# INFLUENCE OF AUDIT BY ACCREDITATION BODIES ON QUALITY OF ACADEMIC PROGRAMMES IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN KENYA: A CASE OF FACULTY OF EDUCATION, UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI

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*ABSTRACT*

*This study examined the influence of audits by authorized accreditation bodies on the quality of academic programmes' quality in Higher Education Institutions in Kenya: A case of the Bachelor of Education programme at the University of Nairobi. The study used Deming's Theory of Quality Management. A descriptive survey design targeted heads of academic units, lecturers, and alumni of the Faculty of Education. A sample of 111 lectures, 360 Bachelor of Education (B.Ed) alumni, and 16 Heads of academic units was selected and included both open and closed-ended questions. The analysis generated quantitative and qualitative outcomes whereby quantitative data was coded and analyzed using Social Sciences Statistical Packages (SPSS Version 25.0). The study applied descriptive statistics using frequencies and inferential statistics to determine the relationship between variables. NVivo software was used to analyze qualitative data, and responses with common patterns or themes were clustered into coherent groupings per the study's objectives. The findings revealed that audits by accreditation bodies significantly influenced the quality of academic programmes.*

*Further, the study established that audits by accreditation bodies enhanced the provision of quality products and services.*

*Audits guarantee that the university's academic units follow set standards for service delivery that meet stakeholders' requirements. The study recommends that audits by accreditation bodies should be conducted on a more regular basis to enhance the quality of service delivery. In addition, universities should provide quality and relevant programmes to respond to industrial needs and improve the country's education quality.*

**Key Words**: Audits, Accreditation, Accreditation Bodies, Quality of Academic Programmes

**INTRODUCTION**

Higher education institutions (HEIs) contribute significantly to nations' economic, political, and social transformation through the continuous development of human capital, research, and technological advancement (Machumu & Kisanga, 2014; Elken & Stensaker, 2018). Since tertiary education is the core of the global economy, its quality becomes an evident necessity (Haseena & Mohammed, 2015).

The principal purpose of HEIs is to produce graduates that meet the human resource requirements based on the needs of society and strengthen the frontiers of knowledge through research. (Green, 1994; Haseena & Mohammed, 2015). According to Matei and Iwinska (2016), quality is one of the significant and critical issues affecting the performance of HEIs.

However, the concept of quality has been interpreted differently based on diverse approaches and mechanisms used to measure quality. For instance, according to Mishra (2007), quality in HE is expressed as a high assessment bestowed on an educative process grounded on a particular criterion that prescribes minimum standards and values by which performance is determined. Since its inception, quality improvement has been a major concern in education. However, for the past two decades, there has been a shift towards promoting quality assurance (QA), especially the quality enhancement approaches in HE (Cardoso *et al*., 2017).

The HE landscape continues to experience speedy changes such as the massification of education, internationalization, student and programme diversities, labour market demands for quality graduates, scarcity of resources, accountability, and governance (Dill, 2007; Seyfried & Pohlenz, 2018). Hence it has become an obligation to institutionalize and articulate quality in HE. The most prevalent mechanism of QA is the evaluation of the caliber and grade of an educational programme, which is a determinant factor of the overall corporate image of an academic institution. Globally, the institutions embrace numerous QA practices and models for evaluating the quality of education in HEIs. For instance, several QA mechanisms exist in the UK, such as professional programme accreditation, the quality audit of teaching and learning processes, academic programme assessment, and other contemporary developments (Harvey, 2005).

One of the challenges facing educationists today is demonstrating and quantifying the quality of education outputs. The rapid expansion of educational systems has accelerated people's concerns about the quality of education, which has led nations to put frameworks and policies in place to improve the quality of HE (Dill, 2011).

Across the world, particularly in the advanced nations, e.g., USA, Australia, and UK, there has been a continuous improvement in various aspects of education, including curriculum, student assessment, student-lecturer ratio, academic resources, and faculty qualifications (Cheng & Tam, 1997; Cheung & Man Wong, 2012). Moreover, QAA (Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education) was founded to safeguard the quality standards of education rendered by higher education establishments in the UK (Ryan, 2015; QAA, 2014). Similarly, the CHEA (Council for Higher Education Accreditation) has immensely added value to the quality enhancement of tertiary education in the USA through its quality awards. Additionally, INQAAHE (International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education), a multinational quality assurance agency, closely works with educational experts and national accreditation bodies to refine the status of higher education (van Damme, 2002).

Although higher education reforms aimed at enhancing the quality of education, the complexity of the education environment, lack of consistent education standards, and quality indicators have increased the uncertainty and ambiguity of educational systems (Teichler, 2004). Amid numerous challenges facing HEIs today, QA practices and approaches have become critical to ensuring education relevance (Dill, 2007; Haseena & Mohammed, 2015; Materu, 2007). For instance, in Africa, most countries have increasingly become aware of the need for effective quality improvement and enhancement in HEIs due to increased student enrolment numbers, shrinking budgets, and increased demand from different stakeholders (Nabaho & Turyasingura, 2019).

Hence, reassuring the public that the educational provisions from HEIs meet local and international minimum standards remains indispensable. Likewise, AAU (Association of African Universities) initiated AfriQAN (African Quality Assurance Network) to foster the effectiveness of academic programmes across the whole region.

In higher education, the common QA standards focus on several key aspects; institutional mission and vision, academic programmes, academic resources (e.g., library, technology, facilities, and infrastructure), faculty members' qualifications, student numbers, and their entry qualifications, and financial capacity (Materu, 2007). Equally, Harvey and William (2010) described QA in HE as a combination of multiple instruments, including audits, assessments, accreditation, performance indicators, student surveys, graduate employability, capability and work readiness, and other monitoring and evaluation instruments focused on assuring educational quality.

With rapid changes in the business world, there is a need to constantly review the quality of curricula to verify if it aligns with the dynamic requirements of society. According to UNESCO (2013), the commercialization of university education erodes academic programs' quality globally, particularly in East Africa. As a result, the IUCEA (Inter-University Council of East Africa) formed EAQAN (East Africa Quality Assurance Network) to coordinate the enhancement of quality in the Eastern Africa region. The network provides a platform for QA experts, practitioners, and other stakeholders to explore and share perspectives on quality assurance, teaching and learning, and related topics in higher education management.

In Kenya, there have been concerns about the degradation of higher education quality due to the shortage of academic staff and other academic resources necessary to support academic programmes (Kinyanjui, 2013; Nganga, 2019). The Kenya Universities Quality Assurance Network (KuQAN) was established to bring together QA experts and practitioners to address the shortcomings facing the sector in the country. Equally, Kenya's Commission for University Education (CUE) and other regulatory bodies safeguard the quality of higher education by conducting regular audits in the institutions and programmes to maintain sustainable high standards of quality education. CUE has outlined a minimum requirement for every academic programme, which is, but is not limited to, admission requirements, course administration, resources to support its successful implementation, and the mode of delivery. Though there is literature on quality and academic programme standards, there needs to be more information on the impact of audits by accreditation bodies on the quality of academic programmes in universities in Kenya.

**PROBLEM STATEMENT**
Ever-increasing student enrolment has led to an overwhelming student population in universities. This has resulted in overstretch in academic resources, negatively affecting the quality of academic programmes. Odhiambo (2011) argued that the overwhelming population of students could lead to cost and time losses that may be unrecoverable. Similarly, a World Bank Report titled "Kenya's Education Achievement and Challenges" Criticizes Kenyan universities' failure to bring out graduates with the needed dexterities, competencies, and knowledge in line with the country's Vision 2030 (Kagondu & Marwa, 2017). `

Though the Kenyan Government has been allocating a notable amount of money from the national budget to higher education every financial year, the quality of education is still a significant concern. Further, previous studies have tried to explain the level at which Kenyan universities make strides toward implementing quality assurance practices.

The researcher undertakes this study to establish the contribution of accreditation bodies to the quality of higher education in Kenyan universities. In this reference, this study seeks to probe into the influence of audits by accreditation bodies on the quality of academic programmes in Kenyan universities.

**OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The study's primary objective was to explore the influence of audits by accreditation bodies on the quality of academic programmes in Kenyan universities.

Specific objectives were;

1. To assess the accreditation body's audit level of influence on the quality of educational programmes in higher education institutions in Kenya.

2. To establish levels of implementing recommendations by the certification bodies' audits in higher education institutions in Kenya.

3. To analyze adherence to standards on academic programmes in higher education institutions in Kenya.

**THEORETICAL LITERATURE REVIEW**

Management of quality is paramount in all organizations (Deming 2012). This study is centered on Deming's Theory of Quality Management which highlights the notion of forbearance ceilings, which affects quality negatively because most organizational leaders tend to relax so long as their products or services fall within those limits. Similarly, Deming developed fourteen (14) management levels, the system of profound knowledge, and the Stewart Process Plan-Do-Check-Act (Frazer, 2013). The system of profound knowledge is made up of knowledge of variation – grasping how variation and what triggers its occurrence in the organization, system appreciation – grasping how systems and processes and systems of company operate, knowledge of psychology – a comprehension of human nature, the theory of knowledge – mastery of what which can be known. The fourteen points of Deming's theory of full quality management are the development of constancy of intention, acceptance of a new philosophy, cessation of reliance on mass inspection, goal of continuous production, not awarding business based on the price, and service enhancement, the introduction of cutting-edge job training, initiation of cutting-edge management methods, removal of company concerns, elimination of quantity-based work goals, elimination of quotas and requirements, promotion of pride in craftsmanship, ensuring that everyone is qualified and skilled, deconstruction of departmental barriers, and ensuring that the top management system respects all the above (Davis & Goetsch, 2014). Aston University in England, for example, adopted Deming's theory of TQM and continued increasing advances in quality in its lifelong planning process. Wanza, Ntale, and Korir (2017) used this theory on the effects of quality management practices on the performance of Kenyan universities. They contend with Deming's theory in that it clearly explains how leaders should include the people they lead at all levels in an institution or organization. The dedication of management to serving a university is essential in providing leadership.

**EMPIRICAL LITERATURE REVIEW**

The following subsections explore the empirical literature on the subject: audits by accreditation bodies on the quality of academic programmes. Due to the continuous globalization of HE, there is a need for global accreditation standards to facilitate transparency and comparability among the HEIs, particularly when evaluating the quality of academic programmes and research activities (Ali *et al*., 2018). European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) defines accreditation as 'judgement passed on courses, programmes, or institutions that meet the predetermined standards or requirements for quality' (ENQA, 2001).

Similarly, the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) delineates accreditation as the method used to determine the quality and authenticity of educational institutions (CHEA, 2014a).

Globally, there are three basic models of accreditation used for QA in HE; these include the decentralized QA model of the US with limited state control; the centralized QA model of Europe; and the mixed QA model of the British system where the state grants self-accreditation status to the universities (Wilkerson, 2017). According to the CHEA (2014), the US institutional accreditation agencies have been adopted across many nations and have accredited more than 8,300 HEIs globally. Some institutions seek global accreditation in addition to those supported by their state governments. For instance, a study by Cheng (2015) found that most Taiwanese institutions seek US-based accreditation in addition to the recognized qualifications in the country. As a result, there is no clear understanding of the criteria for accreditation standards in higher education.

Another worldwide association for QA in HE consists of the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE), which has over 300 member organizations, most of which are QA agencies. The INQAAHE, established in 1991, focuses on three foundational approaches; accreditation, quality assessment, and academic audit (Dill *et al.*, 1996). Generally, the state governments have regional accreditation agencies that conduct accrediting activities for educational institutions and academic programmes based on predetermined standards and regulations. The state governments rely on accreditation to assure the quality of educational programmes and institutions for the placement of students and public funding. Other categories of accreditation agencies include career-related agencies and specialized or professional agencies that focus on a programme in a particular discipline, such as nursing, engineering, and law (Wilkerson, 2017).

In most cases, the accrediting agency provides a list of programmes accredited and/or recognized by a particular professional body.

The main goal of accreditation is to assess and certify the quality of education of HEIs. Accreditation standards vary from country to country. A study by Cardoso *et al.* (2017) established that with the increasing concerns about educational quality, there had been a shift from merely improving quality to a higher level of institutional accountability. Their findings indicate that most educational institutions focus more on responding to the external QA requirements for compliance rather than enhancing their internal QA mechanisms that promote quality culture. Thus the main goal of accreditation is quality improvement and adherence to quality standards of education (Pham & Paton, 2019).

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Research Design
This is defined as a system of techniques and methods used by the researcher to logically integrate several components of the analysis to adequately solve a research question (Creswell, 2014). The researcher used a descriptive survey design to enable respondents to express their views on the university's program quality status. This design was selected since large samples make the outcomes statistically significant even while evaluating multiple variables.

### Target Population
This research targeted heads of academic units, lecturers, and alumni of the Faculty of Education in Higher Education Institutions in Kenya; a case for B.Ed. Programme in the University of Nairobi. The target population was chosen due to their significant role in curriculum development, delivery, review, assessment, and evaluation.

### Sample Size And Sampling Techniques
The study sample size comprised a representative sample of alumni (360), lecturers (111), Heads of academic units (16), and the Commission of University

Education (CUE) (1) as key informants. The researcher also used purposeful sampling to select heads of academic units that service B.Ed. programmes and in the Faculty of Education and the CUE. The use of purposeful sampling is due to the study is delimited to the quality of Bachelor of Education programmes. A simple random sampling technique was applied to choose lecturers and alumni of the University of Nairobi's Faculty of Education. The simple random sampling technique gave an equal chance for alumni and lecturers to be sampled. The sample included 111 lecturers, 360 Bachelor of Education alumni, 16 Heads of academic units, and one senior official at the CUE.

### Research Instruments

A semi-structured questionnaire was used to gather field information and included open- and closed-ended questions. The questionnaire addressed accreditation bodies audits and their influence on the quality of academic programmes. An interview guide for the CUE-Head of Quality Audit was used to gather useful information for the study. Document analysis from different relevant resources provided critical information to the study.

### Reliability And Validity Of The Research Instruments

The researcher pretested the questionnaire on a few heads of academic departments at the University of Nairobi to ensure content validity. The guidance from supervisors ensured the validity of the research instruments; as Young (2006) indicates, 'the knowledge and skills covered by the test items reflect the wider field of knowledge and skills.'

Internal consistency was calculated using Cronbach's alpha (α), which indicates how well a series of test items measure one latent variable. It demonstrates whether specific elements measure related items on the same scale. Further, high reliability was achieved by providing a consistent stimulus to all subjects, which reduced observer bias significantly. (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2009).

### Data Collection Procedure

To collect data, a letter from the University of Nairobi was sought. Besides, a permit to collect data was also acquired from National Commission for Science, Technology, and Innovation. Research tools were prepared in Google forms and emailed to the respondents, and reminders were sent in two weeks to those who were yet to respond.

### Ethical Considerations

Moral principles and standards that control researchers while carrying out their studies include but are not limited to; the protection of intellectual property rights, the protection of participants' welfare and rights, and the precision/ correctness of scientific knowledge (Collogan, Tuma, Dolan-Sewell, Borja, & Fleischman, 2004).

Following that, this study embraced the following principles to ensure: authorization from the institution where the research was being conducted, the anonymity of the respondent, informed consent in which the respondents were made to understand the purpose of the study, compliance with ethical and legal standards, and respect for the research site by having a valid research permit.

### Data Analysis Techniques

The analysis produced qualitative and quantitative data, whereas the quantitative one was coded and entered into the Social Sciences Statistical Packages for analysis (SPSS Version 25.0). By joining a linear equation to the observed data, a simple linear regression analysis model was utilized to establish the linking aspect among the independent variables (explanatory variables) and the dependent variable (response variable).

The $U_y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \varepsilon$ formula was used, with Uy representing the dependent variable (quality of academic programme). $\beta_0$ denotes the intercept/constant. The coefficient is represented by $\beta_1$. The independent variable is denoted by $X_1$ (Audits by accreditation

bodies), and ε represents the error term. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze data at a significant level of 0.05 and to determine the relationship between variables, such as mean frequencies and percentages. In contrast, inferential statistics were used to determine the link between variables. Given the study objectives, researchers used Nvivo software to evaluate qualitative data where responses with shared themes or patterns were organized into coherent groups. Each research question had its own set of data exhibited in tables and graphs, as well as a group of research questions that shared the same statistics.

**Findings and Discussions**

The study sought to investigate the influence of audits by accreditation bodies on the standards of academic programmes in Kenyan universities. These sections present descriptive statistics and regression analysis.

**1.0 Descriptive Statistics for Audits by Accreditation Bodies and Academic Programmes Quality**

This study investigated the influence of audits by accreditation institutions on the standards of academic programmes in Kenyan universities, a Faculty of Education, University of Nairobi case. The study sought responses from heads of academic units, lecturers, and alumni (2016 to 2019).

**1.1 Heads of Academic Units Responses**
The heads of academic units were requested to indicate their opinions on the frequency to which the various statements were applied. The findings are shown in Table 1.1.

**Table 1: Means of Frequency to Various Likert Type Statements**

|  | Mean | Std. Dev. |
|---|---|---|
| Institutional quality audits conducted | 3.667 | 0.651 |
| Academic programmes quality audits conducted | 3.583 | 0.996 |
| Implementation of recommendations of quality audits monitored and evaluated | 3.500 | 1.087 |
| Requests for a quality audit done | 3.250 | 1.138 |
| Adherence to standards on programmes quality | 4.083 | 0.793 |
| Adherence to standards on resources supporting programmes | 3.417 | 1.165 |
| Curriculum review for accreditation | 4.250 | 0.452 |

As per the findings in Table 1, the heads of academic units indicated that curriculum review for accreditation is conducted frequently (Mean=4.250, Standard Deviation=0.452), that adherence to standards on programmes quality is done frequently (Mean=4.083, Standard Deviation=0.793) and that institutional quality audits conducted is done frequently (Mean=3.667, Standard Deviation=0.651). The respondents also indicated that academic programmes quality audits are conducted frequently (Mean=3.583, Standard Deviation=0.996) and that implementation of recommendations of quality audits is monitored and evaluated frequently (Mean=3.500, Standard Deviation=1.087). However, the adherence to standards on resources supporting programmes (Mean=3.417, Standard Deviation=1.165) and requests for a quality audit (Mean=3.250, Standard Deviation=1.138) was below 3.5. Therefore, it was done occasionally.

**1.2 Lecturers Responses**
Lecturers were requested to indicate their opinions on the frequency to which the various statements apply. The findings are shown in Table 1.2.

**Table 1: Frequency to which the Various Statements Apply**

| | Mean | Std. Dev. |
|---|---|---|
| Institutional quality audits conducted | 3.395 | 0.896 |
| Academic programmes quality audits conducted | 3.276 | 1.001 |
| Implementation of recommendations of quality audits monitored and evaluated | 3.026 | 1.166 |
| Requests for a quality audit done | 3.540 | 0.886 |
| Adherence to standards on programmes quality | 3.276 | 1.115 |
| Adherence to standards on resources supporting programmes | 3.158 | 1.189 |
| Curriculum review for accreditation | 3.632 | 1.018 |

As per the findings in Table 2, the lecturers indicated that curriculum review for accreditation is conducted frequently (Mean=3.632, Standard Deviation=1.018) and that requests for quality audit is done frequently (Mean=3.540, Standard Deviation=0.886). Moreover, the lecturers indicated that institutional quality audits are conducted occasionally (Mean=3.395, Standard Deviation=0.896), and academic programmes quality audits are conducted occasionally (Mean=3.276, Standard Deviation=1.001). That adherence to standards on programmes quality is done occasionally (Mean=3.276, Standard Deviation=1.115). Also, lecturers indicated that adherence to standards on resources supporting programmes is average (Mean=3.158, Standard Deviation=1.189) and that implementation of recommendations of quality audits monitored and evaluated is done occasionally (Mean=3.026, Standard Deviation=1.166).

**1.3 Alumni**

The alumni were requested to indicate their opinions on the frequency to which the various statements were applied. The findings are shown in Table 1.3.

**Table 3: Frequency to which the Various Statements Apply**

| | Mean | Std. Dev. |
|---|---|---|
| Institutional quality audits conducted | 3.540 | 1.158 |
| Academic programmes quality audits conducted | 3.498 | 1.122 |
| Adherence to standards on programmes quality | 3.791 | 1.159 |
| Adherence to standards on resources supporting programmes | 3.703 | 1.137 |
| Curriculum review for accreditation | 3.619 | 1.149 |

As per the findings in Table 3, the alumni agreed that adherence to standards on programmes quality is done frequently, as shown by a mean of 3.791 and standard deviation of 1.122, and that adherence to standards on resources supporting programmes is frequently done, as exhibited by a mean of 3.703 and standard deviation of 1.137. Moreover, the alumni students agreed that curriculum review for accreditation is frequently done as shown by a mean of 3.619 and a standard deviation of 1.149 and that institutional quality audits conducted are frequently done, as manifested by a mean of 3.540 and a standard deviation of 1.158 and that academic programmes quality audits conducted is occasionally done as indicated by a mean of 3.498 and standard deviation of 1.122. These findings concur with Dill *et al*., (1996), who argued that state governments have regional accreditation agencies that conduct accrediting activities for educational institutions and academic programmes based on predetermined standards and regulations.

They also concur with Cardoso *et al*. (2017) who established that there has been a shift from improving quality to a higher level of institutional accountability with the increasing concerns of educational quality. Most educational institutions focus more on responding to the external QA requirements for compliance rather than enhancing their internal QA mechanisms that promote quality culture.

*Conclusions*

The study sought to investigate the influence of audits by accreditation institutions on the standards of academic programmes in Kenyan universities, a case for the University of Nairobi's Faculty of Education. The paper established that curriculum review for accreditation, adherence to standards on programmes quality and institutional quality audits are conducted frequently. Additionally, academic programmes quality audits and implementation of recommendations of quality audits are monitored and evaluated frequently. The study also found that the adherence to standards on resources supporting programmes and that requests for quality audits are moderate.

The study concluded that audits by accreditation bodies significantly influenced the standards of academic programmes in universities in Kenya. Audits by accreditation bodies ensure that curriculum review for accreditation, adherence to standards on programmes quality, and institutional quality audits are conducted. In addition, academic programmes quality audits conducted frequently, and implementation of recommendations of quality audits monitored and evaluated frequently contribute to the quality of academic programmes. There is also moderate adherence to standards on resources supporting programmes.

**Recommendations**

The report recommends that university administrators work closely with external accreditation agencies to guarantee that academic programmes in Kenyan universities meet acceptable standards. Frequent and timely quality audits of academic programmes, adherence to program standards, and resources supporting programmes would enhance quality and education standards in HEIs. There is also need for evaluation and monitoring of the implementation of recommendations of institutional and programme quality audit reports.

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