

To cite this article: Dr. Wandera Roberts Otyola, Barasa Sam, Katende Joseph, Tsubira Simon Peter, Akakimpa Hanns and Kyewalabye Peter (2025). EXAMINING THE ROLE OF THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN ASSESSMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN UGANDA, International Journal of Education and Social Science Research (IJESSR) 8 (2): 360-373 Article No. 1053, Sub Id 1652

EXAMINING THE ROLE OF THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN ASSESSMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN UGANDA

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DOI : <https://doi.org/10.37500/IJESSR.2025.8224>

ABSTRACT

This study explores the role of the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) in the assessment and regulation of higher education institutions in Uganda. Established in 2002, the NCHE has played a crucial role in enhancing the quality of higher education through accreditation, policy formulation, and institutional evaluation. The research examines the processes and strategies employed by the NCHE in assessing educational standards, focusing on accreditation procedures, quality assurance mechanisms, and the alignment of higher education outputs with national development goals. Through qualitative analysis, including interviews with key stakeholders and review of NCHE reports, this study investigates the effectiveness of the Council's interventions in improving the quality of education and ensuring compliance with national and international standards. The findings highlight both the achievements and challenges faced by the NCHE in fostering a dynamic, competitive, and globally relevant higher education sector in Uganda.

KEYWORDS: Higher education, educational assessment, educational standards

INTRODUCTION

Higher education plays a fundamental role in national development by fostering intellectual growth, innovation, and economic progress. In Uganda, the effectiveness of higher education institutions is largely contingent on a robust regulatory framework that ensures quality, credibility, and adherence to academic standards. The National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) was established to provide oversight, accreditation, and policy guidance to universities and other tertiary institutions. However, the dynamic and rapidly expanding higher education sector presents significant regulatory challenges, particularly in maintaining academic quality amidst increasing institutional diversity. Despite NCHE's efforts, concerns persist regarding inconsistencies in accreditation, delays in institutional assessment, and the adequacy of quality assurance mechanisms. This study seeks to explore the role of NCHE in the assessment of higher education, critically evaluating its regulatory effectiveness, the challenges it faces, and its overall impact on institutional performance and policy

implementation in Uganda. By examining these aspects, the study aims to contribute to the ongoing discourse on higher education governance and quality assurance in developing contexts.

The assessment of higher education plays a crucial role in ensuring academic quality, institutional accountability, and the alignment of educational outcomes with national development goals (Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2019). Assessment of Higher Education refers to the evaluation and measurement of academic standards, institutional quality, accreditation processes, and compliance with regulatory policies in higher education. Effective assessment frameworks provide a basis for evaluating curriculum relevance, faculty competence, research productivity, and student learning outcomes. In many countries, including Uganda, higher education assessment serves as a tool for benchmarking institutional performance against established academic and professional standards (World Bank, 2020). However, challenges such as inconsistent evaluation methodologies, inadequate assessment policies, and limited enforcement mechanisms continue to affect the credibility and effectiveness of higher education assessment processes. Without a robust assessment framework, higher education institutions risk producing graduates with inadequate competencies, leading to high unemployment rates and skill mismatches in the labor market (Turyasingura, 2021).

The National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) is the regulatory body responsible for overseeing the quality, accreditation, and governance of higher education institutions in Uganda. Established in 2001 under the Universities and Other Tertiary Institutions Act, NCHE is mandated to ensure compliance with national and international academic standards, promote research and innovation, and advise the government on higher education policies (NCHE, 2023). As the custodian of higher education quality assurance, NCHE plays a crucial role in licensing institutions, accrediting academic programs, and monitoring institutional performance to uphold the integrity of the sector. However, the regulation of higher education in Uganda has evolved significantly, shaped by historical, political, and economic factors. During the colonial era, higher education primarily served the administrative and technical needs of the British colonial government, with Makerere University, established in 1922, being the sole institution providing tertiary education. Access was highly restrictive, and the curriculum was aligned with colonial interests rather than national development (Kasozi, 2019).

Following independence in 1962, efforts to expand higher education were hindered by political instability and economic challenges. The structural adjustment programs of the late 1980s and early 1990s led to the liberalization of the education sector, resulting in the rapid proliferation of private universities and tertiary institutions. While this expansion increased access, it also raised concerns about quality assurance and institutional credibility (MoES, 2022). In response, NCHE was tasked with enforcing regulatory frameworks to safeguard educational standards and ensure institutional accountability. However, empirical studies highlight persistent challenges, including inconsistent enforcement of accreditation standards, bureaucratic inefficiencies in institutional evaluation, and limited capacity to monitor compliance, particularly within the private sector (Kasozi, 2019;

Turyasingura, 2021). Furthermore, the rapid expansion of higher education, resource constraints, and political interference have weakened NCHE's effectiveness, raising concerns about the overall quality, credibility, and global competitiveness of higher education in Uganda (MoES, 2022; World Bank, 2020).

Uganda's higher education sector has expanded significantly over the past three decades, driven by increasing demand for tertiary education and the liberalization of the sector (Kasozi, 2019). The growth of private universities and the introduction of diverse academic programs have provided more educational opportunities; however, this expansion has also led to concerns about declining academic standards, insufficient infrastructure, and the proliferation of unaccredited institutions (MoES, 2022). Reports indicate that some universities operate with outdated curricula, limited faculty capacity, and inadequate student support services, all of which undermine the quality of education (World Bank, 2020). Additionally, Uganda's higher education institutions face global competitiveness challenges, as degrees from unaccredited or substandard institutions risk losing international recognition, limiting graduates' opportunities for further education and employment abroad (Turyasingura, 2021).

The relationship between NCHE's regulatory role and the assessment of higher education is critical in determining the overall effectiveness of quality assurance mechanisms in Uganda. A well-structured regulatory framework should enhance the assessment process by ensuring that academic programs meet established benchmarks and institutions adhere to accreditation requirements. However, weaknesses in NCHE's enforcement capacity and the lack of standardized assessment criteria have led to inconsistencies in institutional evaluations, making it difficult to measure and compare the quality of education across different universities (Kasozi, 2019). Strengthening the link between regulatory oversight and educational assessment is essential for improving academic outcomes, enhancing institutional accountability, and aligning higher education with national and international quality standards.

This study is grounded in Rotter's (1966) Social Learning Theory, which posits that institutional behavior and regulatory compliance are influenced by both external control mechanisms and internal expectations. In the context of Uganda's higher education sector, institutions may respond to NCHE's regulatory role based on perceived enforcement strength, incentives for compliance, and the broader socio-political environment. The theory provides a framework for understanding how NCHE's oversight influences institutional assessment practices and how gaps in regulation contribute to variations in educational quality. By applying this theoretical perspective, the study seeks to explore the extent to which NCHE's role impacts the assessment of higher education, highlighting areas for policy intervention and institutional reform.

Purpose of the Study

To examine the role of the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) in the assessment of higher education in Uganda and its impact on academic quality, institutional compliance, and graduate competencies.

Objectives of the Study

1. To analyze the role of the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) in the accreditation of higher education institutions in Uganda
2. To assess the effectiveness of the NCHE's quality assurance mechanisms in ensuring educational standards in Uganda.
3. To examine the challenges faced by the NCHE in assessing higher education institutions in Uganda.
4. To investigate the role of the NCHE in aligning higher education programs with national development goals and global standards.

Research questions

- What is the role of the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) in the accreditation and assessment of higher education institutions in Uganda?
- How effective are the NCHE's quality assurance mechanisms in improving the standards of higher education in Uganda?
- What challenges does the NCHE face in the accreditation and assessment of higher education institutions in Uganda?
- How does the NCHE ensure that higher education programs align with Uganda's national development goals?

Significance of the Study

This study offers a comprehensive evaluation of the National Council for Higher Education's (NCHE) regulatory mechanisms in Uganda, with the goal of understanding their effectiveness in ensuring quality assessment within higher education institutions. Through a detailed SWOT analysis, the study will identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats associated with NCHE's current regulatory practices. This foundational understanding is critical for assessing how well the NCHE upholds its mandate in a rapidly evolving academic environment.

The research also seeks to identify specific gaps and challenges within the regulatory framework, particularly where NCHE mechanisms may be ineffective or insufficient. It will explore both institutional challenges—such as limited infrastructure, inadequate resources, and capacity constraints—and systemic issues like policy gaps and poor coordination among stakeholders.

Uncovering these barriers is essential to formulating effective strategies for improving regulation and quality assurance in the sector.

From the evaluation, the study will generate practical, evidence-based recommendations aimed at strengthening NCHE's role and closing identified gaps. These recommendations will be informed by best practices in higher education regulation and tailored to suit the unique context of Uganda's higher education system. Enhancing NCHE's regulatory effectiveness will ultimately lead to improved enforcement of academic standards and more consistent assessment practices across institutions.

Furthermore, the study promotes strengthened accountability and transparency among higher education institutions. By encouraging institutions to uphold high-quality programmes and report outcomes openly, the study contributes to building public trust in the higher education system. Transparent reporting also empowers students, parents, and other stakeholders to make informed decisions about educational choices.

The findings will also contribute to the improvement of NCHE's accreditation and quality assurance processes. By refining standards and aligning them with international benchmarks, the study will support the development of more efficient and robust systems for evaluating institutional performance. This, in turn, will raise the overall quality of higher education provision.

In addition, the study is significant for its policy relevance. The insights gained from the evaluation will inform government and institutional policy decisions, particularly in the areas of quality assurance, regulation, and assessment. Policymakers will benefit from context-specific recommendations designed to strengthen NCHE's regulatory role and enhance the higher education landscape.

Finally, by enhancing the effectiveness of NCHE's regulatory mechanisms, the study contributes to elevating the global competitiveness of Ugandan universities. Improved quality assurance practices will enable institutions to attract international students and faculty, form global partnerships, and play a more active role in national and regional development.

METHODOLOGY

We adopted a qualitative approach which focused on exploring perceptions, experiences, policies, and processes related to the role of the National High Council of Education (NHCE) in Uganda's educational assessment. This approach allowed us to gain in-depth insights into how the NHCE influences education.

RESEARCH DESIGN

This study employs a case study design to investigate the National Council for Higher Education's (NCHE) role in developing assessment policies and their effects on selected higher education

institutions in Uganda. Through interviews with university administrators, quality assurance officers, and NCHE officials, along with document analysis, the research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how NCHE's regulatory mechanisms influence policy implementation and quality assurance practices within these institutions.

Data Collection Methods

The research team conducted semi-structured and in-depth interviews with NCHE officials, university administrators, quality assurance officers, and education experts to gather insights on higher education assessment policies. Additionally, the team analyzed official NCHE documents and reports to evaluate the effectiveness of current assessment methods, identify challenges in the accreditation process, and assess the alignment of evaluation strategies with intended educational outcomes. These findings aim to inform recommendations for refining policies and assessment frameworks to enhance the quality of higher education in Uganda.

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs): The research team conducted Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) separately with lecturers, teaching staff, and students to explore their experiences with NCHE-led assessments. These discussions provided a platform for participants to share their views on the importance of the assessments and the challenges they encountered. The insights gathered shed light on perceptions of the assessments, highlighting both benefits and areas needing improvement to enhance their overall effectiveness. To ensure meaningful discussions and capture a broad range of perspectives, each group consisted of 6 to 8 participants, with multiple sessions held to achieve data saturation. Each session lasted between 1 to 2 hours in a comfortable, non-threatening environment, encouraging open and honest dialogue. An objective facilitator guided each discussion to ensure all participants contributed without bias. The team developed open-ended questions to encourage reflective responses, ensuring unbiased feedback and avoiding leading questions.

Document Analysis of NCHE Policies:

The research team conducted a comprehensive document analysis of NCHE reports, government policies, and academic assessments to examine trends and assess the impact of existing policies on higher education in Uganda. This analysis involved reviewing relevant documents such as NCHE annual reports, policy frameworks, and academic evaluation records to identify patterns in the assessment process and understand how policies have influenced the quality of education. By examining these documents, the team assessed the alignment between policy objectives and assessment outcomes, providing a deeper understanding of the effectiveness of current practices and identifying areas for further policy development.

For instance, the NCHE has identified that underfunding contributes to the production of low-quality graduates, highlighting the need for increased investment in infrastructure and faculty to improve educational outcomes. Additionally, the expiration of over 1,400 academic programs due to inadequate reviews underscores the necessity for regular program evaluations to maintain academic standards.

These findings align with the objectives of the Uganda National Qualifications Framework, which aims to harmonize and elevate educational standards to meet both national and international labor market requirements.

Purposive sampling, also known as judgmental, selective, or subjective sampling, is a non-probability sampling technique where researchers intentionally select participants based on specific characteristics relevant to their study. In this study, purposive sampling was employed to select participants with direct experience and involvement in the National Council for Higher Education's (NCHE) policies and education assessments. This included NCHE officials, school administrators, and examiners, ensuring that the selected participants could provide relevant and insightful data on the assessment process and its impact on higher education.

Data Analysis Techniques

Thematic analysis: The research team used thematic analysis to identify common themes across interview transcripts and documents. This method allowed the team to systematically examine the data and categorize it into key themes, such as the effectiveness of NCHE's assessment processes, challenges faced by participants, and gaps in current policies. By organizing the data into these themes, the team gained a clearer understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of NCHE's approach to higher education assessment. This analysis also highlighted areas where improvements could be made to enhance the overall impact of NCHE's policies and practices on the quality of higher education in Uganda. Through this approach, the team was able to capture a comprehensive view of the current state of assessment and its implications for future policy development.

Content Analysis: The research team employed content analysis to systematically review policy documents and NCHE reports, extracting key insights regarding assessment processes in higher education. This method involved analyzing the language, structure, and content of these documents to identify patterns, trends, and underlying themes related to NCHE's policies and their implementation. By doing so, the team pinpointed critical areas where policies were either successful or facing challenges, gaining a deeper understanding of how these documents shaped the current assessment framework.

For instance, the NCHE's Quality Assurance Framework for Universities outlines standards and guidelines aimed at ensuring quality in higher education. By analyzing such documents, the team assessed the alignment between policy objectives and assessment outcomes, identifying strengths and areas needing improvement. This analysis informed recommendations for enhancing NCHE's policies and practices to improve the quality of higher education in Uganda.

Narrative Analysis: The research team used narrative analysis to understand the personal experiences of educators and policymakers regarding NCHE's role in higher education assessment. This approach focused on the individual stories and perspectives shared by participants during interviews and focus

group discussions. These personal accounts offered valuable insights into how educators and policymakers perceive the effectiveness of NCHE's policies, the challenges they face, and the impact of the assessment process on their daily practices. By analyzing these narratives, the team was able to capture the nuanced experiences of those directly involved in the education system. This approach helped contextualize the broader findings of the study, providing a comprehensive view of NCHE's role in shaping higher education in Uganda. Through this, the team could better understand the real-world impact of NCHE's policies and identify areas where improvements were needed.

Validity and Reliability:

To ensure the validity and reliability of the research, several strategies were employed during both the data collection and analysis phases.

In terms of **validity**, the research team employed a multi-method approach, utilizing interviews, focus group discussions, document analysis, and observations. This combination allowed for triangulation of the findings, which provided a more balanced and comprehensive understanding of NCHE's role in higher education assessment. By drawing from various sources, the research ensured that the conclusions were not influenced by a single viewpoint or source of data, thereby reducing bias. Semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions were conducted to explore participants' views in depth, offering a broad range of experiences and insights. Furthermore, member checking was used, allowing participants to review the findings and confirm that their perspectives were accurately represented in the study. This contributed to the credibility of the data and ensured that the research reflected their true experiences.

For **reliability**, the team-maintained consistency throughout the research process by following a standardized approach for both data collection and analysis. This included using pre-established interview protocols and systematically documenting all stages of the process. The qualitative analysis was structured and methodical, utilizing well-recognized techniques such as thematic, content, and narrative analysis to ensure the findings were repeatable and verifiable. Additionally, peer reviews were conducted to further assess the quality of the research. Feedback from colleagues and experts in the field helped verify the consistency and accuracy of the conclusions, ensuring that the findings were both reliable and robust.

To ensure credible results, the research team employed **triangulation** by utilizing multiple data sources, including interviews, documents, and focus group discussions. This method enabled the team to cross-check and validate the findings from different perspectives. By comparing insights gathered from NCHE officials, policymakers, educators, and students with the information obtained from policy documents and reports, the team was able to confirm patterns and trends across various sources. Triangulation not only enhanced the credibility of the findings but also minimized the potential for bias, ensuring a more comprehensive and accurate representation of NCHE's role in higher education assessment.

Additionally, the team employed member checking as a method to validate the preliminary findings. After data was collected and analyzed, the team shared a summary of the initial findings with participants, including NCHE officials, policymakers, educators, and students. This allowed participants to review the interpretations and confirm whether their views and experiences had been accurately captured. Any discrepancies or misunderstandings were addressed through feedback, ensuring the final findings reflected the participants' perspectives accurately.

FINDINGS

The Role of the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) in the Accreditation and Assessment of Higher Education Institutions

The National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) is mandated by the Universities and Other Tertiary Institutions Act, 2001 (as amended in 2008) to regulate, license, and supervise all Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Uganda. One of its core functions is the accreditation of academic programs to ensure they meet nationally recognized quality standards. For instance, in 2015, NCHE accredited the Bachelor of Science in Computer Science program at Makerere University. Additionally, NCHE plays a pivotal role in the establishment of new institutions. A notable example is Busitema University, where an NCHE inspection team assessed the institution's readiness before its establishment. Following a positive recommendation, Parliament passed an instrument on July 10, 2007, officially founding the university. These regulatory and accreditation roles are essential for maintaining quality assurance and structured development within Uganda's higher education sector.

Effectiveness of NCHE's Quality Assurance Mechanisms

NCHE's quality assurance mechanisms have significantly contributed to the enhancement of higher education standards in Uganda. Through rigorous monitoring and periodic institutional audits, higher education institutions are required to maintain academic integrity and continuously improve their internal systems. A notable example is the 2018 quality assurance audit conducted at Kyambogo University, which led to meaningful improvements in both academic programming and institutional management.

These mechanisms have also increased accountability across institutions. Universities and other HEIs are now required to regularly submit reports detailing their academic operations and quality assurance efforts. This not only reinforces internal compliance but also enhances public trust through transparency. The availability of institutional data and program details on the NCHE website allows stakeholders, including students and employers, to make informed decisions. Furthermore, NCHE's accreditation process, which demands detailed program documentation, ensures institutions are committed to maintaining national education standards and aligning their offerings with quality benchmarks.

Challenges Faced by NCHE in the Accreditation and Assessment of Higher Education Institutions

Despite its vital role, the NCHE faces several challenges in effectively executing its mandate. One of the major challenges is the rapid expansion of higher education institutions, particularly in the private sector, which has made it difficult to maintain consistent oversight. 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, the capacity of NCHE to regularly monitor and assess these institutions is often stretched.

Another challenge lies in regional disparities. The central region, especially the Greater Kampala area and districts such as Wakiso, Mukono, Mpigi, and Masaka, dominates higher education with 56% of HEIs. In contrast, the northern region has only 11%, reflecting a stark imbalance 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.

Additionally, issues such as inadequate funding, limited staffing, and resistance from some institutions during inspections or compliance processes further hinder the effectiveness of NCHE's regulatory efforts. These challenges call for increased government support, regional policy reforms, and improved institutional cooperation to enable NCHE to fully deliver on its mandate.

Ensuring Alignment with National Development Goals

To ensure that higher education contributes meaningfully to Uganda's national development agenda, the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) collaborates with key national institutions such as the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology (UNCST). These partnerships are instrumental in fostering research, innovation, and the generation of knowledge across Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).

While institutional research output remains relatively low, many individual researchers—particularly within public and private universities—continue to engage in impactful scholarly work. In support of these efforts, the NCHE has revitalized its *Higher Education Review Journal*, which encourages the publication of research aligned with Uganda's national development goals and the council's ongoing thematic areas.

Moreover, the NCHE ensures that academic programs are aligned with labor market demands and national priorities by thoroughly reviewing and accrediting proposed programs. Through its policy frameworks, inspections, and regulatory oversight, NCHE guarantees that higher education offerings are not only academically sound but also relevant and responsive to the country's socio-economic development needs.

CONCLUSION

The National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) serves as a central pillar in upholding the quality and relevance of higher education in Uganda. Through its legal framework and strategic interventions,

the council has not only ensured institutional and program accreditation but has also embedded a culture of accountability and continuous improvement across the sector. While challenges such as limited research capacity, staffing constraints, and unequal regional access persist, the NCHE's collaborative approach and alignment with national development priorities underscore its commitment to a robust and inclusive higher education system. Moving forward, enhancing the council's capacity through sustained investment, policy innovation, and broader stakeholder engagement will be critical in overcoming existing gaps and reinforcing the role of higher education as a driver of Uganda's socio-economic progress.

Recommendations Aligned with Research Findings

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance the role and effectiveness of the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) in Uganda:

The rapid expansion of higher education institutions, particularly in the private sector, has stretched NCHE's monitoring and evaluation capacity, making it challenging to maintain consistent oversight. To address this, it is recommended that NCHE enhance its monitoring and evaluation capacity by employing more qualified staff and investing in advanced technology to facilitate real-time monitoring. This approach will enable the council to manage its resources more efficiently. Additionally, NCHE should implement a risk-based assessment model, prioritizing high-risk institutions and programs for more frequent audits and inspections. By doing so, NCHE can ensure that quality standards are upheld across all higher education institutions (HEIs), regardless of their size or location.

The concentration of HEIs in the central region (Greater Kampala) has led to significant regional disparities in higher education access. These disparities create an imbalance in educational opportunities across the country. Therefore, it is recommended that NCHE and the government develop targeted strategies to encourage the establishment and accreditation of HEIs in underserved regions, particularly in northern and eastern Uganda. One possible solution is to offer incentives to institutions that expand their campuses into these regions. Additionally, NCHE can support existing institutions in these areas to improve infrastructure and academic offerings. Collaborating with local government bodies to identify regional education needs will ensure the equitable distribution of higher education resources and opportunities.

Inadequate funding and limited staffing are significant challenges facing NCHE, which hinder its ability to effectively execute its accreditation and quality assurance mandate. To improve the council's effectiveness, it is recommended that the government allocate increased funding specifically for the council. This funding should be used to hire more staff members and enhance the council's operational capacity. Furthermore, NCHE could explore partnerships with international bodies or donor agencies to secure additional resources for its quality assurance programs. This will enable the council to fulfill its regulatory roles more effectively, ensuring a high level of quality control and national oversight of higher education institutions.

Although the availability of institutional data and program details on the NCHE website has improved transparency, there are still issues related to stakeholder involvement and institutional resistance. To enhance transparency, it is recommended that NCHE provide clear, publicly accessible reports on accreditation outcomes, including the reasons for accreditation decisions. Additionally, NCHE could establish a more interactive and accessible platform for stakeholders, including students, faculty, and the general public, to track the status of accreditation processes and outcomes. This would foster greater trust and cooperation with institutions and stakeholders while reducing resistance during inspections.

While NCHE ensures that academic programs align with labor market demands and national priorities, there is still a relatively low level of research output in higher education institutions. It is recommended that NCHE work more closely with national development planning bodies such as the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology (UNCST) to identify emerging national development priorities. NCHE should incentivize institutions to design academic programs that address these priorities, particularly in key sectors such as technology, agriculture, and healthcare. A stronger focus on interdisciplinary programs that bridge the gap between academic disciplines and national development needs will help produce graduates who can contribute meaningfully to Uganda's socio-economic development.

While individual researchers engage in impactful scholarly work, institutional research output remains relatively low. This limits the contribution of higher education institutions to national development. To address this, NCHE should incentivize institutions to build research capacity by creating competitive grants, research partnerships, and academic collaborations with both local and international organizations. Moreover, NCHE could encourage institutions to establish specialized research units focused on solving real-world problems related to Uganda's national development priorities. This will help institutions play a more active role in generating knowledge and innovation that supports national development goals.

NCHE collaborates with national institutions to ensure that academic programs align with national priorities and labor market demands. To strengthen this collaboration, it is recommended that NCHE formalize and expand its partnerships with key industry stakeholders and employers. This would ensure that the accreditation process not only aligns with national priorities but also meets the specific needs of employers. NCHE could facilitate forums, workshops, and dialogues between HEIs and industry representatives to ensure that academic programs are regularly updated to reflect current trends and skills requirements in the job market.

The significant concentration of HEIs in the central region and the lack of balanced representation across Uganda's other regions have exacerbated educational disparities. To address these regional challenges, it is recommended that NCHE develop a comprehensive regional accreditation strategy that includes targeted outreach and support for institutions in underrepresented areas. This strategy

could include offering incentives such as funding for infrastructure development or preferential accreditation for institutions that commit to serving rural and underserved communities. By doing so, NCHE can contribute to more balanced educational development and equitable access to higher education across Uganda.

To improve its role in the accreditation of higher education institutions, NCHE should enhance its review and inspection procedures. These procedures should be consistent, transparent, and based on clearly defined benchmarks. Accreditation standards should be regularly updated to reflect changes in higher education, including academic infrastructure, staffing levels, and program relevance. This will ensure that institutions meet the minimum requirements for academic excellence before being accredited or licensed, helping to maintain high educational standards across the country.

NCHE should adopt a more robust system of institutional audits and follow-ups to ensure compliance with quality standards. Periodic internal self-assessment by institutions should be made mandatory to promote continuous improvement. Additionally, NCHE should improve the dissemination of audit findings to the public to foster transparency and accountability in the higher education sector. This approach will help build trust in the quality assurance process and encourage institutions to prioritize academic excellence and continuous improvement.

To address the challenges faced in assessing higher education institutions, NCHE should advocate for increased government support in terms of funding and staffing. The council should also enhance its institutional capacity by investing in training for its staff on best practices in quality assurance and accreditation. These interventions will help overcome issues such as limited manpower, outdated evaluation tools, and institutional resistance to regulatory oversight, improving the overall effectiveness of the council's regulatory functions.

To ensure that higher education meaningfully contributes to national development, NCHE should continue collaborating with agencies such as the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology (UNCST) to guide institutions on designing programs that are relevant to the labor market and national priorities. Moreover, all new programs should undergo thorough evaluation for their potential impact on Uganda's socio-economic transformation before approval. This will ensure that academic programs contribute to national development and address the country's pressing needs.

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