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Forensic accounting practices and corporate transparency of commercial banks in South-South, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study investigated how forensic accounting relates with corporate transparency of the Commercial Banks in the South-South Nigeria while moderating the role of internal control quality. The study was motivated by the fact that financial irregularities and lack of credibility in the banking sector's report is a recurring problem in the Nigeria banking sector which also contributed to the declining stakeholder's confidence in the banking sector. The study was based on the theories of fraud triangle, agency and institutional theory. A cross-sectional research design and positivist philosophy was adopted. Using the Taro Yamane formula and multi-stage sampling technique, the total population of the study was 4,986 commercial bank employees in the selected banks in the South-South Nigeria and the sample size was determined to be 423 commercial bank employees. The structured questionnaires were used in the collection of primary data. Descriptive statistics, Spearman rank correlation co-efficient and partial correlation co-efficient at 0.05 level of significance were used for the data analysis. Results showed positive and significant relationship between litigation support services and expert witnessing with financial reporting quality. The findings of this study further revealed that the internal control quality has a significant and positive moderating effect on the link between Forensic accounting practices and corporate transparency. The study's findings were that the practices of forensic accounting would contribute to the improvement of quality of financial reporting and transparency of commercial banks. The study recommended that use of the forensic accounting system be encouraged in the Nigerian commercial banks as the existence of forensic accounting system, qualified expert witness and also the internal control mechanism in the banks are recommended.

Keywords: Forensic accounting Practices; Litigation Support Services; Corporate Transparency; Financial Reporting Quality; Internal Control Quality.

1. Introduction

The banking sector of the economy has been under the spotlight as relates to transparency of companies due to financial misstatements, insider abuses, earnings management and poor disclosure practices in financial statements that led to loss of confidence in financial statements by stakeholders. Corporate transparency, the quality of corporate information provided to the stakeholders, is an open, accurate, timely and reliable information that helps stakeholders make decisions. There are different indicators to measure transparency such as: Quality of financial reporting, follow-up of regulatory requirements and faithfully reporting financial transactions in commercial banks (Dada et al., 2023). This is more relevant over the years as some of the financial institutions in Nigeria over the years have been in distress and collapse, thus the need for enhanced monitoring and accountability practices. Good quality financial reporting can improve investors' confidence, decrease information asymmetry and ensure good corporate governance (Dada et al., 2023; Okoye & Ndah, 2019).

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With the sophistication of financial crimes, forensic accounting is becoming relevant in banking industry for more transparency and accountability. Forensic Accounting is the detection of fraud, financial irregularities and corporate misconduct, through the use of the investigative, audit and litigation skills. There are two of the major areas of forensic accounting — litigation support services and expert witnessing. Expert witnessing refers to the consulting and presentation of accounting evidence to court and/or regulating authorities and litigation support services refer to consulting services provided to an organization to assist in the collection, analysis and presentation of financial evidence to court and/or regulating authorities. However, the traditional audit techniques are not as effective to detect more complex fraud in the banking industry but it is still a necessary precondition for banks. But, over the years, the challenges of insider abuse, financial manipulation, unethical financial reporting and cybercrime have been endemic in commercial banks of Nigeria which calls for better forensic accounting system (Otun, 2025). The empirical studies indicates that the practice of forensic accounting in the Nigeria deposit money banks (DMBs) is very much effective in detecting fraud, accountability and quality financial reporting (Ogunleye & Okwu, 2023; Mukoro et al., 2014).

The introduction of forensic accounting is however welcomed in the banking sector but a concern is the issue of quality internal control system in the commercial banks in Nigeria. Internal control quality is a measure of the effectiveness of policies, procedures, monitoring and governance structures, which are put in place to make sure that an organisation's assets are properly protected and that the financial reports are reliable. To strengthen the system of internal control with regard to the forensic accounting practices, it is recommended to create an enabling environment that prevents fraud, manages and reports risks. But, if the internal control system is weak, then it will be an opportunity for financial misconduct and fraudulent activities will be hidden. Good internal control system has been established to play a positive role in preventing fraud and accounting the corporation in Nigeria (Mukoro et al., 2014; Agbo & Ezuwore-Obodoekwe, 2020). Therefore, the moderating role of the internal control quality in explaining the positive of forensic accounting practices on financial reporting quality and corporate transparency of commercial banks in South-South Nigeria is crucial.

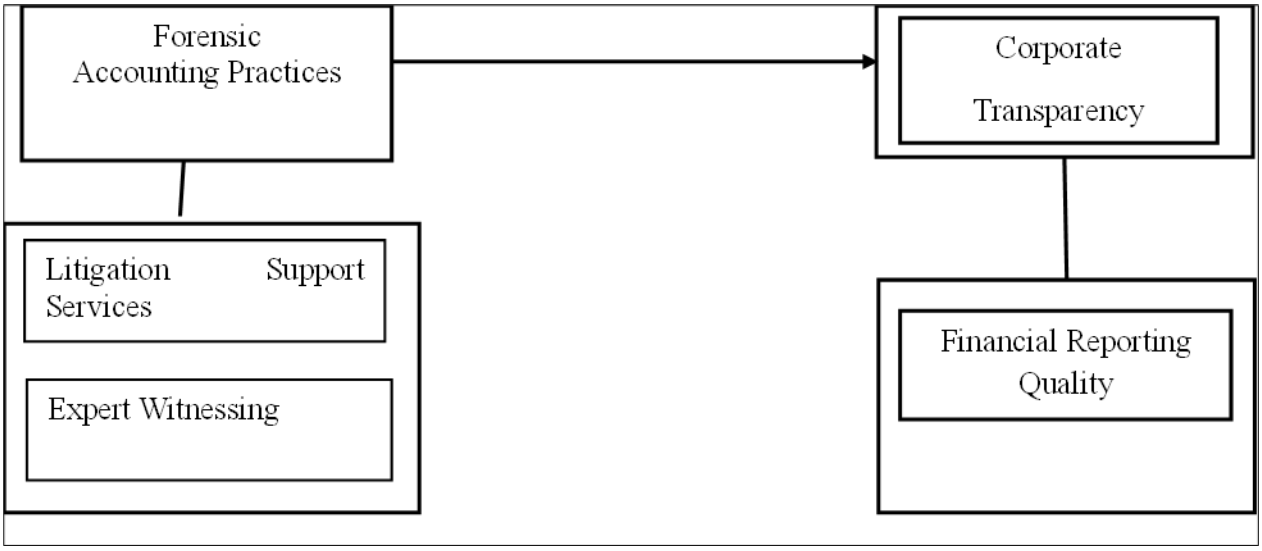
1.1. Statement of the Problem

Forensic accounting has long since been proven to be a valuable asset to the banking industry in identifying fraud, accountability and performance of any organization. Oyedokun et al. (2024) and Dada et al. (2023) mainly concentrated on the role of forensic accounting in the financial performance and fraud prevention, of the Nigerian deposit money banks. Similarly, Agbo and Ezuwore-Obodoekwe (2020) and Mukoro et al. (2014) studied the relationship between forensic accounting, corporate governance and corporate fraud control. These studies, though, failed to break down forensic accounting into litigation support services and expert witnessing, as two important aspects of forensic accounting practice. Moreover, the existing studies have focused primarily on financial issues, outcomes of fraud detection or corporate governance, without focusing on corporate transparency such as financial reporting quality.

Besides, previous empirical studies (Oyedokun et al., 2024; Otun & Sunday, 2025; Okoye & Ndah, 2019) have not taken into account the moderating effect of the internal control quality on the relationship between forensic accounting practices and corporate transparency. These studies are important in identifying the internal control systems (ICS) and its impact on the improvement of financial reports but the relationship between ICQ and forensic accounting practice in regard to banking sector in Nigeria was not well studied. Beyond this, the research is limited to the South-South Nigeria financial crimes, regulatory and transparency issues are becoming a threat particularly in commercial banks. This study is therefore aimed at filling these gaps at conceptual, contextual and empirical levels with the aim of examining the relationship between litigation support services, expert witnessing and corporate transparency (financial reporting quality) as well as the moderating effect of internal control quality in the context of commercial banks in the south-south of Nigeria.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Conceptual Framework



Sources: Forensic Accounting Practices: Litigation support services and expert witnessing (Modugu & Anyaduba, 2021; Dada et al., 2023; Onyema et al., 2024; Eiya & Otalor, 2020). Corporate Transparency: Financial reporting quality (Oyedokun, 2024; Iyoha & Oyerinde, 2023; Armstrong et al., 2010). Internal Audit Quality (Mukoro et al., 2014; Garba, 2024).

Figure 1 Conceptual Framework Showing the Relationship Between Forensic Accounting and Corporate Transparency

2.1.1. Forensic Accounting Practices

Forensic accounting practices involves the acceptance of accounting, auditing, investigative and legal methodologies to analyze the financial records with the intent of detecting the fraud and/or resolve the dispute and provide evidence upon the financial record which will be presented in court. It was developed as a result of the sophistication of corporate fraud, financial crimes and unethical accounting that were not detected by the traditional auditing processes. Forensic accounting is an amalgamation of accounting and investigations to detect accounting irregularities, hidden transactions and provide a professional opinion in litigious situations. Forensic Accounting is a specialised discipline of accounting employed in the detection of financial fraud and increasing accountability of any company, Bassey (2022) explained. In the present scenario the practice of Forensic Accounting has gained a great importance in the bodies especially in banking industry with the day-to-day surge of cases of cyber fraud, insider fraud, money laundering and financial statement fraud.

Forensic accounting is a specialty area in the accounting field which includes Forensic expert witness and litigation support. Litigation support services are the services that are performed to assist the legal practitioner and/or organisation in the collection, analysis and presentation of financial information to tribunals, courts and regulatory authorities. Expert witness involves presenting and interpreting accounting results to tribunals, courts and regulators. In turn, such practices promote trust in the organisation as they offer an independent evaluation of the financial information and guarantee the organisation's financial information is scrutinised and substantiated. The forensic accounting has been found to be beneficial in preventing frauds, financial reporting quality and transparency of Nigerian financial institutions (Dada et al., 2023; Oyedokun et al., 2024). Also, forensic accounting can help instill trust and integrity amongst stakeholders and accountability and ethical reporting within an organization.

2.1.2. Corporate Transparency

The level of transparency in the information disseminated by the company regarding the financial and operating activities of the company to the stakeholders based on the bases of accuracy, timeliness, relevance and reliability. It's about the accessibility and accessibility of corporate information in a way that allows investors, regulators, employees and the public to be able to effectively evaluate corporate performance and governance. Today, corporate transparency is an essential part of the corporate governance in the business world as it helps to reduce the information asymmetry, boost investor confidence and increase the accountability of businesses. Ezejiofor & Okoye, (2021) posited that one of the key measures that can be used to assess corporate transparency is the financial reporting quality which is a measure of credibility, completeness and reliability of financial disclosures by the firms.

The stakeholders feel organisations that are transparent are accountable and follow ethical practices; they are more likely to invest in and/or have trust in such organisations and more likely to be sustainable over the long-term. The transparency of a company is very crucial in financial sector in the context of banks' activity, namely financial intermediation and public's relation with banks. Financial transparency is vital because if it is not there, financial institutions might experience financial scandals, manipulated earnings and regulatory sanctions, which can have adverse effects on the economy and financial institution. Transparency of a firm according to Iyoha and Oyerinde (2023) leads to the improvement of confidence of the stakeholders of the firm on the firm's financial statement which in turn improves the firm's reputation.

2.1.3. Internal Control Integrity

Integrity of the internal control is the quality and effectiveness and honesty of internal control in an organization to protect the assets, compliance with laws and regulations, prevention of fraud and proper financial reporting. It is a gauge of the effectiveness of the organizational policies, procedures and monitoring systems to ensure accountability and good working. Integrity of internal control is a significant aspect of conducting an organization activity within the bounds of standards, regulations and ethical practices. The framework of good internal control adopted based on Committee of Sponsoring Organizations (COSO) reasonably assures in terms of operation efficiency, accurate and reliable financial reporting as well as compliance with relevant laws and regulations (COSO, 2013).

The control procedures will aim to limit the opportunities for fraudulent transactions and good integrity of internal control will be in a better position to detect and prevent such transactions. The sensitivity of the internal control, in the Banking Sector is unique, since the banks are required to do a huge number of financial transactions, and are very sensitive to risks like fraud, cybercrime and insider abuse. Good internal control enhances the credibility of financial statements and aids in ensuring transparency in the organisation as it provides reasonable assurance that the financial information monitored and verified before being released to the public. The studies revealed that there is a significant relationship between Quality of internal control and Quality of financial reporting (Agbo & Ezuwore-Obodoekwe, 2020) and with the accountability of the organisation.

2.2. Theoretical Framework

2.2.1. Fraud Triangle Theory

Cressey (1953) came up with the fraud triangle theory which explains the conditions that causes fraudulent operations. There are three key elements to the theory that contribute to fraud – pressure, opportunity and rationalization. Pressure is a financial or personal stress that could contribute to fraud, Opportunity is an opportunity for fraud which could be a weakness of internal control and Rationalization is rationalization of the perpetrator engaged in the fraud. Additionally, the fraud triangle theory has been a popular theory in forensic accounting and financial fraud investigation because it explains behavioral and environmental factors that allow for financial fraud to occur (Vousinas, 2019).

The implications for the theory to the forensic accounting practice is that if the monitoring systems and practice is good then it would be minimised opportunities for fraud. Litigation support/expert witnessing will be one of the most critical forensics accounting tools that will help in building the case for litigation and hold the fraudulent transactions more accountable. The theory is that if good internal controls are present and forensic accounting controls are in place then there will be less opportunity for fraud, quality of the financial statements and transparency will be ensured within the company. The latter group of researchers considers fraud as an issue of opportunity; they suggest looking at provisions which will reduce opportunities, such as good control and monitoring systems.

2.2.2. Agency Theory

The theory of agency, Jensen and Meckling (1976), was initially developed to deal with the relationship between the principals and the agents, shareholders and management, respectively. The agency problem occurs due to information gap, and the divergence of interest of the managers and that of the shareholders, thus the managers can make decisions that are against the interest of the shareholders at their own interest. Thus, organisations put in place monitoring and governance systems, to make sure that management will do what is best for owners. The agency theory states that there are key mechanisms that can be employed to mitigate the agency problem in the organisation such as accountability, transparency and good control mechanisms (Panda & Leepsa 2017).

The theory in this study is relevant as one of the ways to alleviate the issue of information asymmetry. Helps to improve the quality of financial reporting in an organisation. Litigation support services and expert witnessing may be utilized to delve into instances of financial misconduct, and to provide trustworthy evidence relating to management activity. Likewise, the more effective the system of internal control, the more effective the systems of monitoring the effectiveness of the organization and the less opportunity to manipulate the financial statements. Then to support the argument that commercial banks can improve the transparency of the corporate through good forensic accounting practices, good internal control the Agency Theory can be used.

2.3. Empirical Review

Afolabi (2025) aimed to examine the notion of forensic accounting and fraud detection in the listed Deposit Money Banks in Nigeria. It was decided to select the forensic accounting tools and its impact to the fraud detection as the focus of the study. Descriptive analysis results indicated that frauds were only detected in small percentages and forensic accounting is a positive element in fraud detection. The recommendations of the study were that there is need to improve on the use of Forensic Accounting System in Nigerian Banks.

The study by Otun and Sunday (2025) discussed the effects of forensic accounting techniques on fraud detection of listed commercial banks in Nigeria. The study revealed that the forensic accounting techniques enhanced the commercial banks' listed companies fraud detection. The authors urged Nigerian Banks to be more forensic in combating fraud as all the studies on fraud were general without considering a particular forensic technique.

Oyedokun et al (2024) investigated the association between Forensic Accounting and Financing Reporting Quality of the Listed Deposit Money Banks in Nigeria. The selected listed banks were used to gather the secondary data from published financial statements and panel regression techniques were used. The result indicated that forensic accounting practice namely investigation accounting, litigation support services were important with regard to financial reporting. The result of the study revealed that the practice of Forensic Accounting reduces the manipulation of the reports, and enhances transparency in Nigerian banks.

Muhammad (2024) investigated the effect of Forensic Accounting skills on Financial reporting Quality in Nigerian deposit money banks. The study was a descriptive research design and the population of the study comprised of Deposit Money Banks listed in Nigeria. The results found that the forensic accounting skills will have positive impacts in improving financial reporting quality both in financial reporting credibility, collection of evidence and detection of fraud. The study concluded there is need to continue educating the accounting personnel in forensic accounting.

3. Methodology

This study employed a cross-sectional type of research. Cross-sectional design was deemed suitable as this design would allow us to collect quantitative data from many respondents in an economical manner and allow us to analyse the relationship between variables studied without any manipulation. The approach in this study was positivist which is a philosophy of assuming social phenomena are measurable, can be studied objectively, and can be studied using empirical methods. The use of the above tools was guided by structured questionnaires, statistical analysis and hypothesis testing in order to establish its objective relationship in the variables of the study, thus utilizing positivism.

The study population comprised of commercial banking staff of selected banks in South-South of Nigeria with a staff population of 4,986. Due to the fact that these departments are directly involved with the financial reporting and fraud management activities, the respondents were chosen from among top departments such as audit, accounting, operations, compliance, risk management and internal control. The number of the respondents in the study was calculated by Taro Yamane formula. At 5% level of significance the number of respondents were 370; however, the study added extra 74 to take care of issues of invalidated responses. Stratified sampling and simple random sampling technique was used. The sampling method used was stratified sampling; this sampling method allowed equal opportunity of being selected for the study for all respondents in the selected banks and departments while simple random sampling was used to ensure that all respondents had equal chance of being selected for the study (Sekaran & Bougie, 2019).

The data collected for the study was the primary data and structured questionnaires were used to collect this. Strongly agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree and Strongly disagree, 5-point Likert scales were used to design the questionnaire. The two dimensions on the instrument measuring forensic accounting practices and one dimension of the instrument measuring corporate transparency were: litigation support services and expert witnessing, and financial reporting quality, respectively. Integrity of internal control was the moderating variable used. The same methods as employed in the previous empirical studies of forensic accounting and financial reporting quality (Oyedokun et al., 2024; Agbo & Ezuwore-Obodoekwe, 2020) were used for measuring the variables.

After that, it was forwarded to the experts for face and content validation who had knowledge in accounting and validity of research methodology. The reliability of the instrument was achieved by Cronbach's Alpha coefficient resulting in all the variables had coefficient greater than 0.70 which is the acceptable limit recommended by Nunnally and Bernstein (1994). The data collected from the field were analysed by using descriptive statistics mean and standard deviation, then the data were presented in form of summarization of the respondents' opinion. The two variables: forensic accounting practices and corporate transparency were measured in an ordinal scale and the relationship between the two variables was examined by using the Spearman rank correlation coefficient. Moreover, in order to test the moderating role of the integrity in internal control on the relationship between forensic accounting practices and corporate transparency, the Partial Correlation Coefficient has been used. The data obtained from all the analysis was done using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences).

4. Results

Table 1 Demographic Results

		Frequency	**Percent**	**Valid Percent**	**Cumulative Percent**
Gender	Female	200	47.3	47.3	47.3
	Male	223	52.7	52.7	100.0
	Total	**423**	**100.0**	**100.0**	
Age	20-35	121	28.6	28.6	28.6
	36-50	174	41.1	41.1	69.7
	51 and above	128	30.3	30.3	100.0
	Total	423	100.0	100.0	
Marital Status	Single	186	44.0	44.0	44.0
	Married	202	47.8	47.8	91.8
	Separated	35	8.2	8.2	100.0
	Total	**423**	**100.0**	**100.0**	
Educational Attainment	WAEC/OND	35	8.2	8.2	8.2
	HND/Bachelor	202	47.8	47.8	56.0
	Master and above	186	44.0	44.0	100.0
	Total	**423**	**100.0**	**100.0**	

Source: SPSS 28.0 Output

The distribution of the respondents as shown in Table 1 was fairly good according to their gender, age, marital and educational status and thus provided good information to the study. At the time of making the distribution by gender, it was found that there are 223 (52.7%) male and 200 (47.3%) female students. This revealed that in this study, the number of male and female are almost equal with slight preference to male. The age distribution showed that age group 36 - 50 years old 174 (41.1%) was the highest age group followed by age group 51 years and above 128 (30.3%) and then age group 20 – 35 years old 128 (28.6%). This indicated that the study was majorly an adult study and experiential level of the participants on the forensic accounting practices in commercial banks and financial reporting issues in the banks were high. As far as the marital status of respondents is concerned, majority (47.8%) were married while single and separated respondents were 44.0% and 8.2% respectively. The distribution of the educational qualification also showed that 47.8% of them were with the HND/Bachelor's degree and 44.0% of the respondents were with the master's degree and above. This was a simple measure to determine that the respondents had the right academic background to provide them with the right answer to the questions on forensic accounting, transparency of companies and quality of internal control.

Table 2 Forensic Accounting and Financial Reporting Quality

Correlations					
			Financial Reporting Quality	**Litigation Services Support**	**Expert Witnessing**
Spearman's rho	Financial Reporting Quality	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	0.721**	0.603**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0.	0.000	0.000
		N	423	423	423
	Litigation Services Support	Correlation Coefficient	0.721**	0.138	0.718**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.378	0.000
		N	423	423	423
	Expert Witnessing	Correlation Coefficient	0.603**	0.155	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.322	0.
		N	423	423	423

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
Source: SPSS 28.0 Output

Based on the results of correlation presented in Table 4.2 it is found that there is a positive and significant correlation between litigation support services with correlation coefficient spearman value of 0.721 and probability value of 0.000 which is smaller than the value of α (significance) of 0.05 and financial reporting quality with correlation coefficient spearman value of 0.713 and probability value of 0.001 which is smaller than the value of α (significance) of 0.05. This indicated that, the quality of commercial banks' financial reporting was significantly improved due to the improvement in the litigation support services. The results indicated that litigation supports services make it easier to gather evidence, improve the process of fraud investigation and increase legal accountability, which, in turn, increases transparency of the corporations. Likewise, the value of the correlation coefficient was 0.603 and the probability value (P-value) of expert witnessing with the financial reporting quality was determined. This indicated that expert witnessing considerably contributed in financial reporting's credibility and reliability in commercial banks. The results indicated that the professional manner of interpreting and presenting financial evidence by a forensic expert, may be helpful to have a greater level of accountability and transparency of banking operations.

Table 4.3 Moderating Effect of Internal Control Quality

Correlations					
Control Variables			**Corporate Transparency**	**Forensic Accounting Practices**	**Internal Control Quality**
-none-[a]	Corporate Transparency	Correlation	1.000	0.693	0.552
		Significance (2-tailed)	.	0.000	0.000
		df	0	421	421
	Forensic Accounting Practices	Correlation	0.693	1.000	.699
		Significance (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000
		df	421	0	41
		Correlation	.552	.699	1.000

	Internal Control Quality	Significance (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.
		df	41	41	0
Internal Control Quality	Corporate Transparency	Correlation	1.000	.514	
		Significance (2-tailed)	.	.000	
		df	0	420	
	Forensic Accounting Practices	Correlation	.514	1.000	
		Significance (2-tailed)	.000	.	
		df	420	0	

a. Cells contain zero-order (Pearson) correlations.; **Source:** SPSS 28.0 Output

From Table 4.3, the value of the zero-order correlation coefficient and significance value obtained from the moderating effect conducted between forensic accounting practices and corporate transparency showed that the variable of forensic accounting practices had a high positive correlation with the variable of corporate transparency, this was due to the value of zero order correlation coefficient of r = 0.693 and the significance value of 0.000. There was a positive relationship also between the internal control quality, forensic accounting forensic accounting practices and corporate transparency. However, this correlation dropped to 0.514, when the internal control quality was added. It showed that the internal control quality had a significant moderation effect between the relationship of forensic accounting forensic accounting practices and corporate transparency. The implication of this result was that, the good internal control system promoted the effectiveness of the forensic accounting practices in financial reporting quality and transparency of commercial banks in the South-South Nigeria.

5. Discussion of Findings

The study found a positive relationship between litigation support services and financial reporting quality of commercial banks in the South-South Nigeria which was significant. Spearman correlation coefficient showed that there was 0.721 correlation and was significant at < 0.05 which revealed that improvement in litigation support services correlated with improved financial reports with respect to credibility, reliability and transparency. This discovery supported the theory of Cressey (1933), which was the fraud triangle theory which suggests that monitoring and investigation procedures would decrease the opportunities for fraud and financial manipulation. The application of litigation support to obtain evidence, uphold the law and the conflict resolution process led to improvements in quality of reporting. This is corroborated by the empirical research carried out on the effect of litigation support services on the quality of financial reporting of the listed deposit money banks in Nigeria by Oyedokun et al. (2024) which showed that the financial reporting quality of listed deposit money banks in Nigeria is significantly improved by the litigation support services. In other words, according to Jibril et al. (2023) the Litigation Support services were found to have positively affect financial disclosure credibility and financial accountability of the banks in Nigeria. Additionally, it gave empirical support to Jensen and Meckling's (1976) agency theory which proposed a mechanism of monitoring would lead to less symmetry of information between the management and the shareholders. Therefore, the study assumed that the financial reporting irregularities in the commercial banks was reduced most by better corporate transparency and good litigation support services was the most important reason of better corporate transparency.

The results also indicated the positive significant relationship between expert witnessing – financial reporting quality with “r” value = 0.603 and “value” = 0.05. This resulted in the professional interpreter's input and the financial evidence being presented by the forensic experts having a positive effect on strengthening financial evidence. Expert witnessing has led to an increased public trust in the judiciary, improvements in policy and procedure used in the investigation of fraud and an increased accountability for financial reporting. Discovery confirmed the theory of Meyer and Rowan (1977) about the institutional approach where the organizations have developed some mechanism that will make the organization transparent for institutional and regulatory requirements. The forensic experts were increasingly hired by commercial banks in all law and finance related matters to ensure that they have credible evidence to sustain their credibility and the confidence of the public. The findings in this study corroborates with the findings of Muhammad (2024) on the effect of Forensic Accounting skills on financial reporting quality of Nigerian deposit money banks which revealed that the effect was positive. Similarly, Jibril et al., (2023) also noted that the banking reporting and accountability has improved as a result of expert witnessing. Hence, the study suggested that expert witnessing can play a role as a forensic accounting tool that can help in enhancing financial statements transparency and reducing financial statements manipulation in the commercial banks.

Based on the result of moderating analysis, it can be concluded that the internal control quality has a positive role and significant in the relation between forensic accounting practices, with corporate transparency. The result showed that the internal control quality was a factor that strengthened the role of forensic accounting practices in enhancing transparency as the value of the correlation coefficient after controlling internal control quality was 0.514 lower than the value of the correlation coefficient before the internal control quality was controlled 0.693. This discovery proved the Fraud Triangle Theory that concentrated on the way that the better controls to decrease the opportunities for fraud can improve accountability and the integrity of reporting. Good internal controls helped to comply, supervision and management in financial aspect which paved the way for an effective environment to do forensic accounting practice. This finding is in line with the finding of Muhammad, Madawaki and Jibril (2023) after conducting their study on the effect of internal control system on the quality of financial reporting of the Nigerian deposit money banks, they came to a finding that the internal control system has a significant impact on the quality of financial reporting of the Nigerian deposit money banks. Also, the results of Agbo and Ezuwore-Obodoekwe (2020), indicated that the effective internal control system will prevent fraud and corporate accountability in the Nigerian Banks. The significance of the discovery was that the quality of internal control is a supplement of forensic accounting as it helps in curbing the financial irregularities, monitoring the way the banks' affairs are being operated and thus improved the transparency of the banks in the South-South Nigeria.

6. Conclusion

The relationship between forensic accounting practices and corporate transparency of commercial banks in South-south Nigeria were examined in this study. The study discovered positive and significant outcome of forensic accounting practices on transparency of banks in South-South, Nigeria. The quality of financial reporting, especially with regard to litigation support services and as expert witnessing, was having a positive impact, with greater accountability, fraud investigation and credibility being provided in financial reporting. Besides, the study also revealed that internal control quality is a significant moderator that provides conducive environment in the implementation of monitoring and compliance which underlies relation of forensic accounting practices and corporate transparency.

Limitations of the Study

The financial institutions considered in this study are the commercial banks in South-South of Nigeria, therefore, the findings of this study may not be applicable in other region or other financial institution that is not in the study region. The study also heavily depended on primary data which was garnered through the use of questionnaires, the correctness of the respondent's answers to the questions and their honesty in answering them. In addition, only two of the facets of forensic accounting practices were discussed – litigation support services and expert witnessing – while the other aspects of forensic accounting that might relate to transparency in the corporate world were not discussed. The time factor and the data collection cost was found to be a restriction on the quantity of data to be collected and number of banks sampled as observed in Nigeria in general.

Recommendations

- Commercial banks should be incorporated with Forensic Accounting Unit (FAU) with litigation support services and Fraud investigation. These units should be working closely with legal/compliance/regulatory units to enhance the collection, resolution and compliance process. This would make the financial reporting better and minimise the chances of financial manipulation in banks.
- Commercial banks' management should hire the financial investigations experts to offer commercial banks financial investigations and litigations expert witness services. Regular trainings and certification program for accounting and audit staffs in Forensics Accounting to enhance competency of fraud detection and financial reporting should also be encouraged. This would enhance credibility in reporting and trust in the financial reporting by the stakeholders.
- Commercial banks internal control environment, monitoring, segregation of duties, risk assessment and compliance environment needs to be improved. This would complement the forensic accounting procedures, and also increase the transparency of the company as it would minimise the scope of any fraud or financial irregularities.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

Statement of informed consent

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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