

Assessing Academic Credentials of the Staff and Faculty of Tertiary Institutions in Liberia

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ABSTRACT

This study assessed the academic credentials and faculty development structures within tertiary institutions in Liberia, following the 2024–2025 nationwide Quality Assurance Inspection conducted by the National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE). Using a descriptive quantitative design, data were collected from 59 institutions in Categories A and B of the NCHE classification. Results revealed that only 25.4% of Presidents and Vice Presidents for Academic Affairs possess terminal degrees, while 35.6% have none. Additionally, less than 10% of faculty members across all institutions hold terminal degrees, and 57.6% of institutions reported that fewer than half of their faculty possess master's degrees. Alarming, 81.4% of institutions lack structured faculty development programs. These findings indicate a significant gap in the quality of teaching staff, undermining institutional credibility and student learning outcomes. Guided by Human Capital Theory and Credentialism Theory, the study highlights the urgent need for reforms in faculty recruitment, qualification standards, and professional development initiatives. It recommends stricter NCHE regulations, targeted scholarship opportunities, and sustainable faculty development programs. Addressing these gaps is essential for enhancing academic quality, improving institutional effectiveness, and strengthening Liberia's contribution to human capital and national development.

Keywords: Tertiary, Education, Institution, Assessment, Academic credentials

INTRODUCTION

Academic credentials, encompassing degrees, certifications, and scholarly achievements, play a crucial role in higher education, impacting student learning, institutional credibility, and the overall quality of the educational experience. University faculty members are the prime talent pool because they facilitate students to learn (Umbach, 2007). They mentor them, and prepare them for careers, making central to institutional success (Tinto, 1993, Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, Delotte, 2024).

Barman et al. (2015) state that university teachers, because of their input, can contribute to development of individuals who can benefit society. Thus, it is the quality of their teaching which is crucial for building worthy citizens, which in turn generates national development (Kareem & Ravirot, 2014). The main qualities of a good teacher, are the knowledge of the subject area, teaching experience, teacher training and credentials, and overall academic ability (Xhaferi, 2017).

Recruitment of faculty therefore, shall be based on the degree in which a candidate possesses the skills required to qualify for appointment (Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2009). The recruitment of staff is a strategic issue concerning the provision of skills and the ambition must always be to recruit the person who is the most proficient and best suited to the post (American Association of University Professors. 2018). The needs of the institution must always be taken into account in the selection process.

In 2025, the National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) Liberia. One of the indicators that was used to conduct the assessment was the qualification and quality of the faculty. The NCHE released the assessment report in which institutions were placed into four (4) categories, namely: a) accredited/chartered institutions with challenges, b) accredited/licensed institutions with challenges, c) institutions to be suspended, and d) institutions to be shut down completely. Institutions in **Category A** are accredited/chartered institutions with challenges (see Table 1), and **Category B** are accredited/licensed institutions with challenges. Institutions in these two categories are assessed for various challenges including: fake credentials of faculty and administrative personnel, lack of adequate faculty to teach academic programs, lack of library and laboratory, low visibility, and poor learning environments, which impede students (NCHE, 2025).

Category C includes institutions that fall below the higher education standards. Institutions in this category have the following challenges in addition to the challenges faced by institutions in Categories A and B: no sound strategic and financial plans, no existing institutional structure, and do not operate within their own buildings. Category C institutions “licenses are hereby suspended with immediate effect until they meet the NCHE’s standards” (NCHE, 2025).

Category D includes “illegal institutions operating in the country without the NCHE’s knowledge; they are therefore shut down with immediate effect, and are requested to follow NCHE’s established procedures for the establishment of institutions of higher education in Liberia” (NCHE, 2025).

This study reviews the assessment report on the qualification and quality of the faculty in these tertiary institutions in Liberia. This, no doubt, will project the quality of service delivery in the classrooms because there is correlation between faculty credentials and learning outcome (Darling-Hammond, 2000).

Objectives of the study

The study aims to achieve the following:

1. Evaluate the academic credentials of the faculty of the tertiary institutions in Liberia;
2. Assess availability of Faculty Development Programs of tertiary institutions in Liberia.

Theoretical framework

The study adopted two theories – Human Capital theory and Credentialism Theory

Human Capital Theory, which posits that investments in human capital (education, skills, and experience) lead to increased productivity and economic growth. In the context of higher education, this translates to qualified faculty being a crucial investment that enhances the quality of teaching, research, and overall institutional effectiveness, ultimately contributing to a more skilled and productive workforce and society.

On the other hand, Credentialism theory refers to the practice of prioritizing formal qualifications, like degrees and certifications, in hiring and social status assignments. It suggests that these credentials act as gatekeepers, potentially limiting opportunities solely on educational background.

These theories support the objectives of this study – to evaluate the academic credentials of the faculty of the tertiary institutions in Liberia, which by extension evaluates the quality of service delivery in higher education in Liberia.

Literatures on faculty development programs (FDPs) reveal they are crucial for academic growth and organizational transformation, focusing on improving teaching efficacy, adopting technology, and enhancing research capabilities

There are several underlying assumptions and operational principles which the literature in the field generally supports as essential to an effective faculty development effort. One fundamental assumption is that good teaching can be taught. If one cannot learn to be a better teacher, then the faculty development budget is merely

an administrative expense. The Group for Human Development in Higher Education (1984), credited with giving a big push to the term "Faculty Development," has contended that faculty members should give at least 10 percent of their professional time to faculty development activities. While this is a worthy objective, it is interesting to note that no one has called for a corresponding allocation of 10 percent of the instructional budget to support this goal.

In any case, it is possible to become a better teacher if one has the necessary motivation and support-to that extent, teaching can be taught. One essential operational principle is that a program must pursue clearly defined goals within the context of institutional needs and priorities.

The real goal of faculty development, according to Reilly (1983, p. 26), is program development. Individual needs and initiatives must be accommodated within the stated needs and priorities of the institution-and this has been recognized early and late in faculty development history.

Ji Liu (2021) in his article titled "Evaluating Educational Credentials of Teachers as Predictor of Effective Teaching: A Pupil Fixed-Effect Modeling Approach" investigated factors serve as predictors of effective teaching. His research centered on the debate regarding whether the educational credentials of teachers are indicative of their contribution to pupil's educational success. His study adds new evidence that highlights the importance of the educational credentials of teachers as a predictor of effective teaching and that better-educated teachers can lead to improved pupil learning gains.

METHODOLOGY

The study is descriptive implemented using a quantitative method. This method was selected because the study aimed to examine, describe and analyze the academic qualifications of the faculty of the tertiary institutions in Liberia. Churchill and Lacobucci (2007) recommended that a descriptive research is used when the purpose of the research is simply to describe the characteristics of the group.

Population and Sample

The population of the study comprised of all the 79 higher education institutions situated across Liberia and recognized by the NCHE. The sample considered the 32 institutions classified in Category A and 27 others in category B in the NCHE 2024 inspection. The sample size of the study therefore was 59. The purposive sampling was used to select the all the institutions in categories A and B which were used in this study.

Data Collection Instrument:

The instrument used for the purpose of data collection was an Evaluation Instrument developed by experts for the National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) in Liberia. The study utilized the NCHE inspection instrument used during the nation-wide Quality Assurance Inspection exercise which lasted between November 2024 to July 2025. The questionnaire assessed five main domains: Availability of STEM programs, Levels of academic programs offered, Staff and faculty qualifications (Presidents and Vice Presidents for Academic Affairs and faculty), Availability and adequacy of facilities and infrastructure, and Presence and functionality of research departments. However, the current study focuses on the Staff and faculty qualifications (Presidents and Vice Presidents for Academic Affairs and faculty) at the higher educational institutions.

Data Analysis

Data was analyzed using frequencies and percentages. The analysis was done to determine patterns that best describe the qualification of the staff and faculty. It also involved cross tabulation for easy comparative analysis between the public universities and the private universities

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Findings from the study are presented below:

Categorization of Institutions Based on Data

Results from Table 2 focuses on the institutions in the 32 institutions in Category A. These institutions were located in eleven (11) out of fifteen (15) counties in Liberia. These institutions were selected because they were supposed to be the best in the country according to the findings of the NCHE. These institutions include:

Table 1: List of Institutions in Category A

CATEGORY A: ACCREDITED/ CHARTERED INSTITUTIONS WITH CHALLENGES		
No.	Name	Location
1.	University of Liberia	Capitol Hill, Monrovia
2.	Cuttington University (CU)	Suakoko, Bong County
3.	William V.S. Tubman University	Harper, Maryland County
4.	African Methodist Episcopal Zion University	Po River, Bomi County
5.	African Methodist Episcopal University	Camp Johnson Road, Monrovia
6.	African Bible College University	Yekepa, Nimba County
7.	Stella Maris Polytechnic University	Capitol HillIUN Drive, Monrovia
8.	Liberia Baptist Theological Seminary	Duazohn, Ria Highway, Montserrado County
9.	Nimba University	Sanniquellie, Nimba County
10.	Lofa University	Voinjama, Lofa County
11.	Grand Bassa University	Buchanan, Grand Bassa County
12.	Grand Gedeh University College	Zwedru, Grand Gedeh County
13.	Margibi University	Harbel, Margibi County
14.	Bong County Technical College	Gbarnga, Bong County
15.	Lutheran University of Liberia	Gbarnga, Bong County
16.	Liberia Maritime Training Institute	Marshall, Margibi County
17.	LICOCESS College of Education	GSA Road, Paynesville
18.	Liberia International Christian College	Ganta, Nimba County
19.	Sumo Moye Technical College	Brooklyn Community, Lofa Road, Gbarnga, Bong County
20.	Notre Dame University College	15 th Street Sinkor, Monrovia
21.	Bomi Community College	Tubmanburg, Bomi County
22.	Carver Mission Christian University	King Gray, Paynesville

23.	Baptist College of Missionary Physicians	Gbarnga, Bong County
24.	Adventist University of West Africa	Schefflin, Margibi County
25.	Apex University of Liberia	72 nd Community, Paynesville
26.	Liberia Assemblies of God University	Brewerville, Montserrado County
27.	Starz University	Airfield Sinkor, Monrovia
28.	Trinity University (Undergraduate)	Harbel, Margibi County
29.	Salvation Army Polytechnic	1 st Street, Sinkor, Monrovia
30.	PYJ Polytechnic University College	Ganta, Nimba County
31.	Smythe University College	16h Street Sinkor, Monrovia
32.	J.W. Harris University	Banjor, Virginia, Montserrado County

(Source: NCHE, 2025)

Table 2: List of Institutions in Category B

CATEGORY “B”		
LICENSED/ACCREDITED INSTITUTIONS WITH CHALLENGES		
No.	Name	Location
1.	Bushrod College of Science and Technology	New Kru Town, Bushrod Island Monrovia
2.	Best Brain University College	Thinkers Village
3.	BlueCrest University College	Tubman Boulevard, Montserrado County
4.	Liberia Dujar University College	Johnsonville, Montserrado County
5.	Central Liberia College	Gbarnga, Bong County
6.	Rafiki College of Classical Education	Boys Town, Margibi County
7.	NetLib College of Science and Technology	Congo Town, Paynesville
8.	William R. Tolbert, Jr. Baptist University	Brewerville, Montserrado County
9.	Evangelical Seminary of West Africa (ESWA)	Congo Town, Monrovia
10.	Harvest Intercontinental American University	Harvest Cathedral, Congo Town and Chugbor-Old Road, Montserrado County
11.	Forestry Training Institute	Tubmanburg, Bomi County
12.	Change Agent Network College	New Breed Community, Fissibu Town, Lofa County

13.	Emily College of T-VET and Professional Studies	Jawaijeh Community, Brewerville, Montserrado County
14.	Marantha University College	24 th Street Sinkor, Monrovia
15.	Faith University College	Diggsville, RIA Highway Margibi County
16.	Free Pentecostal College	Voinjama, Lofa County
17.	Evangel Christian University College	Soul Clinic Community, Paynesville
18.	CENSIL University	Wood, Camp, Paynesville
19.	Aware College of Professional Studies	GSA Road, Paynesville, Montserrado County
20.	Grace Life College and Seminary	Jlazon, Light Community, lower Margibi County
21.	Rudolph Kwanue University	Wein Town, Lower Johnsonville
22.	Hill City University of Science and Technology	Gbengba's Town, Ria Highway, Paynesville
23.	United Methodist University	Ashmun Street, Monrovia
24.	Liberia School of Law	Capitol By-pass, Monrovia
25.	African Virtual Campus University	ELWA, Paynesville
26.	Sinoe County Community College	Greenville, Sinoe County
27.	Grand Kru Technical College	Barclayville, Grand Kru County

(Source: NCHE, 2025)

Table 3: Type of Institution * President and Vice President for Academic Affairs have earned terminal degrees
Cross tabulation

			President and Vice President for Academic Affairs have earned terminal degrees			Total
			All of them have earned terminal degrees	Only one of them have terminal degree	Nine of them have terminal degrees	
Type of Institution	Public	Count	11	0	1	12
		% within Type of Institution	91.7%	0.0%	8.3%	100.0%
		% within President and Vice President for Academic Affairs have earned terminal degrees	39.3%	0.0%	5.9%	20.3%

	Private	Count	17	14	16	47
		% within Type of Institution	36.2%	29.8%	34.0%	100.0%
		% within President and Vice President for Academic Affairs have earned terminal degrees	60.7%	100.0%	94.1%	79.7%
Total		Count	28	14	17	59
		% within Type of Institution	47.5%	23.7%	28.8%	100.0%
		% within President and Vice President for Academic Affairs have earned terminal degrees	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

(Source: Researcher's fieldwork, 2025)

Table 3 above shows whether the Presidents and Vice Presidents for Academic Affairs of both the Public and Private Universities have earned terminal degrees. Out of the 12 public Universities, majority (91.7%) of both the Presidents and Vice Presidents for Academic Affairs have earned terminal degrees. Also, out of the 47 Private Universities, 36.2% of both the Presidents and Vice Presidents of Academic Affairs have earned terminal degrees, while 34% of them do not have earned terminal degrees. This presents the true picture of the qualities of senior administrative staff of the Universities in Liberia. The central government is responsible to hire these senior administrative staff for public universities. So, the government sets up a search committee that takes time to vet applicants and choose the best out them. As for the private universities, majority of them are owned by either churches or politicians who simply recruit those they trust into those administrative positions regardless of their academic qualification! This presents serious gap in the academic qualification of the leadership of these tertiary institutions in Liberia. The reason for this situation is simple. It was not until 2022 before Cuttington University was accredited to offer Doctor of Ministry in Theology and Educational Leadership. University of Liberia was accredited to offer PhD programs in Education and Public Health in 2023. But so far, only Cuttington University has kicked off with their doctoral programs. University of Liberia is yet to kick off. This implies that over the years, there was no doctoral program in any University in Liberia, making it difficult for Liberians in Liberia to go for terminal degrees. Hence, it is common to see leaders of tertiary institutions in Liberia without earned terminal degrees.

Table 4: Type of Institution * How many Faculty members have terminal degrees

Crosstab					
			How many Faculty members have terminal degrees		Total
			Less than 10%	11	
Type of Institution	Public	Count	12	0	12
		% within Type of Institution	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%

	Private	% within How many Faculty members have terminal degrees	20.7%	0.0%	20.3%
		Count	46	1	47
		% within Type of Institution	97.9%	2.1%	100.0%
		% within How many Faculty members have terminal degrees	79.3%	100.0%	79.7%
Total		Count	58	1	59
		% within Type of Institution	98.3%	1.7%	100.0%
		% within How many Faculty members have terminal degrees	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

(Source: Researcher's fieldwork, 2025)

Table 4 shows percentage of the faculty in both the public and private universities that have earned terminal degrees. According to the data above, all (100%) of the public universities have less than 10% of their faculty with earned terminal degrees. Also, at the private universities, almost all (97.9%) of them have less than 10% of their faculty with earned terminal degrees.

This also presents a serious gap in the academic qualification of the Faculty of these tertiary institutions in Liberia. The reason for this situation is also not far-fetched! As stated earlier, it was not until 2022 before Cuttington University was accredited to offer Doctor of Ministry in Theology and Educational Leadership. University of Liberia was accredited to offer PhD programs in Education and Public Health in 2023. But so far, only Cuttington University has kicked off with their doctoral programs. University of Liberia is yet to kick off. Even if some Faculty members have enrolled into any of these programs, it would take between four to five years to earn these degrees! This implies that over the years, there was no doctoral program in any University in Liberia, making it difficult for Faculty in Liberia to go for terminal degrees. The very few with terminal degrees studied abroad. Therefore, it is rare to see Faculty with earned terminal degrees in Liberia.

Table 5: Type of Institution * How many Faculty members have master's degree?

Crosstab						
			How many Faculty members have master's degree?			Total
			Less than 50%	Up to 50%	More than 50%	
Type of Institution	Public	Count	0	4	8	12
		% within Type of Institution	0.0%	33.3%	66.7%	100.0%
		% within How many Faculty members have master's degree?	0.0%	22.2%	100.0%	20.3%
	Private	Count	33	14	0	47

		% within Type of Institution	70.2%	29.8%	0.0%	100.0%
		% within How many Faculty members have master's degree?	100.0%	77.8%	0.0%	79.7%
Total		Count	33	18	8	59
		% within Type of Institution	55.9%	30.5%	13.6%	100.0%
		% within How many Faculty members have master's degree?	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

(Source: Researcher's fieldwork, 2025)

The above table deals with the percentage of the faculty in both the public and private universities with master's degrees. According to the table, more than 60% (66.7%) of the public universities have more than 50% of their faculty with relevant master's degrees. The situation is different at the private universities. 70.2% of the private universities have less than 50% of their faculty with master's degrees while only 29.8% of them have up to 50% of their faculty with master's degrees. This shows that there are more qualified faculty at the public universities than the private universities.

Reasons for the situation are not far-fetched. The scope of programs offered at the graduate schools in Liberia is very limited. Most graduate programs (especially in the sciences and engineering) are not available in Liberia. Only MBA/MPA programs, Master's degree programs in Environmental Science, Regional planning, Educational Administration and Conflict Resolution are available in Liberia. As a result, most faculty members of the programs in the sciences and Engineering hold only first degrees but because there are no opportunities for them acquire relevant advanced degrees that they actually need. Very few who possess such degrees studied abroad either by direct government sponsorship or bi-lateral arrangement.

Table 6: Type of Institution * Do you have Faculty Development Programs?

			Do you hve Faculty Development Programs?		Total
			Available but not enough	Not available	
Type of Institution	Public	Count	11	1	12
		% within Type of Institution	91.7%	8.3%	100.0%
		% within Do you have Faculty Development Programs?	68.8%	2.3%	20.3%
	Private	Count	5	42	47
		% within Type of Institution	10.6%	89.4%	100.0%
		% within Do you have Faculty Development Programs?	31.3%	97.7%	79.7%
Total		Count	16	43	59

	% within Type of Institution	27.1%	72.9%	100.0%
	% within Do you have Faculty Development Programs?	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

(Source: Researcher's fieldwork, 2025)

Table 6 shows whether there are faculty development programs at both the public and private universities in Liberia. According to the data, majority (91.7%) of the public universities have some sort of faculty development programs, though not enough. Conversely, only 10.6% of the private universities have such programs. The rest do not have any form of faculty development programs. On the overall, this is a serious situation. The implication is that only Faculty members with the financial capacity can advance themselves. But with the state of the economy in Liberia, coupled with the lack of opportunities for advancement locally, Faculty members find it difficult to advance themselves. There is no doubt that this has effect on the quality of service delivery in these institutions!

DISCUSSION

The results of this study presents a very serious situation, especially at the private universities. These statistics present a serious threat to the quality of higher education delivery in Liberia, considering the central role faculty play in shaping student learning outcomes, conducting research, and sustaining institutional credibility (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Umbach, 2007). Moreover, the revelation in **Table 6** that 81.4% of institutions lack structured faculty development programs highlights the absence of continuous learning and professional growth opportunities. This gap further weakens the teaching and research capacity of institutions, thus limiting their contribution to national development (Zivkovic, 2025).

The implications of these findings are consistent with both Human Capital Theory and Credentialism Theory. Human Capital Theory emphasizes that investments in education and training yield higher productivity and economic growth; therefore, underqualified faculty represent a missed opportunity for strengthening Liberia's workforce and knowledge economy (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). On the other hand, Credentialism Theory sheds light on the persistent issue of fraudulent or inflated qualifications reported by the NCHE. When formal credentials are used as gatekeeping tools without adequate verification, institutions risk admitting unqualified individuals into faculty positions (Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2009). Consequently, Liberia's tertiary education sector may continue to produce graduates who are inadequately prepared for the labor market, perpetuating a cycle of weak institutional effectiveness and poor human capital outcomes. Addressing these systemic challenges is therefore a matter of urgency for policymakers, institutions, and development partners.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the findings, it is recommended that the National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) enforce stricter regulatory frameworks on faculty recruitment, with emphasis on authentic and verifiable academic qualifications. For instance, the data in **Table 4** confirms that terminal degree holders are below 10% across all sampled institutions, highlighting the urgency of requiring a higher proportion of such qualifications in senior teaching and administrative positions. Faculty members who currently lack terminal degrees should be encouraged and supported to pursue advanced studies through local and international scholarships, fellowships, and academic exchange programs. Such initiatives will raise the academic profile of institutions and ensure that they are able to deliver quality teaching, research, and community service in line with global higher education standards (Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2009; Darling-Hammond, 2000).

Furthermore, tertiary institutions should prioritize the establishment of structured faculty development programs aimed at enhancing pedagogical competence, research capacity, and professional growth. Evidence from **Table 6**, where 81.4% of institutions reported no available faculty development programs, demonstrates the urgent need for such initiatives. This can be achieved through strategic collaborations with donor agencies, private sector partners, and international universities that can provide technical support and funding. Regular workshops,

mentorship programs, and training in emerging instructional technologies will not only improve faculty capacity but also strengthen student outcomes (Inside Higher Education, 2025). The NCHE should also institute regular monitoring and evaluation systems to assess the effectiveness of these programs and ensure compliance with national quality assurance benchmarks. By implementing these recommendations, Liberia's higher education institutions will be better positioned to address faculty credential gaps, improve institutional credibility, and contribute more effectively to national growth and development goals (EHL Insights, 2025)

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