

Peer Reviewer Experiences in Institutional and Academic Audits: A Case Study of Zimbabwean Universities

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Abstract

Institutional audits are a cornerstone of quality assurance in higher education. In Zimbabwe, academic peer reviewers play a pivotal role in facilitating these audits, yet their experiences remain insufficiently explored. Understanding their perspectives is crucial for enhancing the effectiveness and credibility of audit processes. This study seeks to examine the experiences of academic peer reviewers engaged in institutional audits within Zimbabwe's higher education sector, focusing on the challenges, perceptions, and operational realities they face. The study adopted a qualitative case study design, drawing on the extensive experiences of a peer reviewer who has participated widely in institutional and academic audits. Data were collected through reflective narration and thematically analyzed to extract key insights. The findings reveal that while audits are essential for promoting quality, they are often perceived by institutions as a threat to autonomy. Although Zimbabwe's audit framework aligns with international standards, it faces local challenges such as ensuring impartiality, addressing disparities in institutional capacity, and balancing accountability with developmental support. Active stakeholder engagement and effective data management were identified as critical factors for successful audits. By highlighting peer reviewer experiences, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of institutional audits in the Global South and underscores the need for supportive, collaborative, and context-sensitive quality assurance systems.