



## COMMUNICATION COMPETENCIES IN FORENSIC ACCOUNTING NEEDED BY ACCOUNTING GRADUATES FOR EFFECTIVE JOB PERFORMANCE

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### Abstract

*This study was undertaken to determine the interpersonal/oral and written competencies in Forensic Accounting Needed by Accounting Graduates for Effective Job Performance. Two research questions were raised for the study and two null hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance. The descriptive survey research design was used for the study. A population of 136 heads of accounting department (Public Accountants) in the Ministries, Agencies and Parastatals and 62 Accounting Lecturers in the Public Universities in Edo and Delta States were used. The total population was 198 which also served as sample. The instrument for data collection was a self structured questionnaire containing 21 items. The statistical method used for data analysis was the mean and standard deviation for the research questions, while the t-test was used to test the null hypotheses. The findings of the study revealed that ability to make informative speech, ability to understand and use common types of speeches, ability to testify about findings, ability to exhibit good listening skills, ability to present effective report writing, ability to simplify information etc. are all interpersonal/oral and written communication competencies in forensic accounting needed by Accounting Graduates for effective job performance. It was concluded that Public Accountants and Accounting lecturers strongly agreed on the importance of interpersonal/oral and written communication competencies of Forensic Accounting for tremendous growth in forensic accounting practice. It was recommended among others that the Accounting Education curriculum be revisited to include these competencies of forensic accounting for effective job performance.*

**Keywords:** *Interpersonal, written, Forensic Accounting, Communication Competencies, Public Accountants, Accounting Education Graduates.*

### Introduction

There is a phenomenal increase in fraud and related crimes in both public and private sectors of the economy in Nigeria. This is obvious in the number of enterprises that are closing down, bringing about unemployment and revenue loss. Hamilton and Gabriel (2012) confirmed this, stating that fraud and related ills have contributed to economic instability in Nigeria and resulting income losses and high mortality rate of organizations. Mobolaji and Omoteso (2009) also opined that the perennial infrastructural decline and general systemic breakdown have been connected to fraud and other corrupt behaviours. It has become worrisome that incidences of fraud have become so prevalent and epidemic in nature. This situation makes it more difficult for the Nigerian government to fulfil its constitutional obligations to its citizens (Okunbor & Obaretin, 2010).

The Federal Government of Nigeria established a lot of agencies to check-mate these fraud incidents but fraud remained unabated. Companies stakeholders and shareholders want

the managers of their organizations to preserve profitability and financial stability. The enormous loss caused by fraud in the public and private sectors has a direct influence on the development of infrastructure, facilities and utilities as well as establishment of public trust.

Along with the legal framework, many experts feel that retaining the services of Forensic Accountants can help minimize fraud, which in turn can motivate firms to strive for economic stability. As a result, the demand for forensic accountants is considerable. DiGabriele and Crumbly (2009) stressed that demand for forensic accountants will continue to grow. As a result, the supply of these experts with the various competences must be increased, particularly in nations with a high risk of fraudulent activities.

The educational sector, which is the bedrock of national development is one sector that should serve as the starting point for resolving problems of this nature. According to Effiong (2012), education has a formative effect on an individual's mind, character and physical

capabilities through the transmission of knowledge. Educational institutions should consequently serve as conduit for the dissemination of new thoughts. Education establishes the benchmarks for assessing future development potentials. Educational institutions are definitely places where new information, skills and abilities are imported. Students including, accounting students represent a country's future workforce, and should therefore be equipped with necessary and relevant information skills and competencies to do their assigned jobs.

Early inculcation and communication is a major one, may be the first step toward developing a preventive behavioural disposition. This is an issue that the majority of Nigerian universities offering higher education in accounting are yet to embrace. Howard and Sheetz (2006) described forensic accounting as the process of clearly, concisely and factually evaluating, summarizing and presenting complicated financial matters as an expert in a court of law.

Accounting graduates are youths that have run a programme in accountancy in universities. Accounting is an educational programme offered in the Universities. As previously stated, Nigeria faces an extreme scarcity of forensic accountants, necessitating the development of a diverse pool of individuals with forensic accountant competencies especially as regards the interpersonal and communication competencies to serve as substitutes. Accounting graduates are capable of filling such functions of forensic accountants efficiently. With this, accountants are able to represent and provide valuable information or evidence to legal practitioners in a court of law if there is litigation having received proper training in fraud detection and reporting.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Fraud and misappropriation of funds have dealt heavy blow on many business organizations in Nigeria. Accounting scandals and frauds are worldwide phenomenon that affects all continents and all sectors of the economy, and most organizations face it regardless of their size, industry or country. It is perennial and has plagued our society. The high incidence of fraud is a serious concern for investors as fraudulent financial report can have a substantial negative impact on a company's existence as well as the market value.

The point at which the corporate existence of organizations is threatened by the growing instances of fraud, and the difficulties in adducing evidence in prosecutorial instances

throws up the need for forensic accounting competencies like the interpersonal and written communication. Forensic accounting has come into lime light due to increase in financial frauds and it has been observed that accounting education graduates have not exhibited these skills of interpersonal reporting they need for better job performance. This is because forensic accounting is not included in Accounting education curriculum.

The aggressiveness with which the traditional accounting and auditing are taught in the universities has not improved the accounting education reporting for prosecutorial purpose and for better performance. Therefore, this study investigated the interpersonal and written communication competencies needed in forensic and fraud reporting.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided the study

1. What are the interpersonal/oral communication competencies of forensic accounting needed by Accounting Education graduates for effective job performance?
2. What are the written communication competencies of forensic accounting needed by Accounting Education graduates for effective job performance?

### **Hypotheses**

The following null hypotheses were formulated and test at 0.05 level of significance.

**H<sub>01</sub>:** There is no significant difference in the mean responses of Public Accountants and Accounting lecturers on the interpersonal/oral competencies needed by Accounting Education graduates for effective job performance.

**H<sub>02</sub>:** There is no significant difference in mean responses of Public Accountants and Accounting lecturers on the written communication competencies needed by Accounting Education graduates for effective job performance.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Conceptual Framework**

#### **Communication**

Communication is the art of imparting or exchanging information through speaking, writing or using some other medium. It is the process of passing information from one person to another. It is the process of sharing information, ideas, opinions, facts etc. There are two major types of communication accountants need to document and express a lot of issues in their everyday practice of accounting. The first

one is written communication competency and the second one being oral communication. A well articulated report by an accountant in carrying out his forensic duties can impress the judge/jury (Crumbley, Heitger & Smith 2007). It could be a personal report which could be passive aggressive or assertive, it could be formal or informal in an office setting but in most cases the formal communication is always in use.

### **Competency**

Competency is a term that refers to a capability or aptitude. It is a collection of similar but distinct behaviours organized around an underlying concept known as the purpose (Boyatziz, 2018). The behaviours are alternative manifestations of the desire, depending on the situation or time period. Competency is a behavioural way of assessing an individual's talent. The anchor for determining which behaviours and intent are relevant in a given scenario arises from effectiveness prediction.

### **Forensic Accounting and Interpersonal/Oral and written Communication Competencies**

Interpersonal communication is an exchange of information between two or more people. This could be through verbal or non-verbal messages and it is interactive and relational. Ataqrabawi and Atshurafat 2020 in their study discovered that interpersonal and written communication skills are major personal skills of the accounting students which they should possess in the work place in order to progress and perform effectively. Similarly, Okoye and Jugu (2010) also observed that due to the growing nature of corruption in Nigeria, accountants demand specialized expertise to act as forensic accountants and fraud investigators with skills such as written communication, critical thinking and oral communication. These competencies they discovered must be highly valued and sought for in a forensic accountant.

Verbal communication skills as part of the job of the forensic accountant is to go into the field and speak to company personnel who may or may not be involved in the suspected fraud (Crumbley et al 2007). In addition, forensic accountants are often called to be expert witnesses and testify during litigation, presenting often complex evidence to the jury in an understandable manner (Sanchez & Trewin, 2004). The ability to effectively communicate in writing via reports, charts graphs and schedules are the bases of opinion in carrying out forensic accounting and there is the need to document works. Expert reports are routinely scrutinized and the need to convey findings properly is of paramount importance. The ability to communicate effectively in both oral and written is essential for today's accounting practitioners.

Oral and written communication competencies are especially important when gathering information from people who may not understand accounting and finance (Murphy, & Dacin 2014). The practitioners need to create a flow of information so that during an investigation, they can flow together in understanding what happened. They must also be able to communicate complex information to clients and other users in a clear and understandable manner. Smith (2005) recommends that practitioners undergoing accounting education training should seek professional training in public speaking, and they need to focus on team building which can build trust and rapport, this improve accountants' understanding of strengths and weaknesses and how people communicate. In all, Murphy and Dacin (2014) observed that interplay of information and work streams on the engagements is crucial. Accountants being professionals that are vast in the language of business should be able to fluently communicate to the intended users of the accounting information. They should have good presentation skill. Strong interpersonal skills improve forensic power of the accountant in interacting with witnesses, senior executives, financial staff and administrative staff in collecting data to support their cases. Effective communication skills enable them to discuss sensitive topics without soliciting combative or confrontational responses (Tucker, 2017). Listening skills are an important part of a forensic accountant communication techniques (Tucker, 2017). They must listen carefully to the testimonies of witnesses and suspects, so they can discuss relevant details and correct misstatements during cross examination. In all, forensic accountant must have the ability to summarize complex and sometimes technical ideas for a jury, and clearly explain their bearing on the overall case. Strong writing and speaking competencies are critical for an accountant with fraudulent matters.

### **METHODS**

The study adopted a descriptive survey method. The population of the study comprised of 62 Accounting lecturers from the department of Accounting Education option of Business Education of Faculty of Education, Department of Accountancy, Faculty of Management and Finance, Department of Accounting and finance in the Faculty of Social Sciences in the four Public Universities offering Accounting Education and Accounting and Finance programmes, and 136 Public Accountants (Heads of Accounts) in Ministries, Agencies and Parastatals in Delta and Edo States. The total population was 198. The population served as

sample. A 21-item questionnaire was the instrument for data collection. The questionnaire was divided into three. Part A contained 3 items of demographic variables such as institution, Ministry/Parastatals/Agency and status, while part B addressed the interpersonal/oral communication competencies needed by Accounting Education Graduates for effective job performance and Part C addressed the written communication competencies needed by Accounting Education graduates for effective

job performance. The questionnaire was structured on a 4-point Likert type rating scale of Strongly Agree (SA) (4 points), Agree (A)(3 points), Disagree (D) (2 points) and Strongly Disagree (SD) (1 point). The questionnaire developed for the study was subjected to face and content validation by two experts in the department of Accountancy, The Cronbach Alpha was used to ascertain the internal consistency, which yielded a co-efficient index of 0.81 and was deemed reliable for the study.

## RESULTS

### Research Question One

What are the interpersonal/oral communication competencies of forensic accounting needed by Accounting Education graduates for effective job performance as perceived by Public Accountants and Accounting Lecturers?

**Table I:** Mean responses of respondents on the interpersonal/oral communication competencies of forensic accounting needed by Accounting Education graduates for effective job performance as perceived by Public Accountants and Accounting Lecturers.

S/N	Items on interpersonal/Oral communication competencies of forensic accounting competencies needed by Accounting Education graduates for effective job performance.	Public Accountants			Accounting Lecturers		
		$\bar{X}$	SD	REMARK	$\bar{X}$	SD	REMARK
1.	Ability to make informative speech	3.29	.58	Agreed	3.38	.78	Agreed
2.	Ability to understand common types of speeches	3.23	.58	Agreed	3.36	.57	Agreed
3.	Ability to use common types of speeches	3.24	.58	Agreed	3.33	.59	Agreed
4.	Ability to face challenges of audience involvement	3.24	.61	Agreed	3.32	.60	Agreed
5.	Ability to present the outcome of their own work verbally to colleagues, clients and supervisors.	3.32	.57	Agreed	3.34	.56	Agreed
6.	Ability to defend the point of view of the outcome off their work verbally to colleagues, clients and supervisors	3.29	.58	Agreed	3.32	.57	Agreed
7.	Ability collaborate with other team members	3.23	.62	Agreed	3.29	.59	Agreed
8.	Ability to apply sense of humour	3.22	.61	Agreed	3.31	1.57	Agreed
9.	Ability to testify about findings	3.41	.62	Agreed	3.21	.58	Agreed
10.	Appear as an expert witness	3.23	.59	Agreed	3.24	.57	Agreed
11.	Exhibit good listening skills to be able to discuss relevant details and correct misstatements.	3.32	.58	Agreed	3.31	.58	Agreed
	Grand Mean	3.27	.60	Agreed	3.31	.60	Agreed

Source: Field Survey, 2022.

**Table I:** showed the mean and standard deviation of the responses of interpersonal/oral competencies of forensic accounting needed by accounting education graduates for effective job performance as perceived by Public Accountants and Accounting Lecturers. All the item mean of both the Public Accountants and Accounting Lecturers were above the cut of mean of 2.50, and their grand mean of 3.27 and 3.31 also were above the cut off had the cut off mean. This means that all the items enumerated in the above table are needed by Accounting Education graduates for effective job performance.

### Research Question Two

What are the written communication competencies of forensic accounting needed by accounting education graduates for effective job performance as perceived by Public Accountants and Accounting Lecturers?

**Table 2:** Mean responses of Public Accountants and Accounting lecturers on the written and oral communication competencies of forensic accounting needed by Accounting Education graduates for effective job performance as perceived by Public Accountants and Accounting Lecturers.

S/N	Items on written and oral communication competencies needed by accounting education graduates for effective job performance.	Public Accountants			Accounting Lecturers		
		X	SD	REM	X	SD	REM
1.	Ability to present effective report writing	3.28	.59	Agreed	3.36	.62	Agreed
2.	Ability to use visual aids in presentation understand common types of speeches	3.22	.61	Agreed	3.24	.63	Agreed
3.	Ability to apply critical reading	3.22	.61	Agreed	3.27	.56	Agreed
4.	Information technology competency	3.20	.62	Agreed	3.25	.53	Agreed
5.	Ability to simplify information.	3.22	0.61	Agreed	3.24	.63	Agreed
6.	Ability to communicate information	3.23	.59	Agreed	3.22	.61	Agreed
7.	Collect and analyse financial information	3.24	.57	Agreed	3.21	.62	Agreed
8.	Translate abstract number into written or oral reports that non accountants can understand	3.25	.54	Agreed	3.24	.58	Agreed
9.	Ability to summarize complex and technical ideas for a jury	3.22	.61	Agreed	3.21	.59	Agreed
10.	Ability to explain the bearing on the overall case	3.20	.62	Agreed	3.24	.63	Agreed
	Grand Mean	3.23	.60	Agreed	3.25	60	Agreed

Source: Field Survey, 2022

**Table 2:** Above showed the mean and standard deviation responses of written communication competencies of forensic accounting needed by Accounting Education graduates for effective job performance as perceived by Public Accountants and Accounting Lecturers. All the item mean of the two groups were above the cut off mean of 2.50 and their grand mean of 3.23 and 3.25 were also above the cut off mean. This means that all the items enumerated in the table above are needed by Accounting Education graduates for effective job performance.

#### Test of Hypotheses

**H0<sub>1</sub>:** There is no significant difference in the mean responses of Public Accountant and Accounting Lecturers on the interpersonal/oral competencies of forensic accounting needed by Accounting Education graduates for effective job performance.

**Table 3:** T-test analysis of the differences in the mean responses of Public Accountants and Accounting Lecturers on the interpersonal/oral competencies needed by Accounting Education graduates for effective job performance.

Group	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	DF	T	P-Value Or sig	Alpha Level	Decision
Public Accountants	136	3.27	0.60					
Accounting Lecturers	62	3.31	0.60	196	-1.756	0.080	0.05	Not Sig

N.S = Not Sig. at 0.05 Alpha level; N = 198

Source: Field Survey 2022.

**Table 3** showed the t-test analysis of the difference in the mean responses of Public Accountants and Accounting Lecturers on the interpersonal/oral competencies needed by Accounting Education graduates. The table showed a P-value of 0.080 at 196 degree of freedom, and the calculated t-value of -1.756 is greater than the alpha level of 0.05. Since the p-value is greater than the alpha level, therefore the null hypothesis of "There is no significant difference in the mean responses of Public Accountants and Accounting Lecturers on the interpersonal/oral competencies needed by Accounting Education graduates for effective job performance" is accepted.

**H0<sub>2</sub>:** There is no significant difference in the mean responses of Public Accountants and Accounting lectures on the written communication competencies needed by Accounting Education graduates for effective job performance.

**Table 4:** T-test analysis of the difference in the mean responses of Public Accountants and Accounting Lecturers on the written communication competencies of forensic accounting needed by Accounting Education graduates for effective job performance

Group	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	DF	T	P-value or sign	Alpha level	Dec
Public Accountants	136	3.23	0.60					
				196	-987	.324	0.05	Not Sign.
Accounting Lecturers	62	3.25	0.60					

N.S = Not Sig. at 0.05 alpha level; 196  
Source field survey 2022

Table 4 showed the t-test analysis of the responses of Public Accountants and Accounting Lecturers of the written communication competencies of forensic accounting needed by Accounting Education graduates for effective job performance. The table showed a P-value of .324 at 196 degree of freedom and calculated t-value of -.987 which is greater than the alpha level of 0.05. Since the p-value is greater than the alpha level, therefore the null hypothesis of “There is no significant difference in the mean responses of Public Accountants and Accounting Lecturers on the written communication competencies needed by Accounting Education graduates for effective job performance is accepted.

#### Discussion of Findings

The findings of the study showed that the Public Accountants and Accounting Lecturers agreed that all the competencies enumerated in Table I as interpersonal competencies are all competencies needed by accounting education graduates for effective job performance such as ability to make information speech, ability to use common type of speeches, ability to apply sense of humor, ability to testify about findings, appear as expert, witness etc.

Table 3 revealed that the t-test analysis of the differences in the mean responses of Public Accountants and Accounting Lecturers regarding interpersonal/oral competencies of forensic accounting needed by Accounting Education graduates did not show a significant difference in their mean responses. This finding agreed with findings of Ataqrabawi and Atshurafat (2020) findings regarding the alignment of accounting graduates skills competencies and job requirements. These researchers identified interpersonal skills as critical competencies for accounting graduates in the workplace and urged educators and other stakeholders to prioritise their development. The findings of Okoye and Jugu, (2010), and the findings of Murphy and Dacin (2014) also

corroborated this finding that oral and written communication competencies are critical forensic accounting competencies.

The findings in Table 2 showed that all competencies enumerated were accepted as written communication competencies of forensic accounting such as ability to present effective report writing, ability to use visual aids in presentation, ability to apply critical reading etc. Table 4 revealed that the differences in the mean responses of the Public Accountants and Accounting Lecturers of forensic accounting needed by accounting education graduates for effective job performance did not show a significant difference in their responses. This finding is in line with the findings of Biswa’s, Hisremath and Shaline (2013) who discovered that forensic accounting auditors and investigators with strong written communication competencies will deliver high quality financial reporting. Also supporting this finding is the finding of Murphy and Dacin (2014) who found that oral and written communication competencies are very important, especially when gathering information from people who many not understand Accounting and finance.

#### Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusively, this paper revealed that accounting education graduates need proper interpersonal/oral and written communication competencies to be able to work as forensic accountants for proper reporting, presentation and defense of the point of view of the outcome of the reports. Considering the benefits, the results from this study can assist University Accounting Education graduates and Lecturers who may not have seen the need to offer forensic accounting courses.

From the findings of these competencies and their benefits, the following recommendations are made.

1. Accounting lecturers in the universities should inculcate in their students these competencies that will lead the students into the world of work.

2. The National Universities Commission (NUC) should enlarge the curriculum of Accounting Education to include forensic accounting courses that will teach these competencies.
3. The Government should provide the enabling facilities and equipment where the teaching of these courses should be domiciled.
4. The Universities should match theory with practice in form of role playing.

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