



The value of accreditation for theological institutions and qualifications among Pentecostal-type ministries in South Africa

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Abstract

In some Christian traditions, a pastor is required to qualify at an accredited institution of higher learning such as a university or a seminary. However, in Pentecostal-type ministries, some pastors start churches without an accredited qualification arguing they do not need a qualification to become pastors but only a calling for ministry. Consequently, these pastors end up being exploited by non-accredited institutions offering them non-accredited qualifications. Some pastors start their non-accredited bible colleges whose qualifications cannot respond to the skills needs of the economy. Other challenges include the exploitation of pastors by degree sellers, the negative impact on accredited institutions, and the illegality of using titles such as doctor or professor without proper qualifications. The research question is what are the significance and values of accreditation of theological institutions and qualifications among Pentecostal-type ministries? To answer this question, this article evaluates the framework of accreditation of theological institutions in South Africa. The aim is to demonstrate the importance of studying in an accredited institution and obtaining an accredited theological qualification among Pentecostal-type ministries.

Keywords

Accreditation; Pentecostal-type ministries; theological training; theological education; theological qualification; theological institutions

1. Introduction

Theological education and pastoral training have a long history in the South African context (Naidoo 2015a, Naidoo 2015b, Knoetze 2021, Knoetze et al. 2021). In most Christian traditions, the training of pastors

takes a formal route in accredited universities and seminaries. Similarly, the classical Pentecostal churches such as the Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa, the Assemblies of God, and the Full Gospel Church have also followed suit by ensuring that their pastors are well-trained in accredited institutions (Nel 2014:108 cf Nel 2016a). Although early Pentecostals were not so keen about enrolling in a formal institution to study for a formal degree, in recent times there is a great interest among classical Pentecostal churches for formal theological training in accredited institutions (Nel 2016b:3). In addition, some the classical Pentecostal churches in South Africa do have their accredited bible colleges (Kgatle 2022b:3). To a certain extent, some pastors in neo-Pentecostal churches were formally trained in accredited institutions before embarking on the journey of pastoring a church. The challenge remains in the Pentecostal-type ministries where so many young men and women of God wake up to become pastors without any formal training in accredited institutions of higher learning. All they have is a calling from God, a tent, and a sound system which to them are enough to establish a church ministry. By receiving a calling to ministry, they feel that they are well-equipped and ready to open a church (Chitando 2010). Consequently, most of them have fallen prey to the unscrupulous international online universities willing to offer them free degrees and ordain them as bishops, archbishops, and so forth. There are also local non-accredited bible colleges also offering non-accredited qualifications which is an exploitative exercise as well. What are the consequences of enrolling in a non-accredited theological institution? What are the challenges of receiving a non-accredited theological qualification in a South African context? What is the value of studying in an accredited institution and obtaining an accredited qualification?

To answer these research questions, this article problematises the non-accredited institutions offering non-accredited qualifications among these Pentecostal-type ministries in South Africa. The article also evaluates the accreditation framework for the theological institutions among Pentecostal-type ministries. The aim is to highlight the importance and value of accreditation in the same. However, to achieve this there is a need to describe the Pentecostal-type ministries in South Africa within the context of the Pentecostal movement. In addition, the challenge of the non-accredited qualifications among pastors in Pentecostal-type ministries

will be discussed in detail. The article will go on to outline the process of accreditation and important role players in the accreditation of institutions of higher learning. The last section will demonstrate the importance of an accredited qualification as opposed to a non-accredited qualification in a way of wrapping up.

2. Pentecostal-type ministries in South Africa

There are so many categories of Pentecostal churches in South Africa and elsewhere in the continent (Anderson 2001:66). This also presents some form of a challenge in discussing the Pentecostal movement in terms of categories. However, to avoid generalisations, it is rather important to locate a specific sub-tradition of Pentecostalism. The recognised categories include the classical Pentecostal churches also referred to as Pentecostal missional churches such as the Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa, the Assemblies of God, and the Full Gospel Church of Southern Africa (Kgatle 2022a, cf Resane 2022). The second category is the neo-Pentecostal churches which emerged in the middle of the 20th century. These are churches that have embraced the prosperity gospel of the faith movement in America with some of them returning to the fundamental teachings of early Pentecostalism such as Spirit baptism, speaking in tongues, holistic salvation, and the eschatological expectation. These are churches such as Rhema Bible Church in Randburg, Grace Bible Church in Soweto, and others (Anderson 2005:68). The newer neo-Pentecostal churches include Hope Restoration in Kempton Park, Christian Revival Church, and others (Kgatle 2022b). The churches have also been referred to as charismatic churches, however, neo-Pentecostals are appropriate as it also helps to differentiate them from charismatic renewals. In recent times, there has also been an emergence of new prophetic churches whose roots are in neo-Pentecostalism with some distinctions. These are the church that emphasises prophecy as they are known for prophetic titles, prophetic miracles, prophetic deliverance, prophetic products, and so forth (Kgatle 2019a, Kgatle 2021a). These are churches such as Enlightened Christian Gathering, Alleluia Ministries International, and so forth.

In this article, I have decided to use the category Pentecostal-type ministries because the challenge of training is prevalent among the neo-Pentecostals

and the new prophetic churches. In addition, some of the Pentecostal-type ministries such as Nala Mandate International have declared that they are not Christian let alone Pentecostal. However, a closer look at the ministry of Nala reveals some Pentecostal practices such as healing, deliverance, and so forth. Therefore, the category Pentecostal-type ministry is inclusive of all other ministries started in tents, schools, community halls, and other familiar territories. In addition, this category helps to also include in our discussion pseudo-Pentecostal ministries that have operated under the Pentecostal name but their actions are outside Pentecostalism. Pentecostal-type ministry as a category within Pentecostalism is helpful in the discussion on the training of pastors. The next section looks at the challenges about the non-accreditation of theological institutions and qualifications among the Pentecostal-type ministries.

3. Problematising non-accreditation of theological institutions and qualifications

The majority of pastors in Pentecostal-type ministries claim to have received theological training. However, a closer look at their qualifications shows that they are from degree mills and non-accredited international online universities and bible colleges (Kgatlle 2021b). This means that the majority of pastors in these ministries have non-accredited theological qualifications (Resane 2017b, Duncan 2018). The online universities mainly from the United States of America promise these pastors ordinations as bishops and archbishops. This has been a factor that has attracted many Pastors in Pentecostal-type ministries to degree mills and lack of interest in formal theological training. Some of the pastors in South Africa have been ordained as professors without a formal doctoral degree and publications to qualify for such titles (Resane 2017b). A news channel Carte Blanche (2023:1) in a show called “Prophet for profit” shared a story online of Edward van den Berg who started Immanuel Theology Institute International that offered non-accredited qualifications including certificates, diplomas, and degrees to many pastors in Pentecostal-type ministries. Many pastors got attracted to this institution as they were also ordained as bishops and arch-bishops after obtaining fake doctoral qualifications from the same institution. When Edward realised that the South African Council of Churches could not admit his church to be a member of the council, he started his council

(Carte Blanche 2023:1). In addition, when Edward realised that the Council of Higher Education could not accredit his university, he then started his council to serve as an accrediting body similar to the Council for Higher Education (Carte Blanche 2023:1). He did all these in desperation to produce fake qualifications for unsuspecting pastors in Pentecostal-type ministries. Edward is just the tip of the iceberg as there are many other bible colleges and universities that are not accredited and offer non-accredited theological qualifications (Resane 2017a).

This is problematic in many ways, but this article seeks to highlight four challenges of non-accreditation of theological institutions and qualifications. First, non-accredited qualifications are not recognised in the South African economy. One of the strengths of a country is its educated citizenry which has at least a minimum qualification in a specific profession. Studies done elsewhere also show that an educated citizenry is a responsible citizenry (Colby 2003). It is even much better when a country has more master's and doctoral graduates. This helps in terms of the Gross Domestic Product of the country and ultimately the growth of its economy. In South Africa, we have so many people depending on the grant system of the country, hence the economy is not growing at the rate it is supposed to grow in recent years (Klasen 1997). The challenge of non-accredited qualification is adding salt to the wound of the South African economy. Meaning the more there are fake qualifications in the economy the less such an economy grows because such qualifications do not add any value to the economy. This is one of the reasons why non-accredited qualifications should be discouraged in the South African context as they affect the economy of the country. This applies also to the non-accredited theological qualifications which have been obtained by many pastors in Pentecostal-type ministries in South Africa.

The second challenge is the illegality of using titles such as doctor or professor without proper qualifications. The pastors in Pentecostal-type ministries have a propensity to use the titles Doctor or even Professor to impress their followers and congregants (Kgatle 2021a). Pastor Daniel Lesego of Rabboni Ministries in Soshanguve is also known as the professor (Kgatle 2022a). So is Uebert Angel, the spiritual father of Shepherd Bushiri who used to work in South Africa and is known as the retired professor of prophecy (Kgatle 2019a, 2021a). However, the question remains, what is the

legal implication of using a title without proper qualifications? Is it legal for a pastor to call themselves a doctor or a professor without following the process to attain such a title? Is it also legal to benefit from a title such as a doctor or professor without proper qualifications? For one to be a doctor, there is a need to complete a doctoral thesis in an accredited institution (Sensing 2011). Many pastors holding a fake doctoral degree do not even know what a thesis is. To become a professor, many other factors contribute to this position such as publications, supervision of postgraduate students, teaching experience, academic citizenship, and so forth (Beck and Kosnik 2002:6). Equally, many pastors going by these titles without proper qualifications do not know the requisites for a professorship. Therefore, it is illegal for a pastor to wake up one day and call themselves a doctor or a professor. It is illegal to benefit from titles such as doctor and professor without proper qualifications and the necessary requisites for such titles.

The third challenge is that the selling of non-accredited degrees to Pastors in Pentecostal-type ministries is the exploitation of the same pastors. In other words, these degrees are not given for free but are sold at prices sometimes equivalent to the tuition fee that a pastor could have easily paid to a public institution to get a proper qualification (Carte Blanche 2023:1). When degree mills sell non-accredited qualifications with the impression that they are proper qualifications, this is an exploitation of the pastors in Pentecostal-type ministries. Sometimes, due to a lack of knowledge, some pastors just fall prey to unscrupulous degree mills (Resane 2017a). However, at times some pastors would pay an exorbitant amount knowing very well that the qualification is not accredited but have the pressure to be called by a higher title such as Doctor or even professor. They will insist on proceeding with such purchase of degrees for the benefit of these titles. Therefore, at a distance, it might appear that some pastors are being exploited but when observing closing, some pastors are voluntarily purchasing fake qualifications. Some of the pastors have proper qualifications elsewhere as engineers, accountants, and so forth. Therefore, they do know an accredited qualification but would buy a fake one for the sake of having a powerful title. However, whether the pastors are aware or not aware of the fake qualifications, it does not give the non-accredited institutions a right to keep on selling these fake qualifications.

Lastly, the non-accredited institutions affect the accredited institutions not only in theology but in other disciplines as well (Phooko 2014:367). Instead of registering for a formal qualification in institutions of higher learning such as public universities and private institutions, pastors just go ahead and buy qualifications. This affects the total number of students that should be enrolled in accredited universities, seminaries, and colleges. This might be one of the reasons why the student numbers in the theological departments and faculties in public universities are decreasing. Because the same students who could be registering for a formal qualification in an accredited institution are busy purchasing fake qualifications. Therefore, the sale of fake qualifications affects the enrolment in accredited qualifications in theology. This is because the non-accredited colleges are attracting so many pastors in Pentecostal-type ministries at a higher speed than the accredited institutions of higher learning. All these four challenges that are highlighted here need to be addressed within the framework of accreditation of institutions of higher learning and the offering of accredited theological qualifications. However, before one looks at the accreditation framework, it is important to look at the theological implications of non-accreditation.

4. Theological implications of non-accreditation of theological institutions and qualifications

The greater challenge of the non-accreditation of theological institutions and qualifications is the lack of theological ethics and integrity in the theological training of Pentecostals particularly among the Pentecostal-type ministries. When a Pentecostal pastor buys a degree qualification from a non-accredited institution, then their integrity and ethical conduct are questionable (Resane 2017a, Duncan 2018, Kgatlle 2021a). Therefore, a fake qualification and title have the potential to compromise the integrity of a pastor. Ethical conduct and integrity are important in the Christian tradition as a pastor is expected to be someone with unquestionable character (Kretzschmar 2002). Lack of integrity does not only affect the individual Pentecostal pastor but also the integrity of the Pentecostal movement as society at times is not able to make a distinction between various strands of the movement. In the end, Pentecostals are perceived as anti-theological education or lacking theological foundation in the process

of leadership development (Anderson 2004). In hindsight, this is actually the case among Pentecostal-type ministries as some pastors in these ministries do not see the value of going through the process of theological training (Resane 2020). Some of the Pentecostal pastors only want to depend on the Holy Spirit for the pastoral calling without proper theological training (White 2015). Hence, they opt for buying doctoral degrees which end up tarnishing the image of their ministries and compromise their integrity.

Whilst the pursuit of titles such as Doctor and professor from non-accredited institutions is done to boost the profile of the individual pastor on one hand, it is also damaging in terms of integrity, ethics, and values in ministry. It must be noted that in Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity, a pastor is not only responsible for the local congregation but is also invited to preach in other congregations. Thus, having a title such as Doctor and Professor for some pastors is important to receive such invitations. However, this should not be done without following proper processes for obtaining such qualifications and titles. Because when these titles are obtained illegally, they affect the integrity of the individual pastor and the Pentecostal movement in general.

5. Framing accreditation of qualifications in a South African context

In a South African context, an academic qualification needs to be accredited by South African Qualification Authority (SAQA). According to the official website of SAQA (2023:1 cf Ballim, Mabizela, and Mubangizi (2014):

The South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) is the oversight body of the NQF and the custodian of its values and quality character. The role of SAQA, as stipulated in the NQF Act, is to advance the objectives of the NQF, oversee the further development and implementation of the NQF, and coordinate the Sub-Frameworks. SAQA's functions are set out in section 13 of the NQF Act.

In addition, there are various processes to follow for the accreditation of institutions of higher learning for an institution of higher learning in South Africa to be able to offer accredited qualifications. Many of the bible

colleges in South Africa have not followed these processes but only start and offer fake qualifications as was the case with Immanuel University (Carte Blanche 2023:1). Some of the Bible colleges in South Africa exist as affiliates or campuses of the institutions coming from the United States of America (USA) (Resane 2018). These are Bible colleges such as Impact Christian campus whose main campus is Team Impact Christian University in the USA. According to the official website for Impact Christian campus (2023:1) Team Impact Christian University is situated at “8894 Airline Hwy Suite E, Baton Rouge, LA 70815, USA, registered with the Secretary of State in Louisiana, USA (2009), registered with the IRS as a 501(c) 3 Corporation and accredited with Theological Accreditation International (T.A.I.)” However, even with its registrations and accreditations in the USA, the Campus should still be fully accredited in South Africa for it to offer accredited qualifications in theological studies. But some pastors take it for granted that if something is coming from the USA then it is genuine. This is because USA has an influential economy, consequently, many pastors in South Africa and elsewhere in Africa fall prey to such institutions.

Some of the bible colleges particularly the church-based bible colleges are started with a genuine zeal for the training of pastors in South Africa but the founders just do not care about accreditation (Masuku 2019). Even here, the quest to empower pastors at a local congregation level should not come at the expense of accreditation. However, some of the Bible college founders do not know the value of carrying an accredited qualification in the 21st century and many do not even have proper qualifications (Carte Blanche 2023:1). Another reason is the greed of the founders of these bible colleges who want to make money at all costs including offering non-accredited theological qualifications. Hence, the need for an understanding of the accreditation framework for accredited institutions of higher in the South African context.

Nonetheless, following the process of accreditation is important for various reasons. The institution will be able to offer quality education at different levels of the National Qualification frameworks (Allais 2007). According to the Western Cape Government (2023:1):

The National Qualifications Framework (NQF) is the system that records the credits assigned to each level of learning achievement

formally to ensure that the skills and knowledge that have been learned are recognised throughout the country.

In addition, the process leading to such quality will be followed properly. In simple terms, a registered and accredited institution will be able to conduct quality assurance which does not happen in a non-accredited institution. Furthermore, an accredited institution can protect the students against various exploitation which also does not happen in non-accredited institutions. In accredited institutions, there is an alignment between the National Qualification Framework and the curriculum offered in the institutions (Ensor 2003). However, in non-accredited institutions, students do not receive qualifications as per the National Qualification Framework. Some pastors receive a degree by just completing a set of assignments in a year without following proper channels for teaching and learning standards (Sensing 2011). Whereas in an accredited institution, a degree normally takes three to four years as it is a National Qualification Framework 7. Therefore, the students registering in an accredited institution of higher learning can meet the minimum requirements for the completion of a qualification because there is a framework followed in such institutions.

To be recognised as an accredited institution, the institution must be registered first with the Department of Higher Education and Training in South Africa (Badat 2010). This is the department in a South African context that oversees all the institutions of higher learning including public and private institutions. In addition, the institution should be accredited by the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) of the Council on Higher Education (CHE) (Ballim, Mabizela, and Mubangizi 2014:1140). According to the Council of Higher Education (2023:1)

The mandate of the HEQC includes quality promotion, institutional audit, and programme accreditation. As part of the task of building an effective national quality assurance system, the HEQC has also included capacity development and training as a critical component of its program of activities.

This is also important because the institution will be able to be monitored in terms of quality assurance. In addition, the accredited qualifications in an institution are monitored for necessary updates and reviews. So, it is not a simple thing of just registering an institution but there is a follow-

up in terms of ensuring that each qualification is accredited. Hence, some institutions that are accredited have been found wanting concerning offer unaccredited qualifications. If an institution is only accredited for offering theology, it cannot offer nursing or business studies. Lastly, all the National Qualification Frameworks should be accredited by the SAQA as discussed at the beginning of this section (Keevy 2006:25).

6. The value of accredited theological institutions in Pentecostal-type ministries

There is value in an accredited bible college in Pentecostal-type ministries in South Africa. according to Hobe (2019:41), this provides the Pentecostal movement with a voice within theological education in South Africa. In other words, when the Pentecostal pastor studies in an accredited bible college, other pastors coming from other traditions will be able to take the Pentecostal pastors seriously (Masenya and Masenya 2018). Currently, given so many scandals of fake institutions, fake qualifications, and fake titles, the Pentecostal-type ministries have become a laughing stock in the Christian tradition. However, when there is a serious move toward the accreditation of bible colleges and schools, this reality will slowly change. In other words, there should be an intention to seek accreditation despite the challenges so that accredited colleges can serve as the training of pastors in the form of ministry-integrated learning. Unlike universities and seminaries, accredited bible colleges will serve as training centers for the pastors internally while they work as ministers in their churches. In addition since some pastors are already doing the work of ministry, there will be no need for them to leave their ministries but study through these accredited colleges while busy serving in their churches.

The accredited bible colleges among Pentecostal-type ministries can work with universities in getting pastors in Pentecostal-type ministries to enroll for a formal qualification. This is important in preparing pastors to take up leadership roles in society (Jentile 2016). Because theological training must be perceived beyond the narrow function of preparing the Pentecostal pastor for ministry. It should also play a meaningful role in making an impact in society, hence the importance of higher qualifications. This means that it is not enough to only possess an undergraduate qualification from an

accredited bible college (Duncan 2018:5 cf Farisani 2010). The Pentecostal pastors in Pentecostal-type ministries can go ahead to complete a degree or diploma in universities or seminaries. Therefore, a Pentecostal pastor should be encouraged to register for the degree in a university or seminary. In addition, a Pentecostal pastor can gain credits for the first-year modules in a university or a seminary. This is possible because most universities in the South African context have a recognition of prior learning (RPL) mechanism that acknowledges previous studies or experience. In this way, the National Qualification Framework obtained from an accredited bible school can be recognised in crediting the prospective student in the degree or diploma curriculum.

7. The value of an accredited theological qualification among Pentecostal pastors

The accredited qualification has value because the pastor in a Pentecostal-type ministry can use it beyond preaching and teaching in the church. The training of Pentecostal pastors in Pentecostal-type ministries is not only about a few tips on sermon preparation, bible interpretation, and so forth but also about ensuring that the Pentecostal pastor is competent to add value to the economy of South Africa. In other words, an accredited qualification is useful in the economy as opposed to a non-accredited qualification. As previously discussed, an educated citizenry plays a role in the growth of their economy because their skills and experience add value in the same. Therefore, an educated or suitably qualified pastor in Pentecostal-type ministries in South Africa will add more value to the economy as opposed to a pastor with a non-accredited qualification. This is possible because the accredited qualification is recognisable in the economy of South Africa, unlike a non-accredited qualification. Therefore, a move away from a non-accredited qualification toward an accredited qualification will help to enhance the economy of South Africa. A suitably qualified pastor will be able to move their church beyond its spiritual responsibilities toward development amid many challenges facing Africa in the 21st century.

An accredited theological qualification is also needed in the workplace in departments such as the South African Defence Force, the South African Police Services, and many other governmental departments (Mkhathini

2016; Meyer 2020). In addition, some schools in South Africa also require pastors to work as chaplains in meeting the spiritual needs of their students. In these institutions, there is a need for Pentecostal pastors to take part as chaplains and other professionals. Currently, many of the chaplains in such institutions are coming from other traditions with few being Pentecostals (Cadge et al. 2020:187). Thus, obtaining an accredited qualification in the form of a degree offers pastors an opportunity to be employed in such departments. In addition, Pentecostal pastors will be able to make an impact in government and society because of their presence in such departments. In this way, an accredited qualification has more value than a non-accredited qualification among Pentecostal pastors in Pentecostal-type ministries. This means that rather than buying a degree from degree mills, a Pentecostal pastor should be looking at investing the same money and time in studying for an accredited qualification.

Equally, the accredited theological qualification is important for some Pentecostal pastors to become academics in institutions of higher learning (Kgatle 2018 cf Quampah and Naidoo 2020:302). Indeed, the first intention of studying for theological education and training is the preparation of a Pentecostal pastor to enter a full-time ministry (Resane 2018 cf Naidoo 2022). However, this can be extended to other outcomes such as teaching theology in a university or seminary. However, it is not possible when Pentecostal pastors do not have accredited theological qualifications. Currently, there is a greater need in public universities for Pentecostal theologians given the growth of Pentecostalism in Africa. However, since many Pentecostal pastors have non-accredited qualifications, they cannot teach at these universities. Consequently, the curriculum in these public universities remains untransformed in the context of Pentecostalism (Kgatle 2018:2). This means that it does not serve most Pentecostal pastors. This reality cannot change if Pentecostal pastors are not serious about obtaining accredited qualifications. This reality cannot change for as long as Pentecostal pastors in Pentecostal-type ministries continue to embrace fake bible colleges, fake qualifications, and fake titles.

8. Conclusion

This article problematised the challenge of the non-accredited institutions producing non-accredited qualifications. At least four challenges were raised in this article. First, the challenge is that such qualifications are not recognised in the South African economy, thus making a loss to the gross domestic product. Second, the illegality of walking around with a title such as a doctor and professor without qualifying for the same. Third, the exploitation of pastors who have fallen victim to the degree sellers who charge a lot of money. Last, the impact that the non-accredited institutions have on the accredited institutions. This article addressed these challenges within the framework of accreditation in the South African context. When the bible colleges are accredited, they will be able to serve as channels for admission to universities and seminaries. In addition, Pentecostal pastors will be able to use accredited qualifications in the economy by applying for various positions. This is an important contribution to the theme of theological education within the Pentecostal tradition. It is important to deal with the current abuses through non-accredited institutions producing non-accredited qualifications.

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