

## MANDATORY AUDITOR ROTATION AND AUDIT QUALITY IN THE NIGERIA FINANCIAL SECTOR

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**ABSTRACT:** *The objective of this study was to provide evidence on the existence of a relationship between mandatory auditor rotation and audit quality in Nigeria firms. Ordinary least square (OLS) econometric technique was use to analyze the relationship between mandatory auditor rotation and audit quality. Findings reveal that there is a significant relationship between mandatory auditor rotation and audit quality. The other explanatory variables (Auditor type and Auditor Independence) considered alongside audit quality were found to be related to audit quality aside from Auditor Independence which shows a positive effect. The recommendation is that firms should make sure that they adopt mandatory auditor rotation and also seek the partnership of one of the big four (4) auditors if they want a quality audit report.*

**KEYWORDS:** Mandatory, Auditor, Rotation and Audit Quality

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### INTRODUCTION

Audit involves performing procedures to obtain evidence about amounts and disclosures in the financial statements so as to evaluate the appropriateness of accounting estimates made by management (KPMG, 2008). The Audit quality therefore, is a basic ingredient in enhancing the credibility of financial statements to users of accounting information. Audit quality is a product of auditor's independence and independence is relevant to auditor familiarity with client. When auditor becomes too familiar with a client, it may affect his/her independence. When auditor independence is impaired, the quality of audit suffers. Therefore, auditor rotation is a means of maintaining auditor's independence. Mandatory audit firm rotation is defined in the Sarbanes - Oxley (SOX) Act section 207 as the imposition of a limit on the period of years during which an accounting firm may be the auditor of record. Mandatory audit firm rotation is often discussed as a potential way to improve audit quality typically gaining attention when public confidence in the audit function has been eroded by events such as corporate scandals or audit failures (McLaren 1958; Seidman 1967; Corporate Accountability Research Group 1976; Hoyle 1978; Imholff 2003). De Angelo (1981) defined audit quality as the probability that an auditor will both discover and truthfully report material errors, misrepresentation and omissions detected in a client's accounting system. This probability depends upon the broad concept of an auditor's professional conduct, which includes factors as objectivity, due professionalism and conflict of interest.

The concern about Auditor rotation arises because if a company and an auditing firm have been in close association for a long period of time, this may lead to auditors identifying with their clients management consequent detrimental effect on independence (Gray and Manson, 2008). This has actually led to suggestions that auditor should be rotated with the added benefit that this would: (i) result in automatic checks of the work of the previous auditor; (ii) encourage audit innovation; and (iii) discourage complacency (Gray and Manson 2008). The idea of

mandatory auditor rotation is not new. Professionals and regulatory bodies have discussed this subject since Senator Metcalf in 1976 suggested auditor rotation as a safeguard to prevent auditors to become too familiar with its clients.

Mandatory audit firm rotation is an extension of audit partner rotation, while audit firm is being replaced after a fixed number of years. The replaced audit firm is then not allowed to take on the old clients until a fixed period of years has elapsed. Some countries had tried mandatory audit firm rotation through the last two decades but they have later abandoned the idea (Porter, Simon and Hatherly, 2001). Consequently, studies (Arrunada and Paz-Ares, 1997; Healey and Kim, 2003; Brody and Moscovice, 1998) have attempted to identify possible control variables for the state of audit quality. In the light of these studies, auditor tenure has become the focus of much debate. The resulting dilemma is that the firm is faced with the decision of whether to replace its auditors after a period of time or to build and maintain a long-term relationship with the audit firm. The outcome is at polarity with conflicting findings. While some researchers have identified the need and have provided justification for auditor rotation (Healy and Kim, 2003; Ebimobowe and Oyadonghan 2011; Geiger and Raghunandan 2002) others argue on positive effects of tenure on audit quality (Ghosh & Moon, 2005; Adeyemi & Okpala 2011; Defond & Francis, 2005).

Several studies (Arrunada and Paz-Ares, 1997; Healey and Kim, 2003; Brody and Moscovice, 1998; Dopuch, King and Schwartz, 2001; Myers et al 2003) have attempted to evaluate possible explanatory variables for the state of audit quality. In the light of these studies, auditor rotation has become the focus of much debate. Should a firm replace its auditors on a regular basis, or should the auditor be allowed to build a long-term relationship with the client? Studies on the impact of auditor rotation on audit quality are at polarity. A considerable number of these studies (Healy and Kim, 2003; AICPA, 1992; Carcello and Nagy, 2004) consider rotation of audit firms as a way of improving audit quality. This is because familiarity with the client has the effect of reducing the fresh point of view auditors have in the early years of engagement. The Sarbanes-Oxley Act of 2002 consolidates this view as it requires rotation of the lead audit partner every five years so that the engagement can be viewed “with fresh and skeptical eyes.” The argument basically is that longer auditor- rotation tends to result in an opportunity cost of auditor independence.

Conversely, other studies (Ghosh and Moon, 2005; Defond and Francis, 2005; Jenkins and Velury, 2008) also argue that longer auditor rotation improves audit quality as auditors may need time to gain expertise in the business they audit and acquire client-specific knowledge over time. This implies that audit quality is lower during the early years of the Auditor- Client relationship, and audit quality increases with length of auditor-rotation due to the reduction in information asymmetry between auditor and client (Azizkhani, Monroe and Shailer 2006). However, in the Nigerian audit setting, the challenge of auditor rotation and client relationship though still budding has not attracted much analytical attention and empirical studies beyond mere anecdotal opinions. Consequently, there has been a dearth of research in this area and inadequate empirical evidence from Nigeria. Thus, the study will provide empirical evidence from Nigeria on the existence or otherwise of a relationship between rotation of auditor and audit quality. The broad objective of the study is to examine mandatory auditor rotation and audit quality in Nigeria.

## CONCEPTUAL LITERATURE

### Audit Quality

According to DeAngelo (1981), she defines audit quality as “the assessed joint probability that a given auditor will both (a) uncover a fraud in the client’s accounting system and (b) report the fraud.” When stated differently, the quality of an audit is a function of (1) the ability of the auditor to discover material omissions or misstatement in the client’s financial statements, (2) the uncertainty that the auditor will disclose material errors. The diversity in the level of the discovery aspect represents the diversity in the level of competency of the auditor, while the diversity in the incentives to report represents the level of the auditor’s independence. An improvement in either competence or independence would lead to an improvement in audit quality, while the reverse will lead to low audit quality. Audit quality is the uncertainty that an auditor will discover any material errors, misrepresentation and omissions detected in a client’s accounting system and truthfully report same (De Angelo 1981). According to Hay and Knechel (2010), they said auditing could be placed as a type of credence good and consequently, auditors add credibility to corporate financial reports by saying an opinion about the true and fair representation but only in that the users of financial statements will perceive that the opinion is valuable.

Audit quality is the soul of audit profession. It is related to the vital interest of the public. Audit quality has been considered a multifaceted concept by the International Auditing and Assurance Standard Board (IAASB). Users, auditors, regulators, investors (shareholders), and other stakeholders in the financial reporting process may have divergent views as to what constitute audit quality which will influence the type of indicators one might use to assess audit quality. The auditor conducting the audit may define high audit quality as satisfactorily completing all tasks that is required by the firm’s audit procedures. The auditor may decide to evaluate high audit quality as one for which the work can be defended against any challenges in an inspection by a court of law. Regulators on their own stand point may view audit quality as one that is in compliance with professional standard. The public may consider high audit quality to be one that avoids economic problems for a company or the market (Enofe, Mgbame, Adeyemi, Obehioye & Ehi-Ohio, 2013)

### Mandatory Auditor Rotation

Olowookere and Adebisi (2013) Mandatory auditor rotation prevents the audit firm from developing a close relationship with the client and also provides an incentives for the audit firm to carry out its work to a high standard because they are aware that the quality of their work will be observable to some extent when a new firm of auditors take over the audit. Dopuch, King, and Schwartz (2001) said that mandatory auditor rotation leads to less biasing audit reports. Lu and Sivaramakrishnan (2009) said that mandatory auditor rotation reduces overstatements and increases understatements insinuating increased reporting conservatism.

Catanach and Walker (1999) they mentioned that the said rotation would increase the quality of services provided by the auditor because the audit firm would attempt to differentiate themselves from other firms through the quality of their work. When the same client (management) is audited too frequently by a particular auditor, the auditor tends to be too familiar with the client. This over familiarity between the auditor and client is likely to restrict the value added service of the auditor. For example, the audit programme may become stale as the auditor begins to anticipate the condition of the client’s system. As such, the quality of the

audit work becomes compromised. The beauty of mandatory auditor rotation is that it will limit the formulation of audit –client relationships that can most times lead to compromising independence.

### **Empirical literature**

Ebimobowei and Oyadonghan (2011), auditors may be engaged in a long term audit–client relationship and there may be different incentives for this. Such long term professional affiliation may signal skepticism with regards to the perception of the auditor’s objectivity, independence and audit quality. The findings of the study show that there is a statistical significant relationship between mandatory rotation of auditors and the quality of audit reports. The study concludes that a policy favoring mandatory rotation of auditors could have positive effects on the quality of audit reports as it would allow for fresh approach and restore public confidence in the audit function. According to Johnson, Khurana and Reynolds(2002), as the auditor-client relationship lengthens, there is the tendency that auditors may develop a “learned confidence” in the client which may result in the auditor not performing religiously, the required testing of financial reports. This learned confidence results in the auditor making assumptions about outcomes and using less rigorous audit procedures or static audit programs. Potentially, a loop hole for a decline in audit quality has been created.

Adeniyi and Mieseigha (2013) examine the relationship between the tenure of auditor and audit quality in Nigeria. Findings reveal that there is a negative relationship between auditor tenure and audit quality though the variable was not significant. Carcello and Nagy, (2004) also considered the relationship between audit quality and mandatory rotation of auditor’s tenure which is investigated from the point of view of fraudulent financial reporting. A logistic regression model was used and the results reveal a significant positive relationship between short auditor tenure and audit quality. Mgbame, Eragbhe and Osazuwa (2012) provide an evidence on the existence or otherwise of a relationship between the tenure of auditor and audit quality in Nigeria. Findings reveal that there is a negative relationship between auditor tenure and audit quality though the variable was not significant. The other explanatory variables (ROA, Board Independence, and Director Ownership and Board size) considered alongside auditor tenure were found to be inversely related to audit quality aside from Returns on Assets which exhibited a positive effect. Onwuchekwa, Erah and Izedonmi (2012), examines the relationship between mandatory audit rotation and audit quality. The data used were collected through the distribution of questionnaires to investors, lecturers, consultants, accountants and auditors in southern Nigeria. The data was analyzed using percentage analysis while the specified model was estimated using binary logistic regression technique through computer software Eview 7. One hypothesis was stated and tested. The binary logistic ordered regression shows that there exists a negative relationship between Mandatory Audit Rotation (MAR) and audit quality (AUDQ).

Myers, Myers and Omer (2003) using proxy variables such as discretionary accruals and current accruals, investigate the relationship between audit tenure and audit quality. The univariate results show that when auditor tenure is longer, the negative value of accrual measures was observed to be minimal. Furthermore, the study also employed multivariate analysis in order to examine if the discovered relationship between tenure and accrual is also influenced by other factors. The relationship between auditor tenure and accrual measures was also observed to be consistent in multivariate analysis as in the univariate analysis. On the other hand, the study found that extended auditor tenure had a beneficial effect on the dispersion of accruals. The implication is that there is the tendency for auditors to place greater

constraints on both income increasing and income decreasing accruals as the audit client relation lengthens. These results suggest that audit quality does not appear to deteriorate with tenure. In the light of the positions of various studies as reviewed above, we can argue that the effects of auditor rotation on audit quality are controversial. Moreover, few empirical studies use publicly available secondary data in order to determine whether perceived threats to auditor rotation actually compromise audit quality. Therefore, this study which was motivated by the lack of consensus in the literature on the impact of audit rotation on audit quality will contribute to the debate by examining the relationship between auditor rotation and audit quality in Nigeria.

### **Theoretical underpinning**

Auditing theory explains why auditing is needed in the first place. It provides us with a framework for understanding the relationship of a firm. The demand side of audit services to which auditees (companies that need audit services) can be explained using different theories. Some of these theories are driven by public perception of the role of auditors. They are the policeman and lending credibility theory. Others are; agency theory, theory of inspired confidence, moderator of claimant theory and quasi-judicial theory. The first four theories were according to Hayes, Dassen, Schilder and Wallage (2005), the four theories of auditing . However, all the theories highlighted above will be explained below showing if there is any relationship among them.

#### **The policeman theory**

This theory claims that the auditor is responsible for searching, discovering and preventing fraud. According to Adeyemi, Okpala and Dabor (2012), the auditor's job is to focus on the arithmetical accuracy of the financial statement and on prevention and detection of fraud. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, this was certainly the case (Vaasa and Kim, 2010). However, the main aim of auditors has been to provide reasonable assurance and verify the truth and fairness of the financial statement. The detection of fraud is however a topic in the debate on the auditor's responsibilities and typically after the events where the frauds in the financial statements have been revealed, the pressure increases on increasing the responsibilities of auditor in detecting fraud. In another sense, this theory is premised on the fact that auditors act like policemen. That auditor should act as watchdogs over the activities of the client. This is the attitude of some auditees. By virtue of this theory, auditors are mandated to provide adequate securities to the client resources just as is expected of the policemen. The auditors are considered to have failed where this is not done.

#### **Agency theory**

This is the theory that is most often used in research context and it incorporates part of the policeman theory and lending credibility theory, because the theory is the important theory explaining demand for audit (Adeyemi, Okpala and Dabor 2012). The agency theory is formulated on the fact that there is an agency relationship where the principal delegates work to the agent. As a result, there evolves risk sharing and conflict of interest between the two parties. It is the belief that the agent will be driven by self-interest rather than the desire to maximize the profit of the principal. The theory describes the conflict that arises as a result of separation of ownership and control. There is considerable information asymmetry and consequently contractual conflict (Adeyemi et al 2012).



Theoretically, the demand for audit services originates from the need to facilitate contractual relationship between the audit client and the stakeholders group. The preparation of financial statements is typically controlled by the board of directors of the company's stakeholders. This separation of ownership and control creates a contractual conflict between the parties leading to the so-called agency cost. An important assumption within the agency theory is that the auditor is independent and he provides an independent opinion which enhances audit quality.

### Research Strategy

The population of the study is made up of all listed banks on the floor of the Nigerian Stock Exchange as at 31<sup>st</sup> December, 2016. The data intended to be used in this research will be solicited from secondary sources, i.e. Annual reports and statements of Accounts from Nigeria stock exchange (NSE). Cross-sectional data of fourteen (14) banks from the banking sector for 2010-2015 will be used for the analysis using an ordinary least squares (OLS) regression technique with the aid of E-view 8.1. The reason for using cross-sectional analysis is because data is kept annually in Nigeria for all quoted firms and the choice of estimation technique (OLS) is because, when used on cross-sectional data, it tends to yield an unbiased and consistent result.

### Model specification

Consequently, the econometric model is hereby specified:

$$\text{AUDQ} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{AUDTYPE} + \beta_2 \text{AUDIND} + \beta_3 \text{MAR} + E_t$$

Where:

$B_0$  = Constant

$B_1$  = Parameter Estimate

AUDQ = Audit Quality

AUDTYPE = Audit Type

AUDIND = Audit Independence

MAR = Mandatory Auditor Rotation

$E_t$  = Stochastic error term

The model specified above captured audit quality as the dependent variable while mandatory auditor rotation is independent variable.

### Measurement of variables

According to Mgbame, Eragbhe and Osazuwa (2012), the following variables are considered relevant in the specification of the model examining the relationship between mandatory auditor rotation and audit quality.

AUDIT QUALITY= measured by current accruals divided by cash.

MAR= Mandatory Auditor Rotation measured by the frequency of auditor change in a firm. If one of the big four remains with the company for more than 3 years, place 1 but if otherwise 0.

AUDTYPE= Audit Type measured by the big 4 auditor. A dummy value of 1 is used if a firm uses any of the big 4 auditor.

AUDIND= Auditor Independence measured as the proportion of non-executive auditors divided by total auditors in a firm.

### Regression result

**Table 1: OLS Results**

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	t-Statistic	Prob.	Significance level
C	7647.634	4189.014	1.825640	0.0724	Significant
MAR	10070.75	4899.841	2.055322	0.0438	Significant
AUDTYPE	-17190.38	5086.881	-3.379356	0.0012	Significant
AUDIND	597.3646	7045.125	0.084791	0.9327	Insignificant
Adjusted R-squared	0.125003				
F-statistic	4.285813				
Prob(F-statistic)	0.007973				

The regression above shows the systematic relationship between mandatory auditor rotation and audit quality. In the model which comprise of one dependent variable (AUDQ) and three (3) regressors which are Mandatory Auditor Rotation, Audit Type and Audit Independence. The adjusted R-squared shows that the model explains up to 13% systematic variation in the value of the dependent variable. The adjusted R-squared is used because it makes adjustment for the degree of freedom. The coefficient of MAR of 10070.75 shows a positive relationship with the dependent variable and a probability of 0.04 which is significant at 5% conventional level of significance.

The coefficient AUDTYPE of (17190.38) shows a negative relationship with the dependent variable and a probability of 0.0012 which is also significant at 5% level of significance. The coefficient of AUDIND of 597.36 shows a positive relationship with the dependent and a probability of 0.93 which is not significant at 5% conventional level of significance. In testing the significance of all the variables together, the F-statistics shows that the variables are all significant at 1% conservative level. This shows that the causal relationships were carefully selected. This shows that the causal variables were well selected. In testing for Auto correlation the Durbin-Watson statistics which is 1. shows the presence of a low Autocorrelation.

### Findings

The coefficient of Mandatory Auditor Rotation shows a positive relationship with the dependent variable and a probability of 0.04 which is significant at 5% conventional level of significance. This is in line with Ebimobowei and Oyadonghan (2011) that said that there is a statistical significant relationship between mandatory rotation of auditors and the quality

of audit reports. Healy and Kim (2013) and Carcello and Nagy (2004) have also argued that mandatory rotation of auditor is a way of improving audit quality.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this study we have estimated and analyzed mandatory auditor rotation and audit quality in Nigeria. After examining various literature and theoretical theories, a statistical analysis was also carried out using ordinary least square (OLS) econometric technique. The regression showed all the variables used in the research, are of great significance except for audit independence. Which therefore conclude that mandatory auditor rotation and auditor type is a major significant factor in determining the quality of audit report in Nigeria. The importance of mandatory auditor rotation in Nigerian firms cannot be over emphasized. Therefore firms should make sure that they adopt mandatory auditor rotation and also seek the partnership of one of the big four (4) auditors if they want a quality audit report.

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