



EVALUATION OF THE CHALLENGES FACING SMALL AND MEDIUM-SCALE BUILDING CONTRACTORS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

In this study, the challenges associated with the operations of small and medium-scale building contractors in Nigeria were considered. Globally, the construction industry is faced with several notable challenges in terms of technological advancement, development of operational processes and mechanisms, and keeping up to date with the prevailing business trends. The main objective of this study is to examine the problems that are facing small and medium-scale building contractors in Nigeria. The study employed a questionnaire survey as a data collection instrument. A total of 317 closed-ended questionnaires were administered to small and medium-sized contractors in Akure Nigeria. However, only one hundred and seventy-two (172) returned questionnaires were found valid for analysis. The data was analyzed using the simple descriptive statistical method of percentage and weighted mean score (WMS). Findings revealed that inadequate startup capital for contractors was the major problem facing small and medium-scale building contractors in the study area given its highest mean score of 4.0697. In light of the above, the study recommends that the government being the major player in the building industry should endeavour to initiate, create, and implement policies such as grants and aids for small and medium-sized contractors to enable them to remain in business no matter the state of the economy. It is concluded that the ineffectiveness of the small and medium-sized contractors in the study area is influenced by the un-availability of startup capital, lack of political will in implementing policies that assist small and medium-sized contractors, delayed payment, high-interest rates on loan facilities, and difficulty in getting guarantors for the loan facility.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Globally, the building industry is regarded as the potent drive of global, national, regional, and local economies. The industry provides the impetus and forces needed for sustaining a buoyant and thriving economy and at the same time contributes to the reviving of the depressed ones [1]. The Nigerian construction industry (NCI) is one of the most vibrant and important sub-sectors in the Nigerian economy. The importance of the industry is drawn from its numerous contributions to the growth and development of the Nigerian economy. In [2] the contribution of the industry to the National Gross Development Plan (GDP) was put at 6 – 10 %. The study by [3] revealed that the Nigerian building industry is fragmented, and involves numerous parties and complex processes. Further, [3] noted that the industry is highly capital-intensive and requires

confiscated technology, the use of complex materials, and varying skills. The study also revealed that the industry relies heavily on foreign content [3].

Small-scale business according to the National Small Business Act of 1996 is categorized into four distinct categories, which are: Micro, very small, small, and medium categories. According to [4] the overall contribution of small business enterprises to the total GDP in 1995 was 20.8%, medium enterprises contributed 11.9%, and large enterprises contributed 67.3%. Small and medium-sized enterprises have equally contributed to formal employment which was estimated at 29.5% for small enterprises, and 55.2% for large enterprises [4]. Furthermore, studies have shown that small and medium business enterprises are the major factors shaping the economic landscape in all developing countries [5]. This suggests the imperativeness of the government to recognize their contributions and use them as an effective springboard for economic development.

The building contractor through a project manager is solely responsible for the physical execution of the project through an effective combination of time, money, and material resources. The roles of the contractors of the building projects cannot be overemphasized. Hence, [6] noted that the success or failure of any building project is traceable to them. The contractor is the eye the people see, the nose they smell, and the ear they hear concerning the building project outcomes. [7], mentioned that the contractor, builder, or building contractor; is a person or organization that carries out building activities of erecting physical enclosures by the contract documents or agreement. This suggests that building contractors must be apt and attentive to the minutest details to ensure satisfactory delivery of a project that meets or surpasses a stipulated customer's or end user's objective(s).

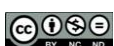
The distinctiveness of the building end product – nonsimilarity in all sheds and forms contributes to the need to rely almost entirely on the contractor for a successful outcome. Any error or mistake due to an act or omission in a building project is usually costly to rectify, particularly if it is not timely discovered. Hence, due diligence is required of building contractors to achieve maximum success. The building construction industries in many developing countries such as Nigeria are still at their infancy stage arising from deficiencies in the form of poor financing, low skill capacity development, and hostile social and economic environment. These challenges are well known and are widely reported [8-9].

However, despite these obvious challenges, concerted efforts have been made to overcome them, including the introduction of the local content requirement (LCR), the establishment of standard organization, and etc. [10]. However, [11] and [1] opine that the lack of confidence in its building professionals by the Nigerian government has led to the industry's slow pace of development. Also, construction firms in Nigeria have suffered massive financial ruin and bankruptcy due to persistent delays in payment. In the same vein, [12] observed that delays in payments are common with government contracts. Hence, there should be an advocacy that will compel the government at all levels to patronize and nurture the indigenous building companies to grow and be able to handle even the most complex projects. Therefore, this study aims to ascertain the problems facing small and medium-sized building Contractors in Ondo State, Nigeria.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

It has been universally accepted that small business enterprises contribute substantially to the economic growth and development the world over [13]. Accordingly, [12] reported that small-scale contractors can be economically beneficial to a nation if projects are designed in such a way as to accommodate them and suit their capacity. On the other hand, [14] defined small and medium-sized construction companies as companies with several employees or annual turnover that falls within certain determined thresholds.

The construction industry is very wide in scope, and it comprises diverse participating stakeholders, varying procurement systems, operational philosophies, different techniques, skills, and tools that together play significant roles in the development of buildings and other infrastructures such as houses, roads, bridges, education, and health infrastructures. Contractors play vital roles in all building projects through the process of effective deployment of proven strategies to realize the overall business objectives of the owner. The construction industry according to [15] is heavenly dependent on the availability of adequate construction skilled workers. Small and medium-sized enterprise (SMEs) comprises a significant component of the construction economy particularly in developing countries and it contributes substantially to job creation and social connection. Likewise, [16] mentioned that the nature of contracts executed by small and medium-sized construction firms includes maintenance works, refurbishment, and new housing and are projects, carried out under determined lump-



sum contracts normally through open tendering technique.

2.1 Nigerian Content in Building Construction

The term “local content” has been described as the development and use of local skills, manpower, enterprise, raw materials, and technology [3]. Likewise, [17] informed that local content is observed in terms of value addition in the local countries through the use of local staff, local materials, local services, and facilities, rather than seeing it in terms of the company performing the value-added activities. The concept is universally the same as they are similarly applied in the same way and in all economic sectors where foreign direct investment (FDI) is required. Nigeria's contents initiative in the construction industry according to [3] is concerned with the idea of localization or what can be termed as “Nigerianization” of all aspects of the government's construction procurement processes, construction resources, construction technology, and the production technology of construction materials.

Further, [3] identified six important areas of focus on Nigerian content in building construction, namely: preference for Nigerian consultants in the design of construction projects, preference for indigenous contractors in the construction of projects, preference for local enterprise in carrying out construction operations, development of local construction on materials supply, transfer of the technology for the construction of complex projects, and production of conventional construction materials.

Similarly, [18] argued that the Nigerian local content policy has not achieved any significant success in enhancing higher indigenous participation. The study further stressed that the local content policy has not achieved the desired fit in the use of local technology, higher contract awards to the indigenous companies, and stimulating joint venture arrangements between the indigenous and foreign companies. This situation is more evident in the construction and oil companies which are generally dominated and controlled by foreign owners.

It is required that the local contents, i.e. those things that are locally available and assessable such as the construction process, enterprise, expertise, skills, labor, materials, and technology should be carefully identified by the government and ensure their effective compulsory application by the construction companies. In addition, foreign content that is those things that are not available locally should equally be identified and defined and transferred for local use [3].

A classic example of Nigerian content is the Nigerian Oil and Gas Content Development Act, of 2010. The bill states that local content development for contractors in Nigeria is required for the reasons stated below:

- i. Local capacity building through mandatory use of local expertise
- ii. Technology transfer which is put at four years in the Act
- iii. Employment generation
- iv. Development of local technology
- v. Development and utilization of local resources
- vi. Opportunities for Nigerian professionals and artisans to gain experience
- vii. Development of local skills
- viii. Saving in foreign exchange
- ix. Reduction in construction costs
- x. Increased rate of development

Generally, the operational procedures of all contractors are closely related. However, they can be distinguished from each other using some characteristics such as the size of the company's annual turnover, capacity and capability of a company, mode and nature of business, etc. [19] mentioned the key characteristics of small-scale contractors are that they are largely unregistered, operate mainly in the informal sector of the economy, and there is complete absence of formal business systems. They further argued that small-scale contractors constitute the largest percentage of contractors in all economies, with low permanent employment capacity of usually not more than ten [3] full-time permanent employees per time [19]. On the other hand, the medium size contractors are usually registered formally as business entities; they have a formal business structure in place and operate in the formal sector of the economy. Unlike small-scale contractors, big-scale contractors employ a relatively larger number of employees at any given time between 40 and 100, and permanently [19].

2.2 Participation of Contractors in Nigeria's Construction Industry

Generally, the Nigerian construction industry is distinctively divided into two sectors which include: the organized (formal), and the unorganized (informal) construction sectors. To this end, [20] observed that the organized construction sector is based on institutional arrangements and regulatory frameworks. The organized sector consists of industries or firms that are formally registered in line with the prevailing laws and are permitted to execute construction works using skilled workers, and laborers



who may be locally sourced or employed from outside the country as expatriates.

Further, [21] noted that the formal sector of the construction industry operates under set rules and outlined regulations, such as complete adherence to national laws on local content, including employment, procurement, and Health Safety and Environment issues. In the formal sector, the governments at different levels are aware of all the activities of the operators in the sector as they are mandated to pay taxes as and when due. On the other hand, [22] noted that the small construction firms specialized in general building work, while the medium and large-sized companies specialized in civil construction work.

In general contracting organizations are categorized into small, medium, and large firms, on account of several criteria that influence the nature of the work they carry out [23]. The informal or unorganized construction sector is those who engage in construction activities to provide direct employment and raise incomes for those engaged in the activities. Usually, this sector operates on a small or medium-scale basis, with very low levels of structural organization without a formal process of labor division. This sector according to a report in [24] lacks labor relations, and where they exist, is concerned with purely casual workers, personal and social relations, and not based on contractual arrangements with formal guarantees of performance. An unorganized sector is made up of small house builders and clients seeking to undertake the construction of single-dwelling units of houses.

[25], also mentioned that an increasing number of private clients in developing countries normally bypass general contractors and the formal practices of awarding contracts, while engaging directly with informal sector enterprises for labour supply. The study further stressed that contracts between the parties in the informal arrangement are mostly verbal, and the building process takes place in stages. Also, [26] described the construction process, without the use of contractors or formal contract procedures, as the “informal construction system”. It is such that clients using this sort of informal procedure in the construction of their houses usually buy construction materials in small quantities, as and whenever the money is available. Also, the informal construction processes have been widely recognized and consequently led to the expansion of the market for the small producers and suppliers of construction materials who hitherto unknown [27]. Observation has shown that these categories of informal sector

businesses are not formally registered and hence not recognized by regulating authorities, consequently workers in this sector fall outside of the framework of labor control and regulation; they do not enjoy any legal protection or any other form of entitlements such as sick, maternity, study or annual leave as obtained in the formal sector. Also, [25] noted that workers in the informal construction sector normally flout rules and regulations that are associated with employment in the construction sector.

A study by [28] informed that workers in the informal construction sectors are dominated by illiterate workers, with little or no idea about occupational health and safety (OHS) laws, which makes it impossible for them to implement or observe safety measures in construction sites. The study further noted that the regulating authorities have little influence on the operations and activities of the informal construction sector and are unable to collect reasonable revenue through them. Looking at these studies it can be stated that it is difficult to maintain reliable statistical information about the informal construction sector in Nigeria to monitor their level of operations.

2.3 Challenges Facing Small and Medium Size Contractors

Though there are several general challenges facing small and medium-scale contractors the world over, contractors in developing or emerging nations such as Nigeria have additional problems to contend with, unlike their counterparts in developed economies such as the UK, USA, etc., [29].

Several studies have been carried out on the challenges facing small and medium-sized contractors in developing countries, and the following key issues have been raised: inadequate finance and inability to get credit for suppliers; inability to employ competent workers; poor pricing, tendering, and contract documentation skills; poor monitoring; fronting for established contractors; lack of entrepreneurial skills; lack of proper training; lack of resources for either large or complex construction works; lack of technical, financial, contractual and managerial skills; and late payment for the work done [12] and [29]. Further, [30] a study on challenges facing contractors in the execution of public building projects identified difficulties in obtaining financial aid, delayed payment by the clients, and poor leadership skills of the project manager as the topmost challenges facing the contractor in the execution of public building projects.



Similarly, [31] identified three factors as the most critical challenges facing contractors in the building construction industry; they include limited availability of skilled labor, an increasing need for high productivity and efficiency, and cost-effectiveness. However, [32] suggested that multiskilling is one potential solution to solving the challenges facing contractors in the construction industry. [33], on the other hand, argued that total quality management (TQM) is a technique that can be used to run an organization. Again, [20] opined that quality assurance management technique is necessary for the delivery of quality construction output. Where the positive change is possible, the quality of the product is considered the norm rather than a reactionary response to socio-environmental changes [32]. In this way, the contractor performance tools serve as a guideline for continuous process improvement that forms the key element of TQM. Although TQM tools have their origin in other industries such as manufacturing, electronics, and pharmaceutical companies, TQM tools have been developed for the benefit of the construction industry [34] and [19].

3.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A survey method was adopted where 317 small and medium-sized contractors were randomly selected from the database of the Ondo State Ministry of Commerce, Industries, and Cooperatives. The probability sampling method using a simple random sampling technique was found to be the most appropriate for the study. The selection criteria adopted to form the target population for this study are as follows:

- i. Small and medium-scale contractors based on financial capabilities are categorized below:
 - a. Category A: N100, 000 - N500, 000,
 - b. Category B: N500, 001 - N1, 000, 000
 - c. Category C: N1, 000, 001 - N1, 500, 000.
 - d. Category D: N1, 500, 001 - N2, 000, 000
- ii. Small and medium-scale contractors who are registered with the State's Ministry of Commerce, Industries, and Cooperatives; and
- iii. Small and medium-sized contractors who are located in the State capital.

A total sample population of 317 small and medium-sized contractors who registered between 2000 and 2021 to operate in the state capital was extracted from the archives of the State's Ministry of Commerce, Industries, and Cooperatives. Also, the contact details such as name, phone number, business, and email addresses of the contractors were obtained. Based on the above, the study employed a simple random sampling technique. The simple random sampling

ensured that every contractor within the sample had equal and independent opportunity to be selected in the samples studied. The sample size adopted for the survey was based on the formula suggested by [35] using precision and confidence levels of 10% and 95% respectively as shown in Equation 1.

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2} \quad (1)$$

Where, n is the sample size; N is population size (317); e is level of precision (10%).

When appropriate values were substituted into the formula, the sample size for the study was 172. Therefore, out of a total of 317 questionnaires distributed, only 172 were correctly filled, returned, and valid for further analysis.

The study employed a cross-sectional descriptive study design to realize the study objectives. The 172 responses retrieved were analyzed using the simple descriptive statistical method of percentage and weighted mean score (WMS) as shown below:

$$\text{Weighted Mean} = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^n (x_i * w_i)}{\sum_{i=1}^n w_i} \quad (2)$$

It implies that $\text{Weighted Mean} = (x_1w_1 + x_2w_2 + \dots + x_nw_n) / (w_1 + w_2 + \dots + w_n)$. Where w is the weights and x is the value.

4.0 DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

Table 1 shows the demographic profile of the respondents. On academic qualification, the study indicates that out of 172 sampled respondents, 1.74% have primary school education, 14.5% have high school qualification, 27.3% have a Diploma certificate, while 34.3% and 22.1% of them have a Bachelor's degree, and post-graduate degree respectively. Concerning the number of years of experience since being registered as a small and medium-sized contractor, 22.1% of the respondents have experience ranging from 1–5 years, 40.1% have 6–10 years of experience, and 37.8% have experience of 11 years and above.

On the aspect of professional background, the study indicates that out of the 172 respondents, 33.7% have an engineering background, 20.9% have an Architectural background, 8/1% are Quantity Surveying professionals, 23.8% are Building Technologist professionals, and 13.4% have other professional backgrounds. The implication of the demographic profile of the contractors shows that all the sampled contractors are suitably qualified to respond to the study questionnaires; hence data collected can be relied upon.

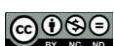


Table 1: Demographic profile of small and medium-sized contractors

Educational Qualification	Response	Percentage (%)
Primary School Certificate	3	1.74
High/Secondary School	25	14.5
Diploma	47	27.3
Bachelor Degree	59	34.3
Postgraduate Degree	38	22.1
Total	172	100
Years of experience		
1 – 5 years	38	22.1
6 -10 years	69	40.1
11 years and above	65	37.8
Total	172	100
Professional Background		
Engineering	58	33.7
Architecture	36	20.9
Quantity Surveying	14	8.1
Building Technology	41	23.8
Others	23	13.4
Total	172	100

Source: Author's fieldwork (2022)

Table 2: Contractors' track record of jobs executed as of December, 2021

Number of building contracts executed	Response	Percentage
1 – 10	17	9.9
11 – 20	21	12.2
21 – 30	53	30.8
31 and above	81	47.1
Total	172	100

Source: Author's fieldwork (2022)

Table 2 above shows the contractor's track records concerning the number of projects (contracts) executed. It shows that 9.9 % of the contractors have executed 1-10 building construction projects, 12.2 % of the contractors executed 11-20 projects while 30.8 % and 47.1 % of the contractors executed 21-30 and 31 and above building projects respectively. This revealed that a greater percentage of small and medium-scale contractors have consistently been used in building projects in the study area. This is consistent

Table 3: Knowledge of basic construction skills

Construction skills	Very High	High	Fair	Low	Very Low	WMV	Ranking of the WMVs
Site Management skill	48	56	43	18	7	3.6977	1 st
Tendering and Procurement skill	27	37	51	29	28	3.0349	2 nd
Business Management skill	23	21	39	58	41	2.7500	3 rd
Construction Management skill	16	19	32	38	67	2.2965	4 th
Health and Safety management skill	7	18	11	71	65	2.0174	5 th
Project Management skill	9	13	17	46	87	1.9012	6 th

Source: Author's fieldwork (2022)

Table 3 shows the analysis of the respondents' knowledge of basic construction skills among the small and medium-scale contractors in Akure Nigeria. The study investigated the level of knowledge of basic construction skills to determine the challenges facing small and medium-sized contractors in Akure. A questionnaire survey was used for data collection, and a 5-point Likert scale and Weighted Mean Value

with the study of [22] who observed that the small construction firms specialized in general building work, while the medium-sized companies specialized in civil construction work. The result also supports the view of [14] who defined small and medium-sized construction companies as companies with several employees or annual turnover which falls within certain determined thresholds.

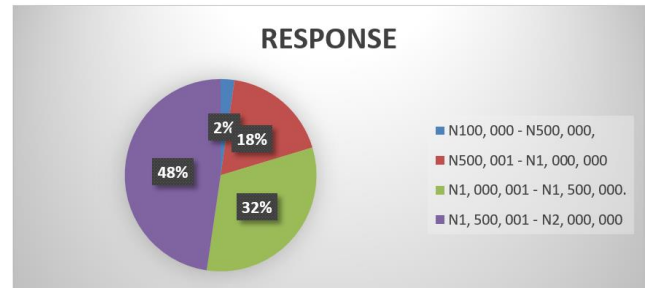


Figure 1: Contract range of small and medium-sized contractors (2011 - 2021)

Source: Author's fieldwork (2022)

Figure 1 above shows the amount of contract sum for which the small and medium-sized contractors who registered with the ministry could procure a contract. It shows that only 2% of the contractors got contracts within the range of N100,000 – N500,000, 18% got a contract between N501,000 – N1,000,000, 32% got a contract within the range of N1,000,001 – N1,500,000, while 48% of the contractors got contract of within the range of N1,500,001 – N2,000,000. The finding supports [16]; [38] who states that the nature of contracts executed by small and medium-sized construction firms includes maintenance works, refurbishment, and new housing projects which are carried out under a determined lump-sum contract using an open tendering technique.

(WMV) were used to estimate the knowledge level of construction skills by the small and medium-sized contractors. From the analysis, the lowest-ranked construction skills possessed by the contractors include project management skills, health and safety management skills, construction management skills, and business management skills with weighted mean

values of 1.9012, 2.0174, 2.2965, and 2.7500 respectively.

These four (4) skills fell within the range of 2.0, indicating that the small and medium-sized contractors did not sufficiently possess those critical skills. On the other hand, tendering and procurement skills and site management skills were all found to be

of fair condition with weighted mean values of 3.0349 and 3.6977 respectively. The finding supports the opinions of [15]; [37] who mentioned that the construction industry is heavily dependent on the adequate availability of a skilled labor force and that the acquisition of a skilled labor force should be given serious attention by the contractors.

Table 4: Problems facing small and medium size contractors

Construction skills	Very High	High	Fair	Low	Very Low	WMV	Ranking of the WMVs
Inadequate startup capital	64	81	8	13	6	4.0697	1 st
Lack of political will to implement policies that assist small and medium-sized contractors	61	82	11	8	10	4.0232	2 nd
Delayed payment of executed job	59	78	2	26	7	3.9302	3 rd
The high-interest rate on the loan facility	39	52	18	39	24	3.2325	4 th
Difficulty in getting guarantors for a loan facility	29	31	16	76	20	2.8430	5 th
Government Bureaucracy	32	27	8	75	30	2.7441	6 th
Lack of innovative technology	19	26	33	61	33	2.6337	7 th
Unfavorable Weather conditions	21	34	13	53	52	2.5465	8 th
Inadequate skilled manpower	14	24	27	59	48	2.4011	9 th

Source: Author's fieldwork (2022)

Table 4 shows the problems facing small and medium-sized contractors in the study area. It depicted the mean value and ranking of the problems associated with small and medium-sized construction companies. The identified problems consist of delay in payment of executed contract, insufficient startup capital, difficulty in getting guarantors to execute a contract, lack of political will in implementing policies that assist small and medium-sized contractors, government bureaucracy, lack of adequate skilled manpower, lack of innovative technology, high rate of interest on loan facility, and unfavorable weather conditions. The study revealed that insufficient startup capital and lack of political will in implementing policies that assist small and medium-sized contractors were the most challenging factors affecting small and medium-sized contractors in the study area having mean score values of 4.0697 and 4.0232 respectively. This study agrees with the findings of [12]; [29] [30]; [39] and [40] who variously identified inadequate startup capital, lack of political will in implementing policies, delayed payment, high interest rates on loan facilities, difficulty in getting guarantors, government bureaucracy, lack of innovative technology, unfavorable weather conditions and inadequate skilled manpower as the challenges facing small and medium-sized contractors in the study area.

5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

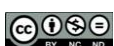
5.1 Conclusion

Evidence revealed in this study shows that the continuous operations of small and medium-sized contractors in the construction industry are unsustainable. This is largely due to several factors facing the subsector, which include but are not limited to inadequate startup capital, lack of political will in implementing policies that assist small and medium-sized contractors, delayed payment, the high-interest rate on loan facility, difficulty in getting guarantors for loan facility, etc. The study further revealed that poor knowledge of project management, health and safety management, and construction management skills constitute some of the contributing factors to the failure of small and medium-sized contractors in the study area.

5.2 Recommendations

To solve the identified challenges facing the small and medium-sized contractors in the study area, the contractors and the regulating bodies must work in synergy to contribute to the overall national development. Therefore, the study recommends the following as ways of mitigating the factors facing the small and medium-sized contractors in the study area:

- i. It is recommended that the government grant seed capital to small and medium-sized contractors to empower them to remain in the business,
- ii. Also, government at all levels should formulate and implement policies that are contractors such as tax weavers for small and medium-sized contractors,



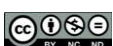
- iii. The contractors should be paid promptly after the execution of jobs instead of holding on to their payment for long.
- iv. It is equally recommended that small and medium-sized contractors should endeavor to attend skill development seminars and training to acquire relevant skills needed for their business,
- v. Finally, the study recommends that small and medium-sized contractors should use modern technologies such as computer-aided designs to fast-track their operations.

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