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FORENSIC ACCOUNTING AND FRAUD MANAGEMENT AND PREVENTION AMONG MINISTRIES, DEPARTMENTS, AND AGENCIES IN LAGOS STATE, NIGERIA

By
Yusuf Alabi Olumoh [1] , Sanni Mubaraq [2] , Benjamin Ayodeji Balogun [3]
Department of Accounting and Finance, Kwara State University Malete
olumoh.yusuf@gmail.com [1] mubaraq.sanni@kwasu.edu.ng [2]
07032508205, 08030817202, 07047979057

Abstract

In Nigeria, the persistent issues surrounding forensic accounting relate to a dearth of skilled experts, limited adoption of advanced methodologies, and the complexities tied to managing electronic forensic accounting records across sectors. This research assessed how forensic accounting impacts the management and prevention of fraud within Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs) in Lagos State. Employing a descriptive research design and a survey approach, the study delved into the practical role of forensic accounting in fraud prevention, prioritizing real-time actions over variable manipulation. The study's focus group encompassed 1000 senior employees from 27 MDAs in Lagos State as of December 2021, with a sample of 286 and respondents selected through simple random sampling. Data was collected through structured questionnaires distributed among selected staff of the various MDAs. Quantitative data underwent descriptive and inferential statistical analysis, particularly multiple regression estimation. The findings revealed a significant correlation between accounting skills, auditing skills, and investigative skilss in managing and preventing fraud ($\beta = 0.3445$, $t = 12.8637$, $p = 0.000$); ($\beta = 0.1767$, $t = 9.2743$, $p = 0.000$); ($\beta = 0.4081$, $t = 17.1880$, $p = 0.000$). This implies that implementing comprehensive frameworks and maintaining vigilant monitoring and evaluation efforts can steer Lagos State MDAs towards enhancing their fraud prevention strategies. The study recommended the need for the Lagos state government to adequately invest in professional development programs, training workshops, and continuous education to augment the forensic accounting skills of those engaged in fraud management and technological applications across MDAs in the state.

Keywords: Forensic Accounting, Fraud Management, Fraud prevention, Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs), Lagos state

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In the ever-changing landscape of global business and finance in both public and private sectors, it is imperative to ensure the integrity and transparency of financial transactions. The need to combat fraud and protect the interests of public entities is particularly critical in the state of Lagos, Nigeria. This bustling economic hub, home to myriad Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs), demands robust measures in the realm of forensic accounting and fraud management (Alberola & Janssen, 2019).

Forensic accounting is a specialized field that combines accounting, auditing, and investigative skills to detect and prevent financial fraud and misconduct (Kranacher & Riley, 2019). With the increasing complexity of financial crimes, the demand for forensic accountants has grown

significantly worldwide. Forensic accounting has gained prominence globally due to the rise in financial crimes, corporate scandals, and the need for effective fraud detection and prevention. The field encompasses various areas, including litigation support, expert witness testimony, dispute resolution, and investigative accounting. It plays a crucial role in assisting legal proceedings, identifying financial irregularities, using skills, techniques, technologies in providing evidence for legal cases. The global adoption of forensic accounting practices has been driven by the recognition of its importance in maintaining financial integrity, protecting stakeholders' interests, and ensuring compliance with regulatory frameworks and many countries have established professional bodies, certifications, and standards to enhance the credibility and expertise of forensic accountants (Alharasis, Haddad, Alhadab, Shehadeh & Hasan, 2023).

Africa has witnessed a surge in economic growth and foreign investments in recent years. However, this growth has also been accompanied by an increase in financial crimes, corruption, and fraudulent activities. As a result, the demand for forensic accounting services has grown exponentially across the continent. Forensic accounting in Africa faces unique challenges due to the diverse legal systems, cultural differences, and varying levels of economic development (Akinbowale, Klingelhöfer, & Zerihun, 2020).

However, several African countries like Ghana, South Africa, Kenya **and Nigeria** have recognized the importance of forensic accounting and have taken steps to address financial crimes effectively. These countries have established regulatory frameworks, professional bodies, and educational programs to develop the necessary skills in accounting, auditing, investigations and expertise in the field (Kaunda, 2021; Gitonga, 2022).

Nigeria, as one of Africa's largest economies, has experienced significant financial fraud and corruption challenges. The country has witnessed high-profile cases of embezzlement, money laundering, and corporate fraud. Consequently, the demand for forensic accounting services in Nigeria has grown rapidly. To combat financial crimes, Nigeria has made efforts to strengthen its legal and regulatory frameworks. The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offenses Commission (ICPC) are the primary agencies responsible for investigating and prosecuting financial crimes in Nigeria. Additionally, professional bodies like the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Nigeria (ICAN) and the Association of Certified Fraud Examiners (ACFE) have played a crucial role in promoting forensic accounting practices and providing training and certification programs (Ibrahim, 2020; Ogunode & Dada, 2022).

Fraud management is a critical concern for governments and organizations worldwide. Fraudulent activities can lead to significant financial losses, damage to reputation, and hinder the effective functioning of public institutions. Nigeria, as a developing country, faces significant challenges in fraud management and prevention within its MDAs. The country has experienced high levels of corruption, mismanagement of public funds, and fraudulent practices within its government agencies. However, in recent years, Nigeria has made efforts to address these issues by implementing anti-corruption reforms, establishing specialized anti-fraud agencies, and adopting forensic accounting skills, techniques and technology-driven solutions to enhance fraud detection and prevention (Karuti, 2020; Awodiran, 2023).

Lagos State, as Nigeria's economic and commercial center, plays a crucial role in the country's overall development. The state government has recognized the need for effective fraud

management and prevention within its MDAs to ensure efficient service delivery and attract investment (Oyedokun, 2022; Ajao, Aremu & Ufuoma, 2022). Lagos State has implemented various measures, including the establishment of anti-corruption bodies, adoption of e-governance initiatives, forensic accounting techniques, skills and investigations and the use of data analytics to identify and prevent fraudulent activities (Inalegwu, 2021; Ajao, et al., 2022)

However, there are several challenges and issues that hinder the effective implementation of forensic accounting practices in Nigeria. One of the major challenges in Nigeria is the lack of skilled forensic accountants (Erasmus & Ibezim, 2021). The country faces a shortage of professionals with the necessary expertise, skills and knowledge in forensic accounting **(Abu, Olatunji & Mike, 2022).** According to a report by the Association of Certified Fraud Examiners (ACFE), Nigeria has a low number of certified forensic accountants between 2020-2022 compared to the size of its economy and the prevalence of financial fraud This shortage of skilled professionals hampers the ability to effectively investigate and prevent financial crimes (Aremu, & Olayinka, 2023).

Another problem in Nigeria is the limited use of advanced forensic accounting techniques and skills. Many organizations and law enforcement agencies still rely on traditional accounting methods, which may not be sufficient to uncover complex financial fraud schemes. The lack of awareness and training on modern forensic accounting techniques, such as data analytics, digital forensics, and forensic auditing, hinders the effectiveness of investigations and the ability to gather evidence for legal proceedings. Be that as it may, the increasing use of technology in financial transactions has led to a surge in electronic forensic accounting records. However, Nigeria faces challenges in effectively managing and analyzing these electronic records and skills in areas of auditing and investigation. Be that as it may, there is a lack of infrastructure and resources to handle large volumes of electronic data, leading to delays and inefficiencies in investigations (Abiodun, Alawida, Omolara, & Alabdulatif, 2022). Additionally, the lack of proper legislation and regulations regarding electronic evidence poses challenges in the admissibility and authenticity of electronic forensic accounting records in court. Therefore, this study aims to evaluate the impact of forensic accounting on fraud management and prevention among MDAs in Lagos State.

Numerous esteemed researchers, including Abdulrahman (2019), Emma, Segun and Obioma (2019), Okoye and Ndah (2019), Suleiman and Othman (2021), Oyedokun (2022), Bagudu (2022), Obiora, Onuora and Amodu (2022), John, Ebilite and Udoye (2022), Amahi (2023), Idem, Ogundele and Emem (2023) have explored various facets of forensic accounting. However, there remains a noticeable dearth in empirical investigations focusing on the application of forensic accounting techniques, services, digital records, and auditing in the management and prevention of frauds specifically within the Nigerian context. Notably absent, to the best of researchers' knowledge, is a comprehensive study delving into forensic accounting, auditing, and investigative skills and their collective influence on fraud prevention and management within Lagos State, Nigeria. In an endeavor to bridge this gap in the existing literature, this paper aims to empirically investigate the substantial impacts of forensic accounting practices on the management and prevention of fraud within Lagos State's Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs). The specific objectives of this study are to; investigate the impacts of accounting skills on on fraud management and prevention among MDAs in Lagos State, Nigeria; examine the impacts of auditing skills on fraud management and prevention among MDAs in Lagos State; and evaluate the impacts of investigative skills on fraud management and prevention among MDAs in Lagos State.

The discoveries derived from this research endeavor are poised to enlighten the academic realm, guide policymakers, government entities, and organizational stakeholders towards the adoption of robust strategies for fraud mitigation. By harnessing the expertise of forensic accountants, equipped with comprehensive training, knowledge, and expertise in forensic accounting, auditing, and investigative skills, these insights will pave the way for the implementation of effective measures. These measures aim not only to curb fraud risks but also to bolster governance, fortify accountability, and elevate standards within various sectors and institutions.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Conceptual Review

The variables of interest were conceptually clarified through the review of different scholars' description and definition of forensic accounting and financial accountability in this sub-section.

2.1.1 Forensic Accounting

According to Amahi (2023), forensic accounting refers to the application of analytical and investigative skills for the purpose of resolving financial issues in a manner that meets standards required by court of law. Alharasis, Haddad, Alhadab, Shehadeh, and Hasan (2023) defined forensic accounting as the integration of accounting, auditing, and investigative skills to examine financial information and uncover evidence of potential fraud or misconduct. Tobin (2023) asserts that forensic accountants engage in a wide array of tasks during the course of their investigations. These tasks encompass the collection of data as they delve into funds, assets, and comparable financial information, as well as the review of accounting systems and practices pertaining to criminal and legal matters. Moreover, they are responsible for providing testimony within the court setting. Tobin (2023) further emphasizes that the competencies necessary for an individual to excel as a forensic accountant can be classified into two categories: core skills and enhanced skills. Core skills encompass critical and strategic thinking, identification of key issues, and auditing prowess. On the other hand, enhanced skills encompass analytical aptitude, effective communication, meticulousness, problem-solving acumen, and adeptness in legal matters. Furthermore, forensic accountants must possess the ability to conduct interviews, gather forensic intelligence, and employ regression analysis techniques. Forensic accounting is defined as the application of accounting concepts and techniques to legal problems (Abdulrahman, 2019). Forensic accounting refers to the application of analytical and investigative skills to resolve financial issues in a manner that meets the standards required by a court of law (Oyedokun, 2022). According to Dada and Jimoh (2020), forensic accounting is a branch of accounting that deals with current, ongoing, or anticipated problems, making it suited for legal evaluation and ensuring the effective reduction of financial malpractices. Al Samara, Al-Afeef, and Al Ali (2017) viewed forensic accounting as the use of criminal methods and the inclusion of investigative accounting issues and legal processes to investigate and detect financial crime and other economic misconduct. Oyedokun (2013) also described forensic accounting as a scientific accounting method for the detection, resolution, analysis, and presentation of fraud cases that can be used in court. However, Oyedokun (2018) further opined that forensic accounting "is a scientific method of uncovering, analyzing, resolving and preventing fraud and white-collar crimes matters in a manner that produces admissible evidence which is capable of proving or disproving facts in issue and suitable in the court of law. In essence, Forensic accounting is a specialized field within accounting that combines investigative techniques with financial expertise to uncover and prevent fraud and financial mismanagement (Akinbowale, Klingelhöfer, & Zerihun, 2020). From another perspective, it involves the application of accounting knowledge and techniques in legal investigations and dispute resolutions (Eko et al., 2020).

2.1.2 Fraud Management and Prevention

Fraud management and prevention involves implementing a strategy to detect fraudulent transactions or actions and prevent these actions from causing financial and reputational damage to the customer and financial institution (Deloitte, 2017). Fraud management and prevention can be adjudged in terms of fraud risk assessment, employee training, background checks, rule-based approach, machine learning, internal controls and detection methods (Deloitte, 2017; Spiceworks, 2021; CG Tax, Audit & Advisory, 2022). Employing fraud prevention and fraud detection strategies is crucial to reducing the loss caused by fraudulent activities (Spiceworks, 2021). The implementations of fraud management prevention could be achieved in Nigeria among the MDAs through the Strengthen Policies and Procedures, Employee Training and Awareness, whistleblower Protection, Internal Audit and Monitoring, Data Analytics and Technology, Collaboration and Information Sharing: Incorporate forensic accounting techniques in fraud management within Nigeria MDAs. This includes conducting forensic audits, analyzing financial records, and using investigative techniques to uncover fraudulent activities (Deloitte, 2017; Oyinloye & Oyinloye, 2018).

2.2 Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on The Fraud Triangle Theory, propounded by criminologist Donald Cressey in the 1950s, serves as the foundational framework for comprehending the dynamics of fraudulent activities. According to this theory, three crucial elements: pressure, opportunity, and rationalization converge to prompt individuals towards engaging in fraudulent behaviors (Cressey, 1953;. Oyinloye & Oyinloye, 2019). In the context of forensic accounting skills, auditing skills, and investigative skills on fraud management and prevention among Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs) in Lagos State. Firstly, the theory highlights "pressure" as a critical factor, signifying the financial, personal, or professional strains that might propel individuals within MDAs toward fraudulent actions. Forensic accounting skills play a pivotal role here, as they enable the identification and alleviation of financial pressures through proactive measures and early detection methods (Idris, 2018) Secondly, "opportunity" delineates the circumstances or vulnerabilities within the organizational structure that enable fraudulent conduct. Auditing skills, a core component of forensic accounting, are instrumental in assessing and fortifying internal controls, thereby reducing the opportunities for fraudulent activities within these entities (Oyinloye & Oyinloye, 2022; Al-Natour et a., 2023). Lastly, "rationalization" encapsulates the mental justification or ethical dilution that individuals may employ to rationalize their fraudulent behaviors. Investigative skills within forensic accounting serve as a crucial tool in uncovering, confronting, and mitigating these rationalizations by delving deep into the evidence and unraveling the truth behind fraudulent activities (Tobin, 2023).

2.3 Empirical Review and Hypotheses Development

There are different empirical studies on forensic accounting have been located in the literature. For instance, Karuti, Mwaniki and King'oriah (2019) investigated how application of forensic accounting skills influence fraud control in County Government. Seven counties in the Mount Kenya region and 351 staff members were the target population as well as the study sample size. Regression analysis was used to estimate the model coefficients while Pearson coefficient of correlation was used to establish the strength of relationship among the variables. The study found that there was a positive linear relationship between forensic accounting skills and fraud control.

Emma, Segun and Obioma (2019) assessed the effect of forensic accounting on fraud management of Selected Firms in Nigeria. Survey design was adopted using questionnaire in data collection

from accounting staff of Nigeria Breweries Plc, Cadbury Nigeria Plc, Nigeria Bottling Company and Dupril Forma Nigeria Ltd, all in Aba, Abia State. Based on regression analysis adopted the findings revealed that forensic accounting significantly influences fraud detection and prevention. Similarly, Abdulrahman (2019) examined forensic accounting and fraud prevention in Nigerian public sector by using some selected studies from within and outside Nigeria. **Their study employed content analysis.** Based on the analysis, the study found that a significant positive influence exists between forensic accounting techniques and fraud prevention. In a different manner, the study of Okoye and Ndah, (2019) x-trayed Forensic Accounting and Fraud Prevention in Manufacturing Companies in Nigeria. Data were collected from primary sources through the issue of fifty (50) structured questionnaires to the accounting staff of ten (10) manufacturing companies. The findings showed that there is a positive and statistically significant relationship between fraud investigation practices and the prevention of fraud in manufacturing companies. In considering different estimating technique, Karuti (2020) investigated forensic accounting and fraud control in county governments in Kenya. **Data gathered from 415 respondents** were analyzed using regression analysis and the study found that county government personnel did not sufficiently enforce forensic accounting standards to counter the potential of fraud. **Suleiman and Othman (2021) investigated impact of forensic accounting on public sector corruption in Nigeria.** The study revealed four aggregate dimensions, commitment of national values, judicial reform, a preventive mechanism and financial commitment can influence fraud prevention.

Kaur, Sood and Grima (2022) determined how forensic accounting contributes to fraud detection and prevention. The study used the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) method to carry out a systematic literature review (SLR) to identify and assess the existing literature on forensic accounting. The findings revealed that there exists a positive correlation between forensic accounting and fraud detection and prevention. **In a contrary view,** Akinbowale, Klingelhöfer and Zerihun (2023) investigated the application of forensic accounting techniques in relation to fraud risk mitigation in South Africa. This study employed an explanatory research design and a qualitative approach accompanied with a purposive sampling method. A primary data source was devised with a focus on the 17 licensed commercial banks registered in South Africa. Result Chi-square tests obtained substantiate that the loopholes created as a result of non-effective application of forensic techniques are partly responsible for some **cyber fraud** incidents in the banking industry.

Eko (2022) evaluated forensic accounting on fraud management in the public sector ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs) in Nigeria. The study investigated how data mining, accounting ratios and trend analysis tools **detect and prevent fraudulent activities in MDAs.** A survey research design was adopted for the study. The ordinary least squares (OLS) multiple regression analysis technique revealed that the adoption of forensic accounting tools (data mining, accounting ratios and trend analysis) will significantly enhance the ability to detect and/or prevent fraud in MDAs. in a borad view, In the same vein, Oyedokun (2022) investigated the determinants of forensic accounting techniques. The data analyzed in this study were gathered from both primary and secondary sources. The 120 respondents were purposively selected, which includes forensic accountants, fraud auditors, bankers, forensic investigators, finance enthusiasts and fraud investigators. The study found that there was a significant relationship between forensic accounting factors on fraud reduction.

In a different manner, Bagudu (2022) examined impact of forensic accounting techniques was examined on the prevention of fraud in microfinance institutions in Anambra state, Nigeria.

Quantitative approach was used on the survey of 69 participants of audit and account staffs of the microfinance institutions. Regression technique was used to evaluated the objective of the study where the findings discovered showed that relative size factor has positive and insignificant impact; data mining has positive and significant impact while ratio analysis has positive and insignificant impact on microfinance institutions fraud prevention. Obiora, Onuora and Amodu (2022) investigated the relationship between forensic accounting services and fraud prevention. The study adopted a Survey Design Approach. The study's data were collected using questionnaire survey administered to the relevant accounting sections of health care firms in Nigeria Two hypotheses were formulated to guide the investigation and the statistical test of parameter estimates was conducted using Kendall's Coefficient of Concordance. The empirical analysis of the study indicates that the application of forensic accounting service has reduced the incidence of frauds and has also led to fraud prevention at 1% significant level.

In their own views, Firmanza, Abidin and Ruswanda (2022) Fraudor corruption in an organization will result in losses for the organization. investigtated role of forensic accounting and audit investigations is in overcoming and preventing fraud. The study used a qualitative approach with data derived from various research results and the study found that the existence of forensic accounting will be able to resolve fraud legal problems, both inside and outside the court.

John, Ebilite & Udoye (2022) evaluated the nexus between forensic auditing and fraud management using Pabod Breweries, Port Harcourt, Nigeria as a case study. The primary data employed in the study were sourced from staff of the Pabod Breweries using questionnaires. Percentage and Pearson correlation were the techniques of analysis used in the study. The results of the study showed a significant positive relationship between forensic auditing and detection of fraud in the private sector. Also, the results showed that there is the existence of a significant positive relationship between forensic auditing and fraud prevention in the private sector. The study conducted by Alharasis, Haddad, Alhadab, Shehadeh, and Hasan (2023) investigated the incorporation of forensic accounting (FA) practices in both educational settings and professional spheres to identify and prevent instances of fraud and misstatement in Jordan. The study employed a questionnaire distributed among a diverse study population consisting of accounting academics, students, and accounting practitioners to collect relevant data. The findings of the study revealed a notable lack of awareness among both students and professionals regarding the concepts and significance of FA.

On the aspect of accounting skills, Al-Natour, Al-Mawali, Zaidan and Said (2023) investigated the role of forensic accounting skills in enhancing auditor's self-efficacy towards fraud detection in Egypt. The study adopted a cross-sectional survey which was developed and distributed to 117 external auditors working in Egypt. Partial least square structural equation modelling is used to examine the study hypotheses. The results show a significant direct relationship between effective communication skills, psycho-social skills, accounting and auditing skills and an auditor's self-efficacy. In a different view, Amahi (2023) assessed the effectiveness of forensic accounting in curbing financial crimes in the Nigerian public sector is in this research undertaking examined. The study made use of the fully modified ordinary least squares method (FMOLS) approach for data analyses of the EViews 13 statistical software. The study found that there is a significant role of forensic accounting in tax revenue to ensure fraud is curbed and subsequently eliminated to affect the performance of our public sector as reflected in the economic development of the Nigerian nation.

Haruna, Ibrahim, Yusuf and Ardo (2023) examined the impact of forensic accounting on tax payer attitude and compliance towards tax evasion within SMEs in the north east Nigeria. The study is cross-sectional, with data collected using simple random sampling. The study used PLS-SEM on 102 responses was utilized to evaluate the data. The findings revealed that a forensic accounting check is required to address the issue of tax evasion in Nigeria to ensure a good attitude and compliance. In their own view, Bankole and Ayomide (2023) investigated the effect of forensic accounting techniques in analyzing the financial reports of listed manufacturing companies in Nigeria. The research employed a purposive sampling technique, selecting 152 respondents as the sample size. Data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics and ordinary least squares. The result revealed that data mining techniques, data analysis techniques, and machine learning techniques have a positive and significant impact on financial information in Nigeria.

Awodiran, Idem, Ogundele and Emem (2023) examined the association between digital forensic accounting and cyber fraud. Primary source was used in gathering data, through a survey questionnaire. The study employed correlation as the technique of data analysis. The results revealed that digital forensic accounting has a negative and significant association with phishing scams, advance fee fraud and credit card fraud.

Given the previous empirical evidence on the various forensic accounting practices influencing fraud management and prevention, and as postulated in the assumption of fraud triangle theory, the following null hypotheses were raised for empirical validation in the context of government agencies in Lagos State, Nigeria.

HO_1: There is no significant impact of accounting skills on fraud management and prevention among Ministreies, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs) in Lagos State.
HO_2: There is no significant impact of auditing skills on fraud management and prevention among Ministreies, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs) in Lagos State.
HO_3: Investigative skills have no significant impacts on fraud management and prevention among Ministreies, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs) in Lagos State.

3.0 METHDODOLOGY

The study embraced a descriptive research design coupled with a quantitative survey approach to delve into the profound impact of forensic accounting on the management and prevention of fraud within various MDAs in Lagos State, Nigeria. The study population encompassed 1000 seasoned senior employees, specifically Accountants and Auditors from from 27 MDAs as of December 2021, affiliated with the Lagos State Government. These individuals were selected based on their substantial experience of at least 3 years in accounting and auditing within the Lagos State Ministries. The rationale behind choosing this cohort finds validation in the criteria set forth by the Association of Certified Fraud Examiner (ACFE) (2023), which emphasizes the significance of professionals possessing 1-3 years of expertise in accounting and auditing, equipped with a commendable level of knowledge, skills, and experience in both accounting domains and forensic accounting. From the broader population of 1,000 participants, a sample size of 286 accounting and auditing officers was meticulously determined using the Taro Yamane formula (Yamane, 1976). Employing the simple random sampling technique post stratification, these 286 proficient staff members were selected. The computation for the sample size was carried out as per the Taro Yamane formula (1976) where n = N/(1+(Ne^2)), reflecting an error limit (0.05) based on a 95% confidence level. Consequently, the sample size was computed as follows: n = 1000/(1 + 1000 * (0.05)^2) = approximately 286.

Primary data was the cornerstone of this research, acquired through a meticulously structured questionnaire administered to the identified respondents. The questionnaire was tailored to gauge the perceived impact of accounting skills, auditing proficiency, and investigative abilities on fraud management and prevention among MDAs in Lagos, Nigeria. Respondents were prompted to evaluate these aspects using a five-point Likert scale: (1) To a Very High Extent (THE), (2) To a High Extent (HE), (3) Neutral (N), (4) To a Very Low Extent (TLE), and (5) To a Low Extent (LE). The utilization of the Likert Five Point Scale facilitated the transformation of data into measurable scales. The research hypotheses were rigorously tested through statistical analysis, employing multiple regression analysis using SPSS Version 20, at a significance level of 5%. To ensure the research instrument's reliability and consistency in yielding stable results, both in terms of stability and internal coherence, Cronbach's alpha was employed to measure reliability. The quantitative data underwent comprehensive descriptive analysis (measures of central tendency) and inferential statistical analysis (multiple regression estimation) to delineate predictors of the response variable through hypothesis testing.

4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presented results which contains response rate, summary of descriptive statistics, muticollinearity test, reliability test, correlation analysis regression analysis and discussion of the findings of analysis of the data on the forensic accounting skills and fraud management prevention among MDAs in Lagos State.

4. Results and Discussions

4.1. Response Rate

Table 1 summarize the response rate for the data collected for the analysis.

Table 1. Response Rate

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Questionnaires Distributed	286	100
Questionnaires Returned and Valid	203	71
Questionnaires Not Valid	7	7.3
Questionnaires Not Returned	76	27

Source: Author's computation (2023)

The table 1 presents the response statistics derived from a study that aimed to gather information through questionnaires. Initially distributing 286 questionnaires, the research achieved a relatively high response rate of 71%, with 203 questionnaires returned as valid responses. However, 7 questionnaires were deemed incomplete or invalid, constituting 7.3% of the total distributed. A notable portion, 27% or 76 questionnaires, were not returned at all. These figures highlight the efficacy of the survey distribution and the response quality, indicating a substantial engagement from the respondents, despite a portion of incomplete or unreturned questionnaires, which could potentially affect the overall data reliability. Therefore, a response rate of 71% is considered adequate for this analysis Sekaran & Bougie (2009) suggested that a response rate of 30% and above is sufficient for surveys.

4.2. Descriptive Statistics Analysis

The summary of descriptive statistics results of data collected for each of the variables employed in this study was presented in Table 1

Variables	ACCS	AUDS	IVESS	FRMP
Mean	4.1678	4.0658	4.0724	3.8923
Std. Deviation	0.4528	0.7074	0.9537	0.6732
Minimum	1	1	1	1
Maximum	5	5	5	5
Skewness	-0.514	1.460	-0.736	1.534
Skewness	0.329	0.634	-0.433	0.845

Source: Author's computation (2023)

Table 2 presents statistical tests conducted in the study to assess the conformity of sample data distribution with the normal distribution and to analyze the characteristics of the variables. The descriptive statistics outlined in Table 1 offer insights into key variables pertinent to forensic accounting and fraud management and prevention, encompassing ACCS (Accounting Skills), AUDS (Auditing Skills), INVESS (Investigative Skills), and FRMP (Fraud Management and Prevention). Among these, the average value for forensic accounting skills stood at 4.1678, ranging from 1 to 5, reflecting a diverse spectrum of responses. The variability around this mean was notable, indicated by a standard deviation of 0.4528. Additionally, skewness and kurtosis measurements provided further details on the distribution shape. Skewness values were -0.514, -0.736, and 1.534 for ACCS, INVESS, and FRMP respectively, indicating asymmetry in their distributions. Meanwhile, kurtosis values suggested platykurtic distributions for ACCS (-0.329) and INVESS (-0.433) and leptokurtic for FRMP (0.845). Assessment of normality displayed skewness and kurtosis falling within the -1 to +1 range, affirming normal distribution for these variables. Therefore, the findings suggest a diverse range of skills across the domains, demonstrating varying levels of symmetry and kurtosis, yet affirming overall normality in their distribution (Hair, Anderson, Tatham & Black, 1998; Hair et al., 2019).

4.3. Multicollinearity Test

For the study to ensure that the model employed in the analysis has no multicollinearity problem, the study employed Tolerance value coupled with Variance Inflation Factor (VIF).

Table 3 Multicollinearity Test

Variables	VIF	TOLERANCE LEVEL = 1/VIF
Accounting skills	1.232	0.811
Auditing Skills	1.029	0.972
Investigative Skills	1.134	0.882
Fraud Management and Prevention	1.267	0.789

Source: Author's computation (2023)

It observed in the table 3, that all the variables of the analysis have their tolerance values exceeding 0.10 and VIF less than 5 benchmark (Gujarati, 2009) which implies that multicollinearity problem does not present in the model.

4.4 Reliability Test

Table 4: Reliability Test

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	N
Accounting skills	0.834	8
Auditing Skills	0.789	8
Investigative Skills	0.765	8
Fraud Management and Prevention	0.866	7

Source: Author's Computation (2023)

The reliability of the study was accessed using Cronbach Alpha. From the Cronbach Alpha result in table, it was discovered that all items are reliable and meet the threshold requirement of 0.7 therefore in explaining forensic accounting on fraud management and prevention in Lagos, Nigeria the research instrument is reliable based on the above result.

4.5. Correlation Matrix

Table 5. Result of Correlation Analysis

Variables	ACCS	AUDS	INVSS
Accounting skills (ACCS)	1		
Auditing Skills (AUDS)	0.389	**1**	
Investigative Skills (INVSS)	0.438	0.143	**1**

Source: Author's Computation (2023)

Table 5 shows the Pearson correlation values for the explanatory variables. The values explain the possibility of having perfect linear relationship between any pair of two or more independent variables. So, it is clear from Table 5 that there is no perfect relationship between the different pairs of independent variables. Gujarati (2009) asserts that multicollinearity becomes a serious issue when the correlation coefficient between two regressors is above 0.8 (Kennedy).

4.6. Regression Analysis

In regression model the coefficients of regressions analysis explain the contribution of an individual explanatory variable on the dependent variable. Therefore, table 6 below summarizes and shows the results from the tests of hypotheses of this study.

Table 6. Regression Analysis of Forensic Accounting (ACCS, AUDS and INVSS)

Variable	Coefficient (β)	Std. Error	t-Statistic	Prob. (Sig.)
Accounting skills (ACCS)	0.3445	0.0267	12.8637	0.000
Auditing Skills (AUDS)	0.1767	0.0191	9.2743	0.000
Investigative Skills (INVSS)	0.4081	0.0237	17.1880	0.000

Source: Author's Computation (2023)

ACCS= Accounting skills, AUDS= Auditing Skils, INVSS= Investigative Skills as predictors. The outcome is fraud management and prevention.

In Table 6, presents the results of a regression analysis for three variables in the field of forensic accounting: ACCS, AUDS and INVSS. The table provides information about the coefficients, standard errors, t-statistics, and probabilities (significance) associated with each variable. The coefficient (β) represents the estimated effect of each variable on the dependent variable. In this analysis: Accounting skills (ACCS) have a coefficient (β) of 0.3445, a standard error of 0.0267, a t-statistic of 12.8637, and a probability (significance) of 0.000 (<0.001). This indicates that, a higher level of accounting skills is significantly and positively associated with an increase in fraud management and prevention. Furthermore, Auditing Skills (AUDS) have a coefficient of 0.1767, a standard error of 0.0191, a t-statistic of 9.2743, and a probability of 0.000 (<0.001). This implies that an improved auditing skills show a significant and positive impact on fraud management and prevention. Investigative Skilss (INVSS) have a coefficient of 0.4081, a standard error of 0.0237, a t-statistic of 17.1880, and a probability of 0.000 (<0.001). This implies that the enhanced investigative skills significantly and positively contribute to fraud management and prevention

Henece, all forensic accounting skills exhibit significantly positive associations with thwarting fraudulent activities. This implies that higher proficiency in accounting, auditing, and investigative skills distinctly contributes to the effective management and prevention of fraudulent behavior.

4.4 Discussion of Findings

This section presents a discussion of the findings obtained from the investigation into the impact of forensic accounting (encompassing accounting skills, auditing skills and investigative skills) on the management fraud and prevention within Lagos State's Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs).

The empirical outcomes related to the first research question unveiled a significant and positive correlation between forensic accounting skills and the management and prevention of fraud. This discovery indicates a substantial association existing between the prowess in forensic accounting and the prevention of fraudulent activities within the MDAs in Lagos State. Notably, this result concurs with earlier research conducted by Karuti et al. (2019), Emma et al. (2019), Okoye and

Ndali (2019), as well as Suleiman and Othman (2021), although it differs from the conclusions drawn by Karuti (2020). This highlights the consistent trend in acknowledging the critical link between adept forensic accounting skills and their efficacy in curbing fraudulent occurrences within governmental entities.

In relation to the second research question, the empirical findings indicated a substantial impact of forensic auditing skills on the management and prevention of fraud. This underscores the pivotal role played by forensic accounting combined with auditing expertise in mitigating fraudulent activities within the MDAs in Lagos State. These outcomes resonate with the research findings of Firmanza et al. (2022) and John et al. (2022), although they stand in contrast with the conclusions reported by Suleiman and Othman (2021) and Akinbowale et al. (2023). This underlines the consistent recognition of the crucial influence wielded by the amalgamation of forensic accounting and auditing skills in combating fraudulent activities within governmental bodies.

Regarding the third research question, the study's results showcased a positive and substantial influence of investigative skills possessed by forensic accountants on the prevention of management fraud. This emphasizes the pivotal role of investigative expertise in enhancing the management and prevention of fraud within MDAs in Lagos State. These outcomes align with the findings of Obiora et al. (2022), Firmanza et al. (2022), and Al-Natour et al. (2023), while diverging from the conclusions drawn by Awodiran et al. (2023). Notably, these findings fortify the fundamental principles outlined in the triangle fraud theory, thereby emphasizing the indispensable nature of investigative skills in curbing fraudulent activities within governmental entities.

5. 0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the regression analysis conducted in this study substantiated the integral role of forensic accounting skills in managing and preventing fraudulent activities within the Ministry Departments and Agencies (MDAs) of Lagos State. The empirical outcomes across three distinct research questions consistently highlighted the positive correlation between specialized skills in forensic accounting, auditing, and investigation, and their significant impact on the management and prevention of fraud. The findings corroborate existing research by various scholars, reinforcing the understanding that adeptness in forensic accounting is pivotal in combatting fraudulent occurrences within governmental entities.

Based on the study's conclusions, several recommendations are made to strengthen fraud management and prevention within MDAs in Lagos State. Firstly, it is imperative for government to contimue and emphasize the inclusion of forensic accounting courses and specialized training in the education curriculum for accounting and auditing professionals. Additionally, MDAs should prioritize the recruitment and retention of personnel equipped with strong forensic accounting, auditing, and investigative skills to enhance their capacity in fraud detection and prevention. Continuous professional development programs should also be encouraged to update existing employees on the latest trends and techniques in forensic accounting practices. Moreover, fostering collaborations between MDAs and forensic accounting experts or consultancy firms can offer valuable insights and guidance in implementing robust fraud prevention measures. Lastly, regular audits and assessments focusing on the efficacy of fraud prevention strategies should be conducted to identify areas for improvement and ensure ongoing effectiveness in combating fraud within governmental bodies.

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