

FORENSIC ACCOUNTING AND FRAUD DETECTION IN NIGERIAN PUBLIC SECTOR

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ABSTRACT

This paper has been carried out to empirically examine the significant difference between forensic Accounting and fraud detection in the Nigerian public sector. A research survey design was used for the purpose of this paper with a sample size of one hundred (100) respondents which comprises of auditors and accountants of four (4) ministries selected from Edo state in Nigeria. The statistical tool used to test the hypotheses was Analysis of variance, (ANOVA). From our findings we found out that the application of forensic accounting in Nigeria's public sector is effective in detecting fraud, there is a significant relationship between forensic accounting and litigation support service in Nigeria's court and lastly the application of forensic accounting in the public sector is effective in preventing fraud. We therefore recommended that the public sector should build a continuous improvement

in the internal control system and initiate effective and efficient internal check, they should adopt a sound accounting system in principal and effective practices, forensic accountant should acquire proper training on forensic accounting skills and procedures and officials in the public sector should embrace integrity, objectivity, fairness, accountability as a moral duty to reduce the level of fraud.

Keywords: Forensic Accounting, Fraud detection, Corruption, public sector.

INTRODUCTION

Corruption, fraud and other financial and economic fraud and crimes has made it difficult for Nigerian's to meet her welfare and social responsibilities to citizenry, these evil have assumed alarming proportions and pervasive mismanagement of resources have become the order of the day in public sector. (Okunbor & Obaretin, 2010). According to Okolo (2007), financial crime has become really pervasive and the likelihood of corporate fraud occurring has also become more severe. High level of financial abuse was hindering tax collection, making and enforcement of Law difficult and discourages foreign investment. The wide spread of fraud in public sector have made traditional auditing and investigation inefficient and ineffective in detecting fraud. Oyejide (2008) opined that fraud

is a subject that has received a lot of attention both globally and in Nigeria.

According to Karwai (2002), he maintains that the increase wave of fraud is causing a lot of havoc in the Nigeria public sector. This is because fraud has penetrated into every aspect of Nigeria public sector. Okunbor & Obaretin (2010), reported that the spates of corporate failure have placed greater responsibilities and functions on accountant to equip themselves with skills to identify and act upon indicators of poor corporate governance, mismanagement, frauds and wrong doings. The failure of auditor to prevent, detect and reduce modern frauds like white collar crimes such as security fraud, embezzlement, bankruptcies, contract disparate, money laundering and other financial crime in the public sector has put pressure on professional accountant and legal practitioners to find better ways of exposing fraud in public sector. (Owojori & Asaolu, 2009).It has now become pertinent to introduce and practice forensic accounting which is one of the approaches that can be used for the prevention and detection in public sector since external auditor do not or may not have the required knowledge to be able to detect, prevent or reduce fraud in Nigeria's public sector.

From the above problems stated, this paper seeks to examine the role of forensic accounting in fraud detection in Nigeria and with a keen interest in the public sector. This paper is divided into four sections. The first part is the introduction,

the purpose and objective of the study. The second section has to do with the conceptual insight of what fraud and forensic accounting is, the role forensic accounting plays, its need and the skills required by accountants in detecting fraud. We also reviewed previous studies of different researchers. The third part looked at the methodology for this study, data analysis and interpretation as well as the results from our findings. The fourth section is the conclusion and recommendation.

1.1 The research questions/objective of the study

On the premise of the above problems, this study seeks to specifically address the following research questions:

1. Is the application of forensic accounting service effective in detecting fraud in Nigerian's public sector?
2. Is there significant relationship between forensic accounting and litigation support service in Nigerian's court?
3. Is the application of forensic accounting service effective in preventing fraud in Nigerian's public sector?

Consequently the objective of this study seeks to examine the extent to which forensic accounting service is effective in detecting fraud in public sector. It also seeks to assess the significant relationship that exist between forensic accounting and litigation support service in Nigerian's court, as well as to evaluate the extent to which forensic accounting is effective in preventing fraud in public sector.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The Concept of Forensic Accounting

According to the Oxford Learner's English Dictionary (2010), forensic accounting means belonging to, used in or suitable to court Judication or public discussion, debate and ultimately dispute resolution. Crumbley (2003) defined forensic accounting as the application of laws of nature to the laws of man. He describe forensic scientist as examiners and interpreters of evidence and facts in legal case that also offers expert opinion regarding their findings in court of law. Baird & Zelin (2009) say that forensic accounting is important investigative tool for detection of fraud. Gray (2008) opined that forensic accounting assist in disputing effective internal control and prevention of fraud in organization. He also analyzed forensic accounting as the combination of auditing and investigating skills. It is simply the process of interpreting, summarizing and presenting complex financial issues, clearly, succinctly and factually often in a court of law as an expert witness.

Damilola and Olafinsola (2007) view forensic accounting as the application of criminal method and integration of accounting investigative activities and law procedures to detect and investigate financial crimes and related economic misdeeds. Zysma (2004) put forensic accounting as the integration of accounting, auditing and investigative skills.

Forensic accounting is suitable for legal view offering the highest level of assurance and including the now generally accepted connotation of having been arrived at a scientific fashion, (Crumbley 2003). Manning (2002), also defined forensic accounting as the application of financial accounting and investigative skills to a standard acceptable by the court to address issues in dispute in the context of civil and criminal litigation. Cutis (2008) argues that fraud can be a subject to forensic accounting since fraud encompasses the acquisition of property or misrepresentation or concealment. He also argued that an accountant without forensic accounting knowledge can prepare valid evidence from accounting records and financial statement used against prosecutors in the court of law.

Forensic accounting as a fast growing field origin was ascribed by Joshi (2003) to Kutilya the first economist to openly recognize forensic accounting. Forensic accounting has greatly and has become a field of interest to auditors and accountants. A nation wide study conducted by Kessler international showed that 39 % of organization have considered the need of forensic accountant due to increase in fraudulent activities and other economic crime. The field has attacked many inexperienced accountant who lacks expert skills in detecting and preventing fraud in organization.

Olofinsola (2009) viewed forensic accounting as the application of criminalities methods and integration of accounting investigative activities and law procedures to detect

and investigate financial crime and economic misdeal. Okunbor & Obaretin (2010) reported that corporate failure have placed greater responsibility and functions on accountant to equip themselves with required skills to identify, detect, prevent as well as preserving the evidence of all form of irregularities and fraud. Dandago (1997), Gray (2008), Ramaswamy (2005) and Owojori & Asaolu (2009), Manning and other researchers view forensic accounting as the combination of accounting, auditing, and investigating skills in detecting and preventing fraud and other fraudulent activities and provide litigation support services in the Court of law, while other researchers expressed their various view of forensic accounting.

According to Bhasin (2007), forensic accountants are trained to look beyond the number and deal with the business realities of situation. He also reported that forensic accounting involve: investigating, analyzing financial evidence, developing computerized applications to assist in the analysis and presentation of financial evidence, communication their finding in form of reports, exhibits and collect documents, and assist in legal proceedings, including testifying in court, as an expert witness and preparing visual aids to support trial evidence. Investigation is an examination of records and accounts of an organization for a specific purpose. According to Oxford Advanced learner's Dictionary (2010), fraud is defined as the crime of cheating somebody in order to get money or goods illegally. Arzova (2003) viewed fraud as enriching oneself by

intentionally realizing the value or worth of an asset in secret. Okafor (2004) reported that fraud is a forensic term and embraces all multifarious means which human ingenuity can devise which can resort to by one individual to get advantage over another in false representation.

Adeniji (2004) and others summaries the types of fraud on the basis of methods of perpetration, include the following but not exhaustive as the methods are devised day in day out; defalcation, suppression, outstripped, theft and embezzlement, tampering with reserves, insider abuses and forgeries, fraudulent substitutions, unauthorized lending, lending to ghost borrowers, kite flying and cross firing, fake payment, fraudulent use of firms documents, fictitious contracts and lot more. Oyejide (2008) opined that fraud is a subject matter that have received a lot of attention both globally and in Nigeria.

According to Bozkurt (2003), there are two types of fraud committed in business. These are: Personal use of business resources and drawing up of financial statement of business falsely. Research has shown that the amount of loss in public sector as a result of employees' fraudulent activities is far greater than that suffers as a result of citizens negligence. About 50 % of employees is determined to commit fraud while 80 % of employee might be inclined to commit fraud under a suitable condition (Owolabi 2007). Researchers also observed that high rate of fraud committed in public sector are committed by married men is higher than unmarried with high

level of education and higher IQ level of age 28 and above, under a suitable working environment who is entrusted with responsibility of taking care of fraud or their collaborators and occupies lucrative positions in the organization. The wide spread of fraud in Nigeria public sector have made traditional auditing and investigation ineffective in detection and prevention of fraud. In 2009, researcher observed that fraud and economic crime rate has increased to about 80 % which have threatened national development and made traditional auditors handicap which brought about the existences of forensic accounting, a specialty that have developed improved skills and techniques to tackle these challenges with its accountant who is knowledgeable in detection, prevention of fraud and provide litigation support service in Nigerian's Court (Jenfa 2002).

Recently, Nigerian's public Sector have realized that fraud, corruption and money laundry were becoming the greatest challenge and major hindrance to National development and decided to introduce forensic accounting to detect, reduce and prevent fraud. This became possible by introduction of forensic accounting training. Forensic accountant are trained to look beyond mere members and deal with business realities of situations (Bhasin, 2007). They analyze, summaries, interpret, and Present complex financial business related issues and also develop computerize application skills to assist in analyzing financial evidence.

Forensic accounting is a rapid growing field in detection and prevention of fraud in the public sector. . This has become a complex area of concern for the accounting profession, (Okoye & Gbegi, 2003). Forensic accountant apply accounting, auditing and investigating skills in detecting fraud and present litigation support service in the court (Bolgna & Liquist, 1995). Forensic accountant are train to look beyond mere numbers and deals with business reality. (Bhasin, 2007). According to Zysman (2004), forensic accountant are usually geared towards finding where money went, how it got there and who was responsible. Forensic accounting as a rapid growing field have been effective in detecting and preventing fraud in Nigerian's public sector by application of its professional and expert technical skills to detect manipulated evidence, analyze financial document in fraud scheme, other illegal financial activities, asses the damages caused by auditor's negligence and fact finding as evidence used against defaulter as litigation support service in the court.

Emeh and Obi (2013) also carried out an empirical analysis on forensic accounting and Financial Fraud in Nigeria. In their study they examined the correlations of the presence of forensic accountants (PFA), the number of accountants with forensic accounting skills (NAFT), extent of forensic accounting practices (EFAP), extent of employee theft (EET), extent of financial fraud (EFR) and extent of top management fraud

(ETMF). There was evidence of significant negative correlations between PFA, NAFT and EFAP with EFR.

In the works of Dada, Owolabi and Okwu (2013), they attempted to look at the relevance of forensic accounting in effective reduction in fraudulent practices in Nigeria. The results of the study reveal that fraud reduction is significantly and positively related to fraud investigation and detection through forensic accounting.

2.1.1 The role of Forensic Accounting

The role of forensic accounting cannot be underestimated in detecting fraud in Nigerian's public sector. Owojori & Asaolu (2009) state that the role of forensic accountant is different from that of traditional auditor and it is suitable to an organization. He also states that forensic accountant utilizes accounting, auditing and investigating skills while conducting investigation and are trained to look beyond dispute in numbers of ways. They analyze, interpret, summarize and present complex issues in understandable and probably supported which provide litigation support service in the court of law.

Crumbly and Apostolou (2005) claimed that a professional forensic accountant has a single minded focus on detection and prevention of fraud. Forensic accounting often involves an exhaustive detail effort to penetrate concealment tactics (Krell, 2002). Forensic accountant specialize in fraud detection, documenting the exact evidence

required for successful criminal prosecution, give preliminary advice as an appraisal of the pleading and evidence available at the start of proceedings, review and identify key documents which should be available as evidence, prepare a detail balance on quantum evidence which is understandable, review expert accounting report and legal counsel on financial and accounting issues.

2.1.2 The need for Forensic Accounting

The need for forensic accounting arose as a result of failure of audit system in organization to detect fraud and other fraudulent activities. Professionals in the field have observed that intense economic pressure have led so many into fraudulent activities in most organization. These great challenges have led to hindrances in National developments which result to the introduction of forensic accounting and its programme. Forensic accounting programme was designed to help Accountant develop an investigative eye toward both internal and external fraud and provide crucial information to cope with it when discovered. Forensic accounting is a new and rapid growing area in accounting which is like a bridge connecting accounting system to legal system. (Mayungbe, 2012).

2.1.3 Skill of Forensic Accountant

Forensic accountant requires expert and professional skill to be effective in performance of duties. Aderibigbe (2000) suggested that a forensic accountant requires high level of

competence, integrity and honesty to perform his job and be thoroughly trained to prove his competence by pass my all relevant examination to become a member of recognized accounting body.

The area of forensic accounting, as Houck, Kranache, Moris and Robertson (2006) argued, consists of rather unique skills that ordinarily requires additional training beyond an academic degree in accounting, certified Public Account (CPA), certified FRAUD Examiners (CFE) or any other certification. Forensic accountant should possess knowledge, and skills and abilities in the following areas:

1. Accounting and auditing skills
2. Criminology specifically oriented to the nature dynamics, and scope of fraud and financial crimes; the legal, regulatory, professional environment and technical issues.
3. Fraud detection, deterrence, detection, investigation, and remediation in the following areas; assist misappropriation, corruption, and false representation financial statement fraud, fraud and forensic accounting based tools and techniques for detecting and investigation, electronics case management tools and other specific to computerize environments.
4. Loss prevention.
5. Forensic and litigation advisory services, including research and analysis validation of losses and damage

investigation, conflict resolution (i.e. arbitration and mediation).

a. The Concept of Fraud

According to The Electoral and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) (2004) and Okafor (2004), fraud can be said to be a non-violent crime and illicit activity committed with the aim of getting illegal wealth either individually, in a group or an organised manner. This violates existing legislation governing the economic activities of government and its administration. Also the Oxford English Dictionary (2009) defines fraud as wrongful or criminal deception intended to result in financial or personal gain. Ojaide (2000) stated that frauds are acts of deceit, dishonesty, falsifications and manipulations done to get either monetary or non-monetary benefits.

In the opinion of Ramamoorti (2007), Fraud is a human behaviour that involves deceit, purposeful intention, risk of being cut, rationalization, strong desire and violating trust. But, Wang, Liao, Tsai, & Hung (2006) and Nwaze (2012) share a similar view on Fraud. They see fraud as a planned tricky process or device usually undertaken by a person or group of persons with the full intention of cheating another person or organisation to gain ill-gotten benefits. It is therefore imperative to know that to catch a thief one must think like a thief. From the point of view of the behavioural scientist, there are psychological factors that could influence the behavior of

fraud perpetrators. So it is necessary for the forensic accountant to think like a crook who secures wealth or power through illegal means. Any form of unethical behavior including bribery, nepotism, kickbacks, political donations, artificial pricing, fraudulent practices, embezzlement, favoritism and other sharp practices that gives advantage to people in authority or their relations, efforts to secure wealth or power through illegal means can be summarized as corruption, which is in line with Williams (2005) who corroborates that corruption is a financial crime.

Ngai, Hu, Wong, Chen, and Sun (2010), have stated that financial fraud is becoming an increasingly serious problem and effective detecting accounting fraud has always been an important but complex task for accounting professionals.

Karwai (2002), Ajie and Ezi (2005), Bozkurt (2003), Okafor (2004), and Adeniji (2004) summarized the different types of fraud committed by employee in an organization. From observation, about 80 % of public sector official are involved in fraudulent activities and other economic misdeed which have hindered national growth and development, forensic accountants are proactive and possess professional and expert skills not found in traditional auditor in identifying and preventing fraud.

Houck et al (2006) argues that forensic accountant requires unique skills and professional knowledge and training that is beyond academic degree. He also argues that for forensic accountants to be effective he must acquire relevant skills and knowledge. Forensic accounting came into existence due to failure of traditional auditor to detect and prevent fraud and other economic crime.

3 METHODOLOGY

For the purpose of this study a research survey design was adopted with a population of four (4) ministries out of the entire ministries in Nigeria and a sample size of about one hundred (100) respondents which comprises of auditors and accountants from the four ministries selected from Edo state.

The source of data of this study was obtained from two sources. The data was sourced from primary and secondary sources, with the primary source being the major source, which comprised of structured questionnaires that was administered to respondents in the various ministries. The study used a well-structured questionnaire to generate data from respondents. They were administered to respondent of four ministries in Edo State in which fifty questionnaires were filled and return.

3.1 Data Analysis and Interpretation

The data collected from the questionnaires were analyzed using Analysis of Variance (**ANOVA**). The choice of ANOVA for this study is on the fact that it determines the extent of variance in dependent variables that are caused by

independent variables, also used in comparing the variation in more than two independent sample that are drawn from population with the same variance. The decision Rule states that the null hypothesis should be rejected if the calculated value of f-ratio is greater than critical value of f. i.e. ($f_{t-1, N-t}$). Otherwise, it stands accepted.

3.2 Test of Hypotheses

H₁: The application of forensic accounting service in public sector is not effective in detecting fraud.

Variables	Question 2	Question 8	Question 11	Total
Agree	5	13	9	27
Strongly agree	38	31	26	95
Disagree	5	5	6	16
Strongly disagree	2	1	9	12
Total	50	50	50	150

Anova Summary

Source	Sum of square	Degree of freedom	Mean square	F-ratio
Between	1510	3	503.3	28.16
Within	143	8	17.875	
Total	1653	11		

Critical value of 5% level of significance with degree of freedom 3 to 8 is 4.07

Decision Rule

Since the calculated value is 28.16, is greater than the critical value of 4.07. The alternative hypothesis (H_A) is accepted and the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected. Therefore the application of forensic accounting service in Public Sector is effective in detecting fraud.

H₂: There is no significant relationship between forensic accounting and litigation support service in Nigerian’s court.

Variables	Question 3	Question 6	Question 10	Total
Agree	8	9	5	22
Strongly agree	37	37	33	107
Disagree	5	4	6	15
Strongly disagree	-	-	6	6
Total	50	50	50	150

ANOVA SUMMARY

Sources	Sum of square	Degree of freedom	Mean square	F-ratio
Between	1774	3	591.33	80.7
Within	44	6	7.33	
Total	1818	9		

Critical value 5% level of significant with degree of freedom 3 to 6 is 4.76

Decision Rule

Since the calculated value is 80.7 is greater than critical value of 4.76. The alternative hypothesis (H_A) is accepted and null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected. Therefore, there is significant relationship between forensic accounting and litigation support service in Nigerian court.

H_3 : The application of forensic accounting is effective in preventing fraud in Public Sector.

Variables	Question 5	Question 7	Question 9	Total
Agree	7	10	11	28
Strongly agree	34	30	34	98
Disagree	6	5	5	16
Strongly disagree	3	5	-	8
Total	50	50	50	150

ANOVA SUMMARY

Source	Sum of square	Degree of freedom	Mean square	F-ratio
Between	1524	3	508	108
Within	33	7	4.7	
Total	1557	10		

Critical value at 5% level of significance with degree of freedom 3 to 7 is 4.35.

Decision Rule

Since the calculated value is 108, is greater than critical value of 4.35, the alternative hypothesis (H_A) is accepted and null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected. Therefore we can conclude that the application of forensic accounting in public sector is effective in preventing fraud.

3.3 Discussion of Findings

Based on the analysis of variance (ANOVA) used to test hypothesis one, two and three, the findings are stated below.

In test of hypothesis one, 122 respondents agreed while 28 respondents disagreed making 150 respondents. This revealed that the application of forensic account in Nigeria's public sector is effective in detecting fraud. This findings is in lane with the works of Ranaswany (2005) and Arzova (2003).

In test of hypothesis two, 129 respondents agreed while 21 respondents disagreed. This revealed that there is a significant relationship between forensic accounting and litigation support service in Nigerian's court. Manning (2002) and Cutis (2008), share the same opinion about with this findings.

In test of hypothesis three, 126 respondents agreed while 24 respondents disagreed. This revealed that the

application of forensic accounting is effective in preventing fraud in Nigeria's public Sector. This is in line with the works of Gray (2008) and Dada et al. (2013).

4. CONCLUSION/ RECOMMENDATIONS

Forensic accounting as a field in accounting has a vital role to play in protection of Nigeria's Public Sector against financial and economic fraud. This study revealed that forensic accounting combines accounting, auditing and investigating skills in detecting, preventing and provide valid evidence used against prosecutors in Nigerian's court. The study also revealed that fraud committed by public sector officials, those involved, roles of forensic accountants, required skills of forensic accountants to enable them contribute, their quota meaningfully in achieving the objectives of this study. Detection and prevention of financial and economic fraud through the application of forensic accounting service will improve the image of Nigerian's Public Sector.

Based on the findings of the study, it is therefore recommended that Nigerian's Public Sector should formulate sound personal and recruitment policies to attract people with good moral standing as employee, authority high pay as antidote for fraud scourge; Nigeria's Public Sector need to build a continuous improvement in the internal control system and initiate effective and efficient internal check; public sector should adopt a sound accounting system in principal and

effective practices; the various anti-corruption agencies like EFCC, ICPC should be restructured by government for better performance; several accounting bodies in Nigeria should ensure that forensic accountant are well trained with modern skills of forensic accounting procedures; Financial Reporting Council (FRC) should ensure the best standard and regulations are established to ensure best practice and service delivery; Nigerian's Public Sector should invest in human capacity building to improve the quality of internal auditors and forensic accountant on payroll and Nigerian's should embrace integrity, objectivity, fairness, accountability as a moral duty to reduce the level of fraud in Public Sector.

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