

## **AWARENESS AND ASSESSMENT OF GRANTS AMONG TEACHING STAFF OF IMO STATE UNIVERSITY, OWERRI**

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**ABSTRACT:** Nigeria is currently undergoing recession which has affected all sectors and aspects of lives of Nigerians. The tertiary institutions ranging from the federal, state to privately owned universities, polytechnics and colleges of education are not immune. Hence, salaries are delayed or denied workers, infrastructural developments are scanty and inadequate and research, the bed-rock of tertiary education, is epileptic or completely cheapened and absent. The major hope for research activities in tertiary institutions hinges on grants. Grants whether at the international, federal, state or private domains are available but locating and accessing them are the real problems especially among the teaching staff whose research interest is at present shaky. This research work is aimed at evaluating the awareness and assessment of all forms of available grants among university teaching staff using Imo State University, Owerri as a case study. One hundred and eighty (180) teaching staff drawn from the existing eleven faculties of the university comprising teaching staff of varying cadre, ages and gender were employed for the study. They were chosen through convenient sampling. Grants' Awareness and Assessment Scale was used in getting data for the study. Simple percentage statistics was employed in analyzing the data. Results indicated that 64.5% of the participants were aware of existing grants but only 35.6% have had access to them. It was then recommended that the university should create more awareness for grants and establish better and easier ways of encouraging the teaching staff in accessing them.

**Keywords:** Awareness, Assessment, Grants, Teaching Staff, University.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Research is one of the pivotal points on which university education rests, the others being teaching and community service. Research is an investigation to discover facts, insights and other elements central to the matter at issue. It is so critical that it determines the quality of any higher institution. It constitutes a key criterion for the promotion of academic staff and, as such, it is highly regarded, sought after and requires high level participation and quality work (Bassey, Akuegwu, Udida & Udey, 2007).

The importance of research cannot be overlooked in a university environment. Research publication in the university is a major indicator of academic staff productivity. For Bassey *et al.*, 2007, quality research by academic staff contributes to genuine indigenous and sustainable development. Dill (1986) in Bassey *et al.* (2007) observed that a vast majority of discoveries are

made through research in the higher education environment and maintained that, in recent years, the emphasis for research in universities seems to be focused on productivity. By implication, the need for quality research has been widely acknowledged not only in academic institutions but in the wider society.

However, Obibuaku (2005) contended that research entails a lot of effort and demands a great deal of money. If a member of the academic staff is to carry out a research with the purpose of publishing it in reputable journals outside the country, there is need to have funds and laboratory equipment required to accomplish the work. If Nigeria is going to catch up with and get into the main stream of development, her universities must be alive to their research responsibilities, because research is essentially the cutting edge of scientific, technological and economic development. As it stands, Nigeria no doubt, is still a developing and multi-tribal and lingual nation. It is currently undergoing recession which has visibly affected all major sectors and aspects of lives of Nigerians. The tertiary institutions, ranging from the federal and state universities to privately owned, are not immune. Hence, salaries are delayed or completely denied workers. Infrastructural developments are inadequate and research works, the bedrock of universities, are epileptic, cheapened or totally absent. All these have caused academic brain drain, suffocation of industries that rely on research activities and general drop in national economy and development.

The major hope for research activities in the Nigerian tertiary institutions is grant. A grant, simply put, is an amount of money given especially by the government or agencies for a special purpose such as research or education. It is a non-repayable fund disbursed by an agency to an eligible grantee.

Today, there are many grants available to be accessed by lecturers in the tertiary institutions. They range from international, federal, state, and regional to private grants geared toward research in various human endeavours. These grants involve millions of Naira and dollars and often hang without being accessed for years. Many university lecturers do not know about them. Those who have knowledge of their existence do not often know how to access them and the few that are aware are most often than not discouraged due to frustrations, delays in processing which often takes years. Keeping the aforementioned factors in mind, this study seeks to empirically evaluate the awareness and accessibility of grants among university lecturers. Specifically, the study revolved around two key questions namely: is lecturers' awareness of grant significantly high? Are lecturers' accesses to grants significantly low?

### **Theoretical Framework/Literature Review**

This work used two theories-the Innovation Diffusion theory and Perception theory. The innovation diffusion theory (IDT) describes how innovations or technologies become accepted and spread through societies, large or small (Rogers, 2003). In IDT, the process of choosing to use a technology or innovation which in this case, is the grant is known as innovation-decision process. Through this process, a person passes from gaining knowledge about the innovation to forming an attitude about it (Demir, 2006). Once an attitude is formed, an individual makes the decision to accept or reject the innovation. If he/she accepts the innovation, the person

implements the innovation and proceeds to confirm the decision. Hence, awareness to grant is first established and followed by assessment. The entire process occurs in five stages, the first being the knowledge stage (Demir, 2006). During this stage, an individual is exposed to technology and how it functions. There are three types of knowledge identified in this stage: awareness-knowledge or becoming aware that the innovation/technology exists, how-to-knowledge or knowledge obtained regarding how to use the technology and principle-knowledge or underlying concepts of the technology, such as how the internet works (Rogers, 2003). While principles-knowledge is not necessary for acceptance and use, not having it may result in the person discontinuing use. In today's world, awareness-knowledge is often obtained through the mass media, while how-to-knowledge is gathered from change agents or early adopters of technology, which play vital role for change (Rogers, 2003). Thus, awareness-knowledge guides the research to evaluate lecturers' awareness of grants.

Persuasion, the second stage of IDT, equips individuals to look for information regarding the technology, evaluate which sources of information are credible and examine peer attitudes towards the technology. Unfavorable attitudes about a technology/innovation do not always lead to acceptance or rejection of innovation. Sometimes an affirmative attitude towards the technology does not point to use and when this happens, it is known as the knowledge-attitude-practice (KAP) gap (Rogers, 2003).

Decision, the third stage for IDT unveils the decision stage when individuals participate in activities that result in acceptance or rejection of the technology. Individuals often seek a way to adopt the technology in a small way; in effect trying out the technology before fully committing to it. This gives the individuals an opportunity to verify that the technology provides an advantage, which if it does greatly heightens acceptance (Rogers, 2003). While overall rejection of an innovation happens at this stage, it can occur throughout the process. When this happens, an individual either actively rejects or passively rejects the innovation (Rogers, 2003).

If an individual chooses the innovation/technology, the next stage for him/her is implementation. Implementation is actual use of technology/innovation and many things may occur at this stage resulting in discontinuance of use. Problems in understanding how to fully implement the innovation/technology may happen. However, a change agent is helpful in resolving issues and providing education use. Further, those who find new or enhanced uses of technology called re-inventors, can provide added incentive for adopters struggling with implementation.

The final phase is confirmation. At this point, the new adopter looks for support regarding his/her decision to use the innovation and in this case access to grants. The adopter wants to be at peace about his/her decision and will seek for reinforcement of his/her choice. However, if he/she receives too much information incongruent to his/her action to adopt, he/she may discontinue use. When discontinuance is chosen the adopter either replaces the innovation or becomes disenchanted. This is known as disenchantment discontinuance which happens when the innovation does not meet with the standard idea the individual has imagined and he/she simply stops using the innovation. Replacement-discontinuance happens when the person replaces the technology with a competing innovation that he/she feels is superior (Rogers, 2003).

In a similar light, Perception theory by Smith (2010) explains the process by which an individual selects, organizes and evaluate stimuli from the environment to provide meaningful experiences for him/her. The audience automatically chooses which information to notice and this kind of selection is dependent on different perceptual filters which are based on the consumer's earlier experiences (Smith, 2011). The theory provides explanation on why a particular message is perceived differently by the audience. This implies that the way a particular audience views a given message may differ from the perception of the message by another audience. This theory is relevant to this study because of the differences in the way the teaching staff of Imo State University, Owerri perceive access to grants from various agencies for the enhancement of researches.

Perception according to Bovee, Thill, Dovel and Wood (1995) is a process of being exposed to a stimulus, paying attention to some degree, and then interpreting the received message. Hence, perception involves the exposure, attention and interpretation of a stimulus. In other words, for perception to take place there must be exposure to stimuli with certain level of attention paid to the stimuli and finally the stimuli are interpreted by the audience (Ezinwa, 2014).

In a study, Bauer (2011) revealed that most institutions do not invest enough time, effort or money into the grants process and investigated how organizations can seek grants support through being proactive and focused, using time system into their human capital development. He also stressed the need for grant for individuals and organizations which capitalize on capabilities and re-defining projects and improving research grants profile to get the right hits.

Debunking some myths about grant writing and accessibility, Henson (2003), believes that it is all about power, adding that grants are necessary for organizations because they bring prestige, programs, equipment, travel and research. Grant frees us to do the kind of research, teaching and service that we enjoy most. However, widespread misconceptions about grant and grants-writing have inhibited many academic researches as most academic researchers seem to believe that grant funds are only available to big and prestigious institutions and not to individual or small institutions.

In yet another study, Bhagavathula, Bandari, Tefera, Jamshed, Elnour & Shehab (2017) assessed the attitude of medical and pharmacy students in Asian and African universities towards scholarly research activities using an anonymous, cross-sectional, self-reported online survey questionnaire which was administered to medical and pharmacy students studying in various Asian and African universities through social media between May and July 2016. The study found that 52.2% of the pharmacy students and 40% of medical students believed that research activities provided a means of gaining respect from their faculty members. Lack of encouragement, paucity of time, gaps in research activities and practices, and lack of research funding were some of the most common barriers acknowledged by the students. If lack of research funding was a challenge to the sampled students according to Bhagavathula et al (2017), what could be the challenge for lecturers in the sampled university? Is it ignorance or lack of access to such funds?

Quick (2003), investigated the expert's tools and techniques for managing funded programs by institutions and how to keep the grant money flowing in, and suggested that institutions should take a more active role in seeing that their mission makes the desired impact succeed beyond expectation. Quick noted that winning the grant is just the first stage in the long process.

Furthermore, Bassey *et al* (2007) conducted a study on academic staff research productivity in universities in the South-South zone of Nigeria. The sample size comprised 480 academic staff drawn from a population of 3,120. Data collection was carried out using a researcher – constructed instrument called Academic Staff Research Productivity Inventory (A.S.R.P.I.), which was validated and pilot tested. Results indicated that male and female academic staff differed significantly in their research productivity; married and single academic staff differed significantly in their research productivity and there is a significant influence of areas of specialization on academic staff research productivity. It was recommended that academic staff in universities should be encouraged to carry out research work irrespective of their gender, marital status and areas of specialization. Based on their recommendation, how are lecturers expected to engage in quality research in the absence of funding and inability to access such funds where in existence?

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study was designed quantitatively using the survey method. According to Owuamalam (2012 in Ojiakor 2017), “survey enables the researcher to deal with the characteristics of a chosen set of people whose opinion, behaviour and attitudes are essential for the collection of information required for the study”. Nwodu (2006) corroborates that survey probes directly and indirectly, attitudes, feelings, opinions and dispositions of a select group of people in a given population and by extension use the outcome to generalize on the entire population. Also, for Wimmer and Dominick (2014:192), “survey allows researchers to examine many variables (demographics and life style information, attitudes, motives, intentions, and so on) and to use a variety of statistics to analyze the data”. It is for these justifications that the researchers use survey to sample the opinions of lecturers in Imo State University, Owerri, regarding awareness and access to research grants.

One hundred and eighty teaching staff were selected for this study. They were chosen through convenient sampling from eleven faculties of Imo State University. Participants were from all cadres of teaching staff.

The instrument for data collection was an awareness and assessment of grant scale developed for this study. The scale was divided into two. The awareness scale has 12 items with reliability of 0.69 Cronbach's Alpha and satisfied norm of eight, meaning that the participant who scored from eight and above indicated awareness of grant while scores below eight showed non-awareness. The assessment scale has 10 items with a Cronbach's Alpha reliability of .71 and statistical norm of 3.3. This indicates that any participant who scored from 4 and above had accessibility of grants.

For the procedure, the researchers went round various faculties of the university and distributed the awareness and assessments of grant scale to available lecturers they could get in their offices and pleaded with them to fill the questionnaire. In order words, lecturers who participated were those the researchers could meet on the spot. The researchers waited on them to fill the questionnaire so there was 100% return rate.

Quantitative data generated in this study were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences SPSS version 20.0. The results were presented using frequency and percentage and charts.

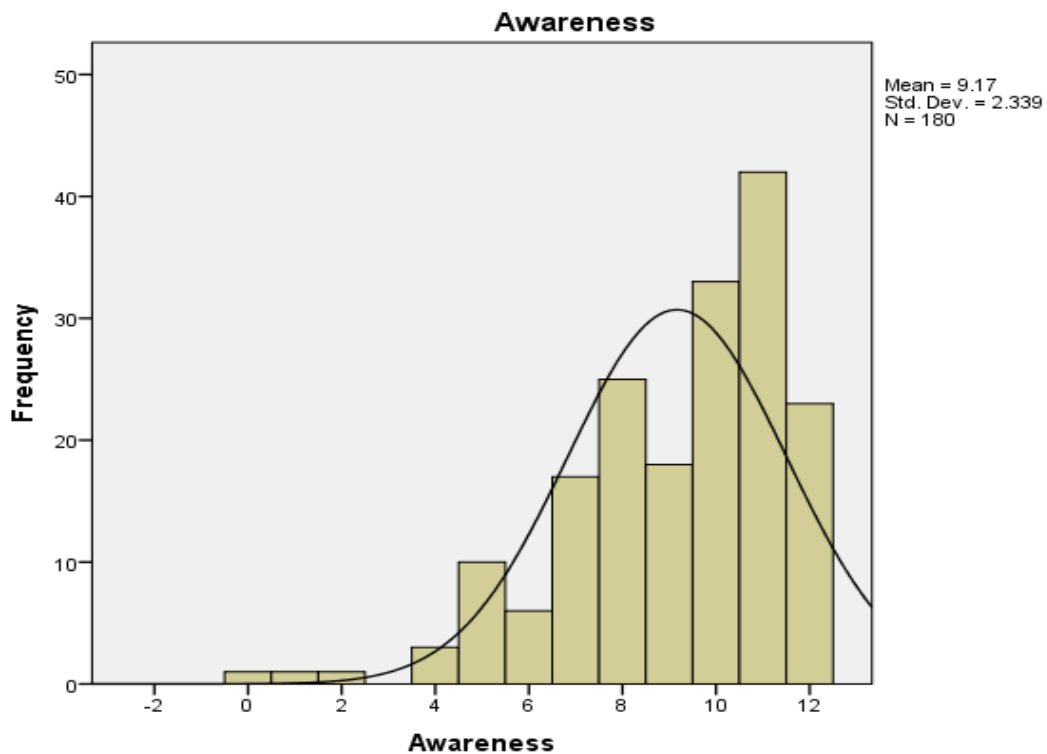
## RESULT

**Table I: Frequency and Percentage of Lecturers' Awareness of Grants**

Score	Frequency	Percent
0	1	.6
1	1	.6
2	1	.6
4	3	1.7
5	10	5.6
6	6	3.3
7	17	9.4
8	25	13.9
9	18	10.0
10	33	18.3
11	42	23.3
12	23	12.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>100</b>

The result from table 1 above shows that lecturers have a significantly high awareness of grants, with 64.5% (116) lecturers scoring higher than 8 out of a total score of 12.

**Fig. 1: Histogram Showing Lecturers' Awareness of Grants**



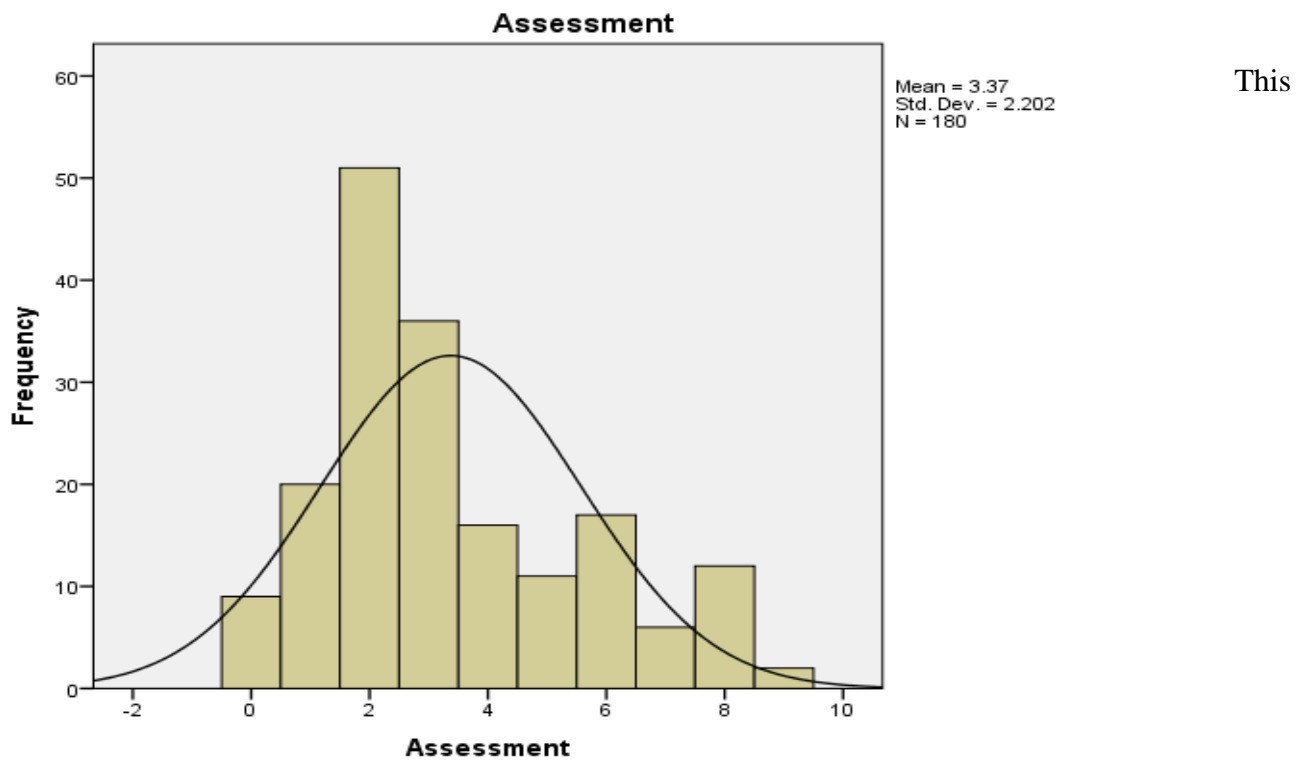
The above histogram clearly reflects level of lecturers' awareness of grants in Imo State University.

**Table II: Frequency and Percentage of Lecturers' Accessibility of Grants**

Score	Frequency	Percent
0	9	5.0
1	20	11.1
2	51	28.3
3	36	20.0
4	16	8.9
5	11	6.1
6	17	9.4
7	6	3.3
8	12	6.7
9	2	1.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>100.0</b>

The result above shows that lecturers' ability to access grants is significantly low, with 64.4% (116) lecturers scoring between 0 and 3 out of a total score of 9. In comparison only 35.6% (64) scored above 3. The interpretation of table 2 is that only a few lecturers have gotten or tried to get Grants.

**Fig. 2: Histogram Showing Lecturers Assessment of Grants**



histogram clearly depicts the fact that although Imo State University Lecturers are very much aware of the availability of research grants, they are not really making efforts to explore the grant option.

### **Discussion of Findings**

The result shows that there is high level of grants' awareness among lecturers of Imo State University, Owerri. From data collected, this high level of awareness was as a result of their colleagues who have successfully accessed such available grants. Another reason for the level of awareness was a result of advertisement tools like branded vehicles of grantees and structures and interventions within the university community. There are also advocacy programmes within the university. It was also found out that the most popular funding body among the respondents is TETFund. Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund) was established as an intervention agency under the TETFund ACT - Tertiary Education Trust Fund(Establishment, etc) Act, 2011; charged with the responsibility for managing, disbursing and monitoring the education tax to



public tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Among their mandates are Research and publication and also academic staff training and development.

The explanation for the high level of awareness and popularity of TETFund could be as a result of their recent sensitization visit to the University. Furthermore the University is littered with infrastructure built by TETFund which by extension shows organizational and individual's level of awareness. Indeed, the management of the University from time to time encourages the lectures through memos to write for grants. This is in dissonance with the conclusion of Bauer (2011) that revealed that most institutions do not invest enough time, effort or money into the grants process and investigated how organizations can seek grants support through being proactive and focused, using time system in their human capital development. He further stressed on the need for grant funds for individuals and organizations which capitalize on capabilities and re-defining projects and improving research grants profile to get the right hits. From our findings, the problem is not with awareness or availability of funds as Bauer suggests.

Further, the results from this study also reveal significant low assessment of grants. This on its own, as a reality, shows that the lecturers are aware of grants but lack techniques of assessing them. The interpretation of the data means that knowledge is not the problem among academic staff in Imo State University, Owerri, rather the problem lies with successful access to the funds. 36.5% of the respondents feel it is waste of effort and time as such funds are not available for south Easterners. Indeed assessment of grants entails rigorous techniques in discovering where grants exist, what they are meant for and the rules of obtaining them. The insignificant few who failed on the first attempt are discouraged to try again and this has become problematic as they often discourage others. This finding can be explained with the perception theory by Smith (2010) which explains the process, by which an individual selects, organizes and evaluates the stimuli from the environment to provide meaningful experiences for him/her. The audience automatically chooses which information to notice and this kind of selection is dependent on different perceptual filters which are based on the consumer's earlier experiences (Smith, 2011). By virtue of the failed attempt, they appear reluctant because of their perception and formed opinion regarding grant access. At this juncture, one agrees with the timely suggestion of Henson (2003), who is of the opinion that widespread misconceptions about grant and grants-writing have inhibited many academic researches as most academic researchers seem to believe that grant funds are only available to big and prestigious institutions and not to individual or small institutions.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Grant for research is still the only hope for lecturers in the tertiary institutions as it frees them and allows them do the kind of research, teaching and service that they enjoy most. Though research grants are still available in millions of dollars and Naira, only a few individuals painstakingly discover their availability and pay the price of assessing them.

The result of this study shows that the teaching staff of Imo State University, Owerri-Nigeria have a high level awareness of the existence of grants but a low level of access to them. Therefore, university authorities and donor agencies need to do more to encourage a high

accessibility of these grants. This can be done through sensitization platforms like seminars and workshop. Mentoring should also be encouraged so that grantees can mentor others on the requirements and processes involved. This study also recommends that lecturers should evaluate and possibly change their perception of funding agencies as the guidelines are to checkmate the influx of fraudsters at the expense of serious minded researchers.

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