



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ACADEMIC RESEARCH IN PROGRESSIVE EDUCATION & DEVELOPMENT



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ISSN: 2226-6348

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To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARPED/v5-i1/2062>

DOI: 10.6007/IJARPED/v5-i1/2062

Received: 17 January 2016, **Revised:** 19 February 2016, **Accepted:** 26 February 2016

Published Online: 20 March 2016

In-Text Citation: (Sorunke, 2016)

To Cite this Article: Sorunke, O. A. (2016). Integrating Forensic Accounting into the Accounting Curriculum in Nigerian Universities: Challenges and Remedies. *International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development*, 5(1), 60–66.

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Vol. 5(1) 2016, Pg. 60 - 66

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Integrating Forensic Accounting into the Accounting Curriculum in Nigerian Universities: Challenges and Remedies

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Abstract

Following the spate of corporate scandal around the world, there has been an increased demand for professionals trained in forensic accounting. However, despite the increase in demand for forensic accountants, studies show that no Nigerian university is offering forensic accounting course.

This study therefore investigates the challenges inhibiting Nigerian universities from integrating forensic accounting course into the accounting curriculum. Results of findings indicated that the demand and interest in forensic accounting in Nigeria is expected to increase. The study further revealed that the challenges of integrating forensic accounting into accounting curriculum in Nigeria are more of academic and administrative bottleneck.

The study thus, recommends some remedies to overcome these challenges. Without any equivocation, these results will be useful to universities that are considering integrating forensic accounting education into their accounting curriculum.

Keywords: Forensic Accounting, Accounting Curriculum, Accounting Education.

Introduction

Accounting profession has always been considered by the public to be highest in integrity among all profession (Pearson 1988). Hence the investing public has historically relied upon audited financial statement when making investment decision and has depended upon auditors and the accounting profession to confirm the accuracy and completeness of financial information (Kane 2004).

However, the spate of corporate failures, dubious accounting practices and abuse of corporate power that happened around the world in the late 90s and early 20s which led to the corporate collapses of several world class corporation notably Enron, Worldcom, Global Crossing, Pamalat, Tyco International, Adelphia communication and a host of others have undermined Auditor's

credibility in their reporting function and have also eroded public confidence in the accounting and auditing profession (Arjon, ND).

In the face of such high profile scandals and fraudulent practices, there has been a renewed demand for forensic accountants.

Literature Review

Concept of Forensic Accounting

Forensic Accounting is a concept that is difficult to define because of its complex and multidisciplinary nature. One definition is therefore not sufficient to appropriately describe the concept. Hence, there is no generally acceptable definition of forensic accounting. There are many definitions, as there are many authors.

According to Dhar and Sarkar (2010), "Forensic accounting is the application of accounting concepts and techniques to legal problems. It demands reporting where fraud, bribery or embezzlement is established and the report is considered as evidence in the court of law or in administrative proceedings"

Adegbe and Fakile (2012) opined that forensic accounting is "the practice of utilizing accounting, auditing and investigation skill to assist in legal matter and the application of specialized body of knowledge to the evidence of economic transaction and reporting suitable in the purpose of establishing accountability or valuation of administrative proceedings"

Also, Bologna and Lindquist, cited in Omar and Jomitin (2013), declared that forensic and investigative accounting is "the application of financial skills and investigative mentality to resolve issues conducted within the context of the rules of evidence. As a discipline, it encompasses financial expertise, fraud knowledge and understanding of business reality and the working of the legal system"

Forensic Accounting Education

Following the spate of corporate scandals around the world, there has been an increased demand for professionals trained in forensic accounting. According to Razaee et al (1992), "forensic accounting is a fast developing field in the accounting profession and has added new dimensions to accounting education and practices." Buckhoff and Schrader (2000) posit that "adding forensic accounting course to the accounting curriculum can greatly benefit the three major stakeholders in accounting – academic institutions, students and the employers of accounting graduates". Despite the increase in demand for forensic accountants, courses being offered at universities around the globe have not kept pace with this demand. According to Razaee et al (1996), "only a handful of universities offer a fraud and/or forensic accounting course." As observed by Epps and Tribe (2008), for many years, virtually no traditional American universities provide any dedicated forensic accounting or fraud specific courses. As a result, accountants who delved into this part of the profession developed their forensic accounting skills working through the proverbial "on-the-job-training" process. Razaee (2002) conducts a survey of a small sample of undergraduate and graduate accounting students and finds that responding students believed forensic accounting offers rewarding career opportunities, yet forensic accounting education is not getting adequate attention in the accounting curriculum and be further promoted in colleges and universities.

Here, in Nigeria, the situation is even worse, according to Waziri (2011), “the accounting curriculum at the undergraduate level in Nigerian universities and colleges do not make provision for the teaching of forensic accounting.” Effiong (2012) hits the nail on the head when he posits that “credit courses in forensic and fraud investigation are grossly lacking in the undergraduate accounting curriculum of Nigerian universities.”

This development is not in any way favourable to the country quest to fight the menace of fraud and corruption in public and private organization. Thus, it has now become imperative that Nigerian universities should either offer new programme in forensic accounting or at least integrate a course in forensic accounting into the accounting curriculum in the universities. However, study by Efiang (2013) reveals that Nigerian universities, unlike their counterparts in many parts of the world are not yet ready to take up forensic accounting courses.

The above situation has posed a serious fundamental question “why do Nigerian universities find it difficult to integrate forensic accounting courses into accounting curriculum?” or in other words “What are the challenges?”. The above question has become the propelling factor behind this study. In other words the main objective of this study is to examine the challenges of integrating forensic accounting courses into accounting curriculum of universities in Nigeria and come up with remedies that will assist education stakeholders in the country to support the development of forensic accounting education in the country. However, it is very important to note that since this study is conducted only in Nigeria, the results of this study cannot be used as a universal conclusion.

Methodology

The research work employs a qualitative methodology. A qualitative approach is favoured involving personal interactions and dialogues between the researcher and the researched (Mason, 2002). This approach facilitates a nuanced assessment of the respondents’ view on the subject matter. It employs a combination of semi-structured, face-to-face in-depth interviews and Focus Group Discussion (FGD). The respondents are carefully selected among senior accounting lecturers across Nigerian Federal universities. Others are top officials of Federal Ministry of Education working in the curriculum development and evaluation unit as well as senior officials of National Universities Commission (NUC).

In all 50 interview and 6 FGDs were planned. However, only 33 interviews and 6 FGDs were conducted. This means that we achieved 66 percent of the targeted numbers of interview.

Results

The study investigates the core issues militating against integrating forensic accounting courses into accounting curriculum in Nigerian universities. Their responses were summarized below:

The question asked on the future prospect of forensic accounting revealed that 85 percent of the participants agreed that the demand for and interest in forensic accounting is expected to increase in the next five years. 76 percent of the participants agreed that educational policy makers in Nigeria are yet to see the need and the benefit of integrating forensic accounting into accounting curriculum in the country. 71 percent of the participant strongly agreed that there is acute shortage of qualified forensic accountants that can handle forensic accounting related courses in Nigerian universities. 52 percent of the participants were of the opinion that lack of

financial resources, instructional materials as well as administrative commitment for a new program is a major impediment of integrating forensic accounting into accounting curriculum in the country, while 63 percent of the participant believed that fear of overburden faculty and students alike in adding forensic accounting with courses already saturated with related material, is one of the major impediments against integrating forensic accounting in the accounting curriculum. 83.5 percent of the participants in the study were of the opinion that rigorous bureaucratic process in curriculum development for new program is also a major impediment. Based on the above responses, it is abundantly obvious that the major challenges confronting integration of forensic accounting course into accounting curriculum in Nigeria is more of academic and administrative bottleneck in nature.

The findings from the study, find support in previous empirical studies (Razaee et al., 1992; Seda and Peterson, 2008; Epps and Tribe, 2008, Razaee et al., 2003; Al-Hadrami and Hidayat, 2014)

Conclusion

In the past two decades, the accounting profession has been witness to a rising demand for professionals trained in forensic accounting. However, studies show that no Nigerian university is offering forensic accounting either as individual course and/or entire fraud accounting programme.

This study investigates the challenges militating against Nigerian universities in their quest to integrate forensic accounting into accounting curriculum as been done in other parts of the world.

Results from the study indicate that the challenges of integrating forensic accounting into accounting curriculum in Nigeria are more of academic and administrative bottleneck. According to the participants, these challenges include:

1. Educational policy makers in Nigeria are yet to see the need and benefits of integrating forensic accounting into accounting curriculum.
2. Shortage of qualified forensic accounting lecturers.
3. Lack of financial resources, instructional materials as well as administrative commitment for a new programme.
4. Fear of over burden faculty and students with courses already saturated with related materials.
5. Rigorous bureaucratic process in curriculum development for new programme.

Based on the above findings, the following are recommended as remedies to the problems:

- i. Efforts should be put in place to attract qualified professional forensic accountants to teach in the universities.
- ii. Universities currently offering accounting as a course either as undergraduate or postgraduate study should send their faculty members to training program in forensic accounting.
- iii. National Universities Commission (NUC) should ensure that forensic accounting courses/topics are included in accounting curriculum for undergraduate students of accounting in Nigerian Universities.
- iv. Universities offering accounting at postgraduate level should encourage specialization in forensic accounting among its students.

- v. Universities should also encourage their accounting students on career opportunities in forensic accounting.
- vi. Scholars and authors should come up with textbooks and instructional materials on forensic accounting.
- vii. Professional accounting bodies in Nigeria such as ICAN and ANAN should include forensic accounting topics in curriculum of their professional examinations.

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