme 2.2: Stakeholder Engagement

The issues of stakeholder engagement continue as core concept in our discussion because effective quality assurance requires a well representation of all stakeholders ranging from the faculty, students, and industry. On the contrary, a study by Chikazinga (2025) orchestrates that there is disconnection between NCHE and these stakeholders. This leads to a lack of input in the accreditation process. The implication is that national policymakers and quality assurance agencies should not consider university actors as 'passive recipients' that mutely accept quality assurance reforms, but rather seriously attend to them as both 'makers' and 'shapers' of policy in order to develop quality assurance systems that can be genuinely embraced. Therefore, to ensure that the criteria remain grounded and reflect what the workforce needs, it is crucial to engage all the stakeholders in the accreditation process.

Another challenge is the absence of structured mechanisms for stakeholder feedback. This also hinders NCHE ability to adapt its processes to the changing need of our present-day education. Kartha and Turyahebwa (2025) shows the concerns of employers in regard to graduate preparedness for the work environment but this feedback is rarely solicited in the accreditation process. Thus, it is important to establish a regular forum for dialogue between stakeholders to enhance trust and promote collaborative strategies to improve quality assurance practices.

Lastly, Bohlens (2025) also contributed to our debate under stakeholder engagement expanding that the lack of student representation in the accreditation process means that those most affected by quality of education are sidelined yet they have the ability to make substantive contribution in the overall teaching pedagogy, curriculum relevance, and overall institutional performance due to their daily interaction within the different faction of educational systems. We believe that student inclusion in the accreditation process would empower them and also ensure that their opinions count in the process.

Subtheme 2.3: Impact of Technology on Quality Assurance

Our last subtheme looked at the integration of technology in the accreditation process emerging as a critical factor in enhancing quality assurance mechanisms. A study by Kapoor, Khalique and Khan (2024) opines that COVID-19 pandemic augmented the approval of digital tools for remote learning and evaluation. This shows its efficacy in modernizing accreditation processes. On the other hand, the extent to which NCHE has adopted technology in the accreditation process varies.

On an advantageous level, institutions using digital platform receives faster feedback as opposed to those going solely on traditional approach of paperwork which are liable to inaccuracies.

Conspicuously, NCHE can achieve its mandate by capitalizing on digital infrastructure. Also, it is important to train its staff and other faction of institutions it oversees. In this regard, the study suggest that government and private institutions should collaborate to raise funds for this project to be successful. The success of this project is likely to give a new outlook on Uganda higher education output and enhance timely delivery in accreditation procedures by NCHE.

DISCUSSION

One of our findings shows that most of the challenges faced by NCHE arises from bureaucratic hurdles. Bohlens (2025); Pambudi, Haryaningsih, Andriani and Berliyanti (2025) study logically confirms with this results and advocates for more efficient processes to promote transparency. The relevance of promoting transparent criteria is to help institutions meet the required criteria and close the gap in prolong application process with no feedback. On the other hand, Roberts Otyola, et al., (2025) looked at solving issues to do with resource limitations as a

key point toward NCHE empowerment to fulfill its mandate smoothly.

Furthermore, our discussion touches the issues of evaluation criteria. These results showed that flexibility approach is the way to go because it houses inclusivity which is a key determinant for collaboration and stakeholder engagement as drivers of quality assurance. These findings reverberated with current literature which place core discussion on the relevance of adaptive strategies in accreditation processes urging NCHE to advance its practices in response to the need of higher education bearing context and specific institutional challenges in mind.

Substantively, a comparative study by Ngenge (2024) concurred with these findings that credibility and performance of higher education institutions can be factored in the regulatory framework bearing in mind their contextual challenges in order. This might lead to faster accreditation processes. For Kartha and Turyahebwa (2025) establishment of regular forum for dialogue among stakeholders is vital because it helps in trust building and promote collaborative strategies to improve quality assurance practices.

Policy Implications

This review has significant implications for policy within institutions of higher learning in Uganda. It suggests that policymakers should strive to reform accreditation processes as this is likely to enrich its effectiveness. This can be done by setting evaluation criteria to reflect the unique characteristics of different institutions. Also make sure there is enough funding for NCHE and higher education institutions.

This study also encourages policymakers to establish a platform that can support collaboration among stakeholder to address concerns, promote inclusivity and promote collaborative quality education in the country. This can be achieved through workshops to promote sharing of insights thus strengthens the bond amongst stakeholders of higher education as both makers and shapers of quality education in Uganda.

Lastly, our findings shows that there is a gap in training and capacity building for both NCHE and higher education institutions. We recognize how important this is and we task the policymaker to develop training programs targeted at skills enhancement of its staff members and other institutions of higher education that are agent of

the accreditation processes for better outcome and compliance with standardised quality criteria.

Recommendations for Policy Action

In this review we recommend simplification and accelerated accreditation process by the NCHE. This will bring about decline in application feedback delays, reduction in errors and increase transparency. Therefore, implementation of digital platforms for application submissions and tracking is the surest way to quicken this process and establish clearer communication.

Fund allotment is necessary to build infrastructure, boost capacity of staff through training and development of quality program for enhancement initiatives. So, we recommend that more financial resource should be awarded to NCHE and higher education institutions to support compliance with accreditation criteria.

Contribution of the Paper

This review has brought to light a vivid perspective on the role of the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) in addressing accreditation and quality assurance challenges in Uganda higher education sector through a critical analysis lens. This has made an impactful discovery on the factors limiting NCHE ability to carry out its mandate effectively. Noteworthy, the recommendations of this paper have laid the foundation for future research and policy development. Lastly, the findings uncovered in this review are not only significant to Uganda context but may relate to other developing countries struggling with similar challenges in higher education. Therefore, it would be a starting point for their analysis and policy reforms.

CONCLUSION

The main agenda that propelled this inquiry was to assess the role of the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) in addressing accreditation and quality assurance challenges in Uganda through a critical analysis lens. We adopted a qualitative approach and systematic review. From the study finding, it recognized that the National Council for Higher Education is the regulatory body charged to oversee the affairs of quality education in Uganda's higher education system.

The study deduced that all these challenges arise as a result of bureaucratic inefficiencies, resource limitations and inadequate training. Also, this paper concluded that quality assurance mechanisms are challenged within NCHE because

of rigid evaluation criteria, insufficient stakeholder engagement and technological impact.

Collectively, these factors are hindering NCHE ability to successfully evaluate and accredit institutions. Collaborative efforts among stakeholders, policy reforms, and a commitment to improve educational standards are recommended. Ultimately, the outcome of this review underlines the great significance of a holistic approach to accreditation which accommodate the different needs of institutions and the larger educational background.

Bearing in mind that this review was inexhaustive, we saw there is a need for future investigation to be carried out specifically on examining the impact of accreditation on institutional performance and student outcomes in Uganda.

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