

Research Paper

An Analysis of Criminal Case Management Practises in The FCT Judiciary and Its Impact on Speedy Justice Dispensation

Nsikak E. Effiong, nsikak.effiong@oasislaw-ng.com, Law Hub Development and Advocacy Centre

Joshua Gbenga Dada, j.dada@lawhubdev.org, Law Hub Development and Advocacy Centre
Maryam Ibrahim, maryamibrahimlegal@gmail.com, FCT High Court

Abstract

Efficient case management is essential for the timely dispensation of justice. In the High Court of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), the current case management system operates through a hybrid model: individual courts handle case information manually, while a limited IT-based case management system is overseen by the Judicial Research Centre. This electronic system primarily utilizes Microsoft Excel to track cases from filing to disposition, through tools such as the Case Filing Form, Case Assignment Register, and Weekly Court Update Register. Despite the rise in criminal trials in the FCT High Court between 2015 and 2017—up by 17.51% in 2016 and 23.18% in 2017—there has not been a corresponding improvement in judgment delivery. The objective of this research is to assess the efficiency of criminal case management in the FCT Judiciary and its impact on justice dispensation. It seeks to identify key stages in the criminal case management process, evaluate current practices, and explore factors influencing efficiency. The study also examines the role of technology in reducing delays and improving case management systems. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the research includes qualitative data from focus group discussions and surveys of criminal justice stakeholders, such as judicial officers, court staff, correctional service officers, prosecutors, and defense lawyers. Preliminary findings indicate significant inefficiencies in the current system, driven by manual processes, poor coordination among stakeholders, and limited use of technology. The study highlights the need for a fully integrated, centralized digital platform accessible by all criminal justice stakeholders to streamline case management and improve the speed of justice delivery. The research recommends the adoption of a unified electronic case management system that fosters collaboration between the police, judiciary, correctional services, prosecutors, and defense lawyers, thereby enhancing transparency and accountability in the justice process.

Keywords: Case management, speedy justice dispensation, technology, criminal justice system, judiciary

1. Introduction

The delays prevalent in the criminal justice system, characterised by severe case backlogs and prolonged judgment delivery, have significantly hindered the administration of justice and burdened both stakeholders in the justice sector and the general public. Over the years, courts have introduced measures such as case management conferences and procedural rules aimed at enhancing efficiency. However, there has been insufficient attention

to the crucial role of proper record-keeping, case tracking and its accessibility in the case management process. The lack of comprehensive studies on the relevance and impact of functional case management on efficient justice delivery highlights a gap. This research focuses on addressing this overlooked aspect, with a specific emphasis on the FCT High Court. Given recent technological advancements aimed at addressing these shortcomings, and the shift from manual record systems to electronic or digitised case management systems, it is essential to evaluate their effectiveness and implementation. This study will examine the insights and perspectives of stakeholders within the justice system, identifying any challenges, shortcomings, and areas that require further improvement. The rise of technology and the widespread adoption of digital tools have significantly transformed how individuals and organisations store and manage information, with the justice sector being no exception. This research aims to assess and evaluate the current case management system in the FCT High Court, examining the role of technology in case management and its substantial impact on the efficient and timely dispensation of justice. The perceived benefits of this study are enhanced efficiency, access to justice, timeliness, transparency and accountability.¹

This paper seeks to identify key stages in the criminal case management process within the FCT Judiciary; assess the current case management practises and their impact on justice dispensation; understand the role of technology in improving the case management system; identify IT applications used in case management within the Court; and inform programme design in case management for the attainment of criminal justice. This research is significant in that it offers a comprehensive assessment of the current case management practice in the FCT High Court, examining the shortcomings and gaps in the system and proffering recommendations to address these flaws. The findings are valuable to policymakers, judicial officers, and criminal justice agencies as they seek to improve the functioning of the criminal justice system in Nigeria. The scope of this study is centred on the existing case management system in the FCT High Court particularly; the centralised and decentralised case management system. This research study also restricts itself to criminal case management and does not factor in civil case management and proffering recommendations exclusive to the FCT High Court.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Overview of Criminal Case Management Systems

The concept of case management emerged because it was recognised over time that the costs and time spent pursuing a case often outweighed the value of the outcome achieved.² Case management connotes a lot of things. However, in the context of this research paper, our focus is on judicial case management. Case management connotes supervision or management of the time and events involved in the movement of a case through the court system from the point of initiation to disposition, regardless of the type of

¹ Erwin Rooze, 'Differentiated Use of Electronic Case Management Systems' (2010) 3(1) *International Journal for Court Administration* 51, 51.

² Yusuf Ali, 'Judicial Case Management: Effectiveness or Interference' (Paper delivered at the 21st Commonwealth Law Conference, Livingstone, Zambia, 11 April 2019) 5 <https://www.commonwealthlawyers.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/C12-Barakah-E.-Ali-Nagode.pdf> accessed 11 October 2024.

disposition.³ According to Niranjana Bhatt,⁴ case management is a judicial process which provides effective, efficient and purposeful judicial management to achieve a timely and qualitative resolution of a dispute. It has also been defined as referring to a process involving the control of the movement of cases through a court or tribunal or the control of the total workload of a court or tribunal.⁵ Erwin Rooze⁶ made a distinction between case and court management. According to him, while case management is connected to the primary processes in courts, our definition includes court administration and other processes that are directly related to case management is connected to the secondary processes in courts and involves activities like strategy-making, human resource management, research and development, ICT, finance, and maintenance of the built environment.

The primary tools for achieving the objectives of judicial case management include laws, rules, and regulations. In Nigeria, these tools consist of the Administration of Criminal Justice Laws of the states, the Criminal Procedure Code Laws of the northern states, and the Administration of Criminal Justice Act, among others. With the development of technology infrastructure, several cutting-edge technologies and software have been introduced to aid case management, such as time and billing litigation support, research communication, data mining and modelling, data security, storage and archive accessibility.⁷ In Nigeria, a developed case management system is still at its inception and has not reached the level of sophistication and state-of-the-art facilities experienced in developed nations. The use of manual methods to record and store information has been the norm and standard for a long time. The stakeholders affected by the criminal case management system encompass the court, the Department of Public Prosecutions (DPP), the police, defense lawyers and the correctional facilities where these inmates are held. Each of these stakeholders plays a crucial role and is interconnected in ensuring the effectiveness of a functional criminal case management system.

2.2 The Role of Case Management in Justice Dispensation

Without a vigorous and functional case management system, the timely dispensation of justice becomes stalled. It is commonly stated that delayed justice is equivalent to denied justice. Trial delays are a problem in the higher courts and the lower courts. However, since lower courts handle the highest volume of cases, delays at this level significantly affect the entire system. Implementing a case management system (CMS) is one effective approach to minimising delays in the courts. A CMS can either be a manual, paper-based system or a computer-based system using software such as Microsoft Excel to create an electronic case register.⁸ Whether manual or electronic, a CMS is a means of recording information on an individual case (e.g. case number; name of parties; offence etc.) and tracking the case's

³ M Solomon and D Somerlot, *Caseflow Management in the Trial Court: Now and for the Future* (American Bar Association 1987) 3.

⁴ Niranjana Bhatt, 'Case Management: A Modern Concept' (Paper presented at the International Conference on ADR and Case Management, organised by the Law Reform Commission, 3–4 May 2003) 1.

⁵ Justice Talwant Singh, 'Court & Case Management' (High Court of New Delhi, no date)

https://www.nja.gov.in/Concluded_Programmes/2019-20/P-1167_PPTs/4.COURT%20&%20CASE%20MANAGEMENT.pdf accessed 11 October 2024.

⁶ Rooze (n [1]) 51

⁷ Ali (n [2]) 4.

⁸ Joan Monye, Patience Obiagbaoso, and Richard Obi, 'Where are we in Curbing Delays in Administration of Justice in Nigeria?' (Punuka Attorneys & Solicitors, 13 October 2020) <https://punuka.com/where-are-we-in-curbing-delays-in-administration-of-justice-in-nigeria/degwu> accessed 12 October 2024.

progress through the court system.⁹ The data collected through the system can be analysed to guide decision-making and policy development, aiming to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of court operations.

Delays in the justice system often arise from a lack of accountability, both in individual cases and within the system as a whole. Staff across various institutions can impede or stop the progress of cases without fear of facing repercussions for their actions or inaction. Furthermore, poor coordination among justice institutions exacerbates these delays. Without accurate information about a case's movement through the system, even when inquiries are made, there is often uncertainty about who to contact, which institution or individual to hold responsible, or how to track the case's progress. Throughout Nigeria, many plaintiffs and appellants have spent years awaiting justice, while others remain in detention facilities with their cases seemingly "forgotten."¹⁰ As of 2023, data from the Nigerian Correctional Service revealed that of the 80,704 inmates in the country, an alarming 68 per cent were awaiting trial, with many enduring multiple adjournments or neglect from the courts.¹¹

In contrast, the UK Ministry of Justice's 2018 criminal court statistics reported an average of 157 days from the time an offence was reported to the case's conclusion. In Nigeria, before the enactment of the Administration of Criminal Justice Act (ACJA), criminal trials often took four to six years to complete. Between 2018 and 2019, the average time to conclude magistrate cases in England increased by 6%, from 151 to 159 days. Comparatively, in 2011, it took an average of 593 days to complete a case in the Magistrate Courts in Kaduna, Nigeria. Implementing a functional case management system could significantly enhance the efficiency of case flow, leading to faster justice administration.¹²

The core components of case management have been distilled into four (4) major categories: (a) administrative management; (b) logistics management; (c) procedural management; and (d) content management.¹³ Administrative management deals with the recording of the initiation of a case and ideally continues to document every action and decision associated with the case, resulting in a comprehensive case record.¹⁴ Logistics management directs the movement of a case from initiation to disposition, archiving, and enforcement. During this process, cases are passed between individuals responsible for various tasks. Without proper logistics, delays and inefficiencies can arise, jeopardizing the flow of justice. Procedural management ensures compliance with rules and laws, while content management focuses on the systematic organization, storage, and retrieval of case-related documents. Effective content management is essential in modern legal systems to handle large volumes of information, ensuring efficiency, transparency, and easy access.

⁹ Justice For All, *How to Guide: Improving Performance in Courts: Introduce a Case Management System and Reduce Trial Delays* (2015) 1

https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/e413_j4a_c2_performance_in_courts_final_v4_web.pdf
accessed 11 October, 2024

¹⁰ Tunde Ajaja, 'Disappointment and Frustration for Litigants Denied Justice by Snail-Speed Proceedings' (*Punch*, 18 November 2023) <https://punchng.com/disappointment-frustration-for-litigants-denied-justice-by-snail-speed-proceedings/> accessed 11th October, 2024.

¹¹ *Ibid*

¹² Monye, Obiagbaoso, and Obi (n[8]).

¹³ Rooze (n [1]) 52

¹⁴ *Ibid*

2.3 Factors Affecting the Efficiency of Case Management

For case management to work there must be commitment from the various heads of institution with the responsibility of making sure that there is proper implementation of case management. There must be management oversight to ensure that data is captured in a timely and accurate manner and analysed to provide meaningful information to inform decision-making relating to court operations and policy. Without this, the CMS will not be a success.¹⁵ It is also necessary to ensure that staff and personnel understand the benefits and advantages of the system and adequate training or capacity building. It has been observed that it is necessary to be aware that some judicial officers and court staff may feel threatened or concerned about greater accountability brought about by the CMS or worry that it will create additional work.¹⁶ There is also a need for sufficient funding to cater for equipment, internet facilities, maintenance, training and coordination efforts among justice stakeholders. This will not only ensure the inception of case management but also its sustenance and continuity.

2.4 The Role of Technology in Modernising Case Management Systems

The advancement in technology has had a ripple effect in our world and has influenced the way individuals, organisations and bodies carry out their activities and duties. In this measure, technology has played a quintessential role in case management systems. This has given birth to digitalised or automated systems of streamlining, scheduling, tracking and storing files and information. This enhances decision-making by giving the right information in context. A criminal case tracking system (CTS) facilitates the monitoring of a case throughout the entire criminal justice process. The system assigns a unique reference number to each accused individual, tracks significant events in the progression of their case, and offers a search feature that allows users to determine the current status, location, and history of the case at any given time. The system also incorporates an 'Alert' system to give early warning of approaching deadlines or key milestones in a case, enables the production of sector-wide, institutional, case and individual 'performance data' and reports and has an enhanced ability to locate any case/accused in the criminal justice system at any time and indicate the current status.¹⁷

The use of an electronic case management system that utilises MS Excel computer software has been used to enhance efficiency by improving the flow of casework, identification of bottlenecks and delays; reduction in the likelihood of missing case files and simplification of the process of finding them.¹⁸ All kinds of benefits have been attributed to the use of ICT systems in judiciaries. As early as in the publication of Gallas and Gallas¹⁹ technology is mentioned as an important change factor since it can have effects on the nature of litigation and effects on the quality of court services. The use of ICT certainly is considered a key element in improving the administration of justice.²⁰ The primary importance of technology in case management in the judiciary has been narrowed down to (a) efficiency of

¹⁵ Security, Justice and Growth Programme, Nigeria, *Case Management and Tracking* (2010) 6 https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/case_management_system_and_tracking.pdf accessed 11 October 2024.

¹⁶ *Ibid*

¹⁷ *Ibid* 2.

¹⁸ *Ibid*

¹⁹ Gallas and Gallas, 'Court Management Past, Present and Future: A Comment on Lawson and Howard' (1991) 15(2) *Justice System Journal* 605, 616

²⁰ D Reiling, *Technology for Justice: How IT Can Support Judicial Reform* (Leiden University Press 2009)

justice; and (b) procedural justice.²¹ The relevance of technology cannot be overemphasised and if well utilised, can play an outsize role in case management for effective and speedy dispensation of justice.²²

3. Methods

3.1 Research Design

This research adopted a mixed-methods design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to gather comprehensive data on criminal case management practices and their impact on the timely dispensation of justice in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Judiciary.

3.2 Data Collection

3.2.1 Quantitative Data Collection

The quantitative data was gathered through online surveys administered via Google Forms. The surveys targeted two distinct groups of criminal justice stakeholders: Judiciary Staff and criminal justice stakeholders outside the judiciary, such as prosecutors, defense lawyers, and legal aid providers. The survey for Group A (judiciary staff) received 32 responses while the survey for Group B (External Stakeholders) had 40 respondents. In total, 72 participants completed the surveys across both groups.

3.2.2 Qualitative Data Collection

Qualitative data was obtained through a focus group discussion (FGD) involving 15 participants including representatives from the Ministry of Justice, the Nigerian Police, Court registrars and clerks, Legal aid representatives, Civil society organizations (CSOs) and a programme analyst from the Judicial Research Centre of the FCT High Court.

3.3 Sampling Technique

Participants for both the surveys and focus group discussions were selected using convenience sampling, which targeted individuals who had significant interaction with the criminal case management system.

3.4 Data Analysis

The data collected from the surveys were analysed using Microsoft Excel, which facilitated the generation of descriptive statistics such as percentages, averages, and frequencies. The transcripts from the focus group discussion were reviewed and thematically analysed to identify recurring themes, challenges, and suggestions for improving criminal case management practices in the FCT Judiciary.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

This research adhered to ethical principles to ensure the integrity of the study and the protection of participants' rights throughout the data collection and analysis process. All participants were fully informed about the purpose and objectives of the research. Participants were made aware that their involvement was voluntary, and they had the right

²¹ Rooze (n [1]) 58

²² The use of technology in countries like the Philippines in 2013 with the introduction of electronic case management system (eCourt) program was launched in 2013 in 58 pilot courts, in Kenya with the automated case management system piloted in three (3) Magistrate Courts: Eldoret, Machakos, and Mombasa Magistrates Courts. Rwanda introduced an Integrated Electronic Case Management System (IECMS) in 2017.

to withdraw from the study at any point without consequence. Consent letters were sent to each organisation, and explicit consent was obtained before any data collection activities. To protect the privacy of participants, their identities were anonymised during the data collection process. Data collected from surveys and focus group discussions were securely stored and only accessed by authorized members of the research team. All data collected were treated with integrity and used strictly for this research. Findings were presented truthfully and based solely on the evidence collected from participants.

4. Findings

4.1 Case Flow at the FCT High Court



Figure 4.1. Case Flow at the FCT High Court

4.2 Survey: Key Insights

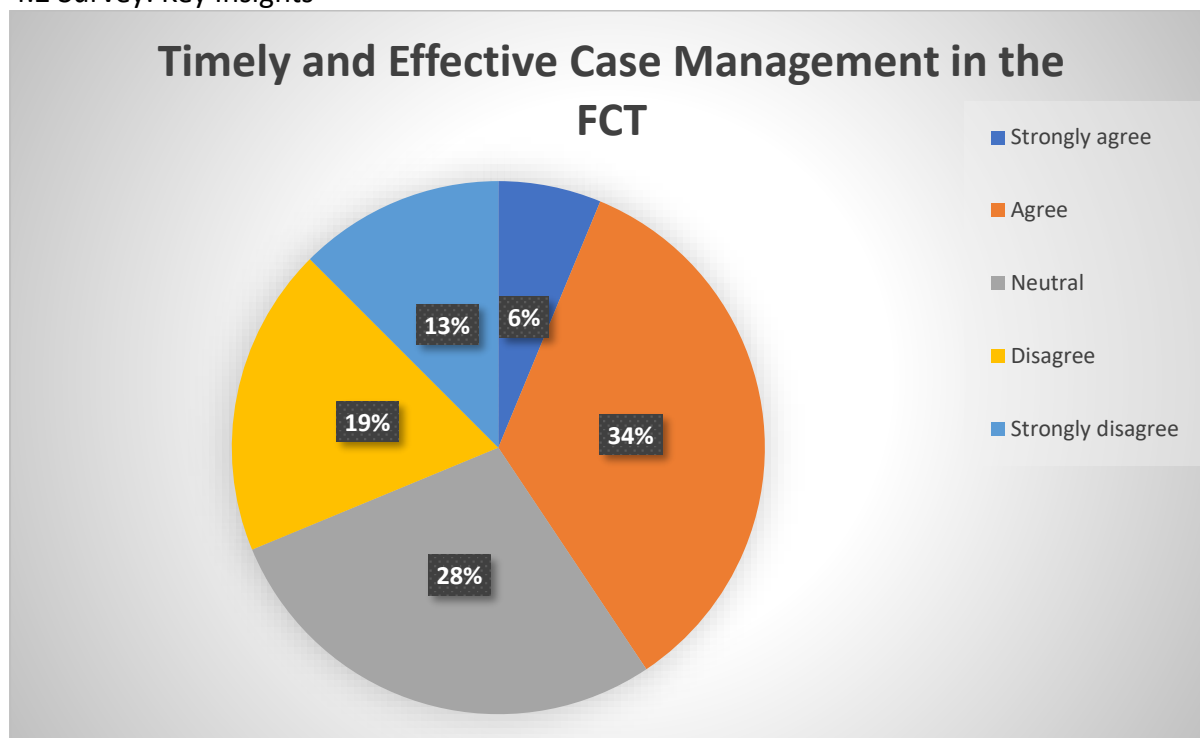


Figure 4.2. Perception of respondents to the timely and effective nature of case management in the FCT High Court

Only 6.25% of respondents strongly agree that the criminal case management (CCM) system in the FCT High Court is timely and efficient, with 34.37% agreeing to its effectiveness. A significant portion of respondents, 28.12%, remain neutral, indicating ambivalence about the system's effectiveness. However, 31.25% (18.75% disagree and 12.5% strongly disagree) believe that the current case management system is inefficient. This highlights a general dissatisfaction with the case management system which could be attributed to technological, structural, or operational bottlenecks in the FCT Judiciary's CCM.

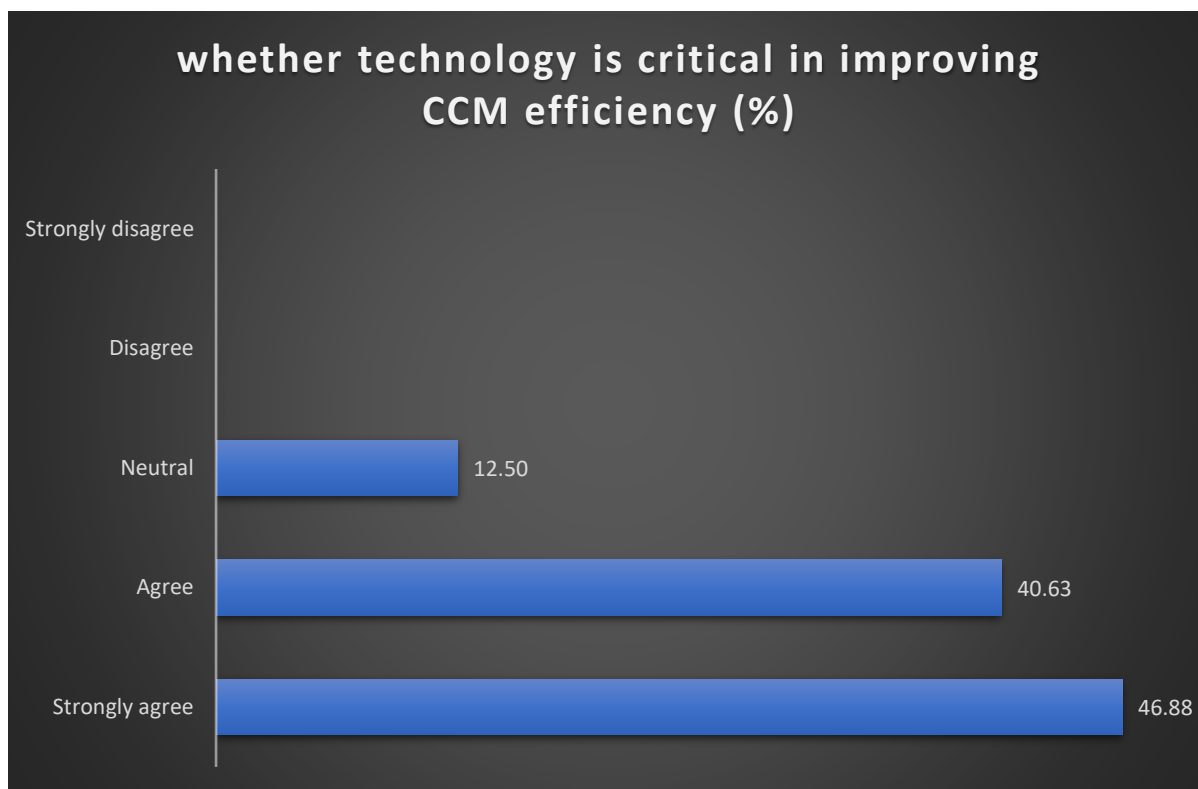


Figure 4.3 Opinion of stakeholders on the use of technology in improving case management efficiency.

A notable 87.5% of respondents (46.87% strongly agree and 40.62% agree) believe that technology plays a critical role in improving the efficiency of case management in the FCT Judiciary, while 12.5% remain neutral. This overwhelming support for technological improvements suggests that stakeholders view the use of digital tools and automation as a vital solution for reducing delays and enhancing overall case management.

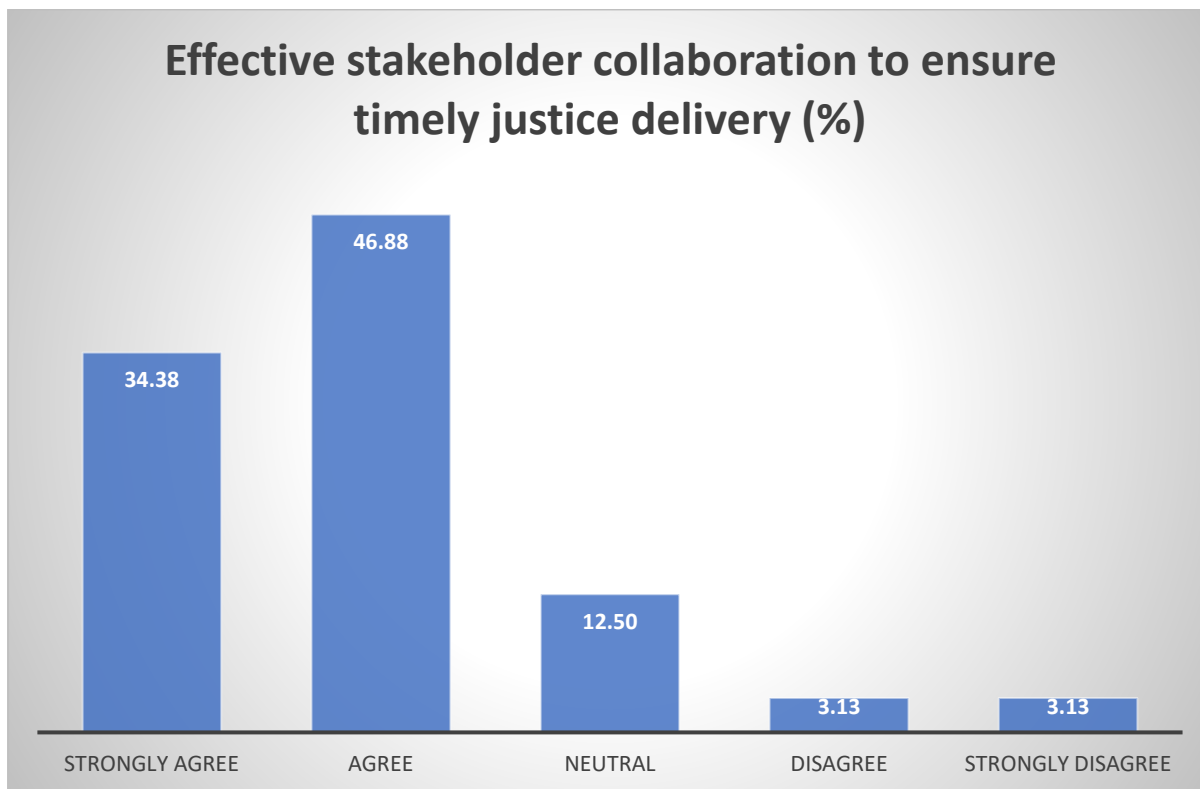


Figure 4.4. Need for Effective stakeholder collaboration to ensure timely justice delivery

About 81.24% (34.37% strongly agree and 46.87% agree) of respondents emphasize the importance of stakeholder collaboration to ensure timely justice delivery, while 6.24% disagree and a small portion remain neutral. The high level of agreement indicates that the efficient coordination between key criminal justice stakeholders (judiciary, prosecution, defense, correctional services) is seen as essential for timely case resolution.

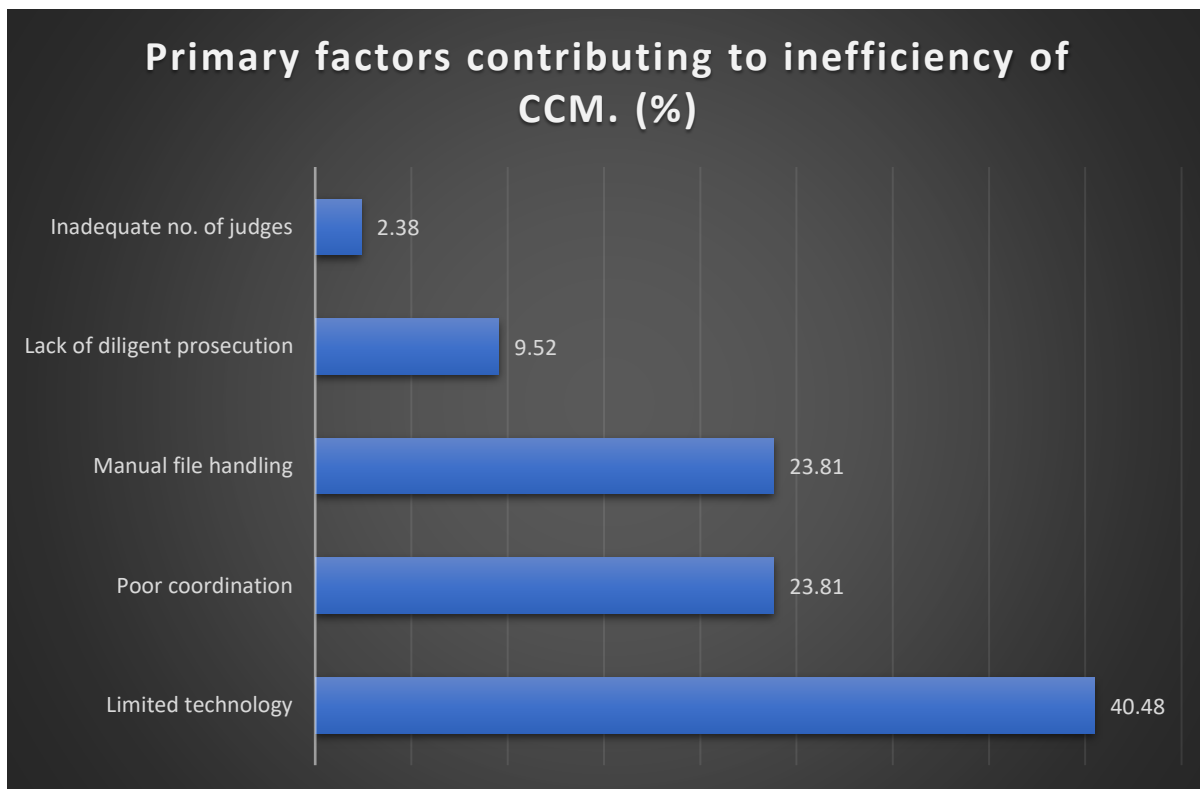


Figure 4.5. Factors contributing to the inefficiency of case management.

The primary factors identified by respondents as contributing to inefficiencies in the CCM include Limited technology (40.47%), Poor coordination (23.80%), Manual file handling (23.80%), Lack of diligent prosecution (9.52%), and Inadequate number of judges (2.38%). The results point to technology and coordination issues as the primary contributors to delays, followed by reliance on manual processes. The low percentage for the number of judges (2.38%) suggests that, while judicial capacity might not be the main concern, the inefficiency lies more in administrative and procedural gaps.

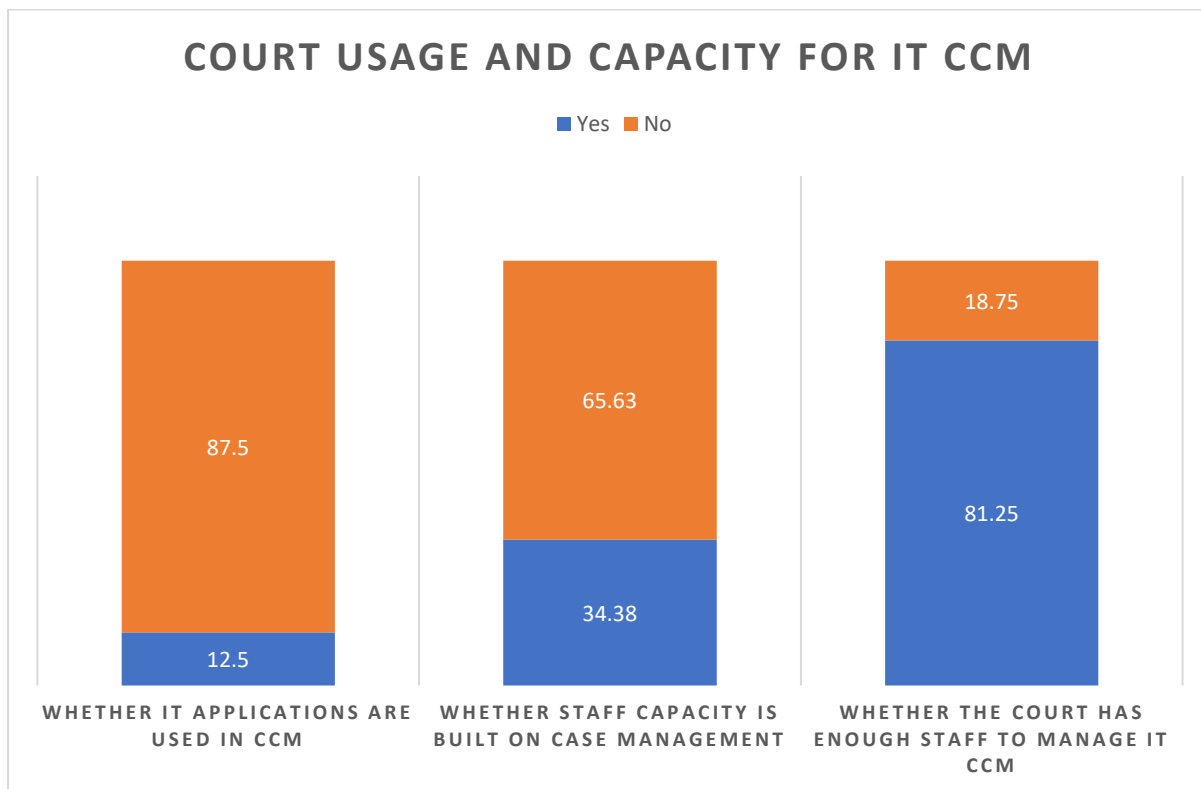


Figure 4.6. Court usage and capacity for the use of IT in case management.

12.5% of respondents indicated that IT applications are used in case management, while 87.5% reported that IT is not adequately integrated into the system. Only 34.37% believe that staff capacity is built on case management, indicating limited training and preparedness for managing cases using technology. Interestingly, 81.25% agree that the court has sufficient staff to manage case management processes, even though the required technology and skills are lacking. The court appears to be sufficiently staffed to manage its workload, but the lack of technological tools and the necessary training to use such tools are key impediments to improving the efficiency of case management. This suggests an urgent need for investment in both technology and staff capacity-building programs.

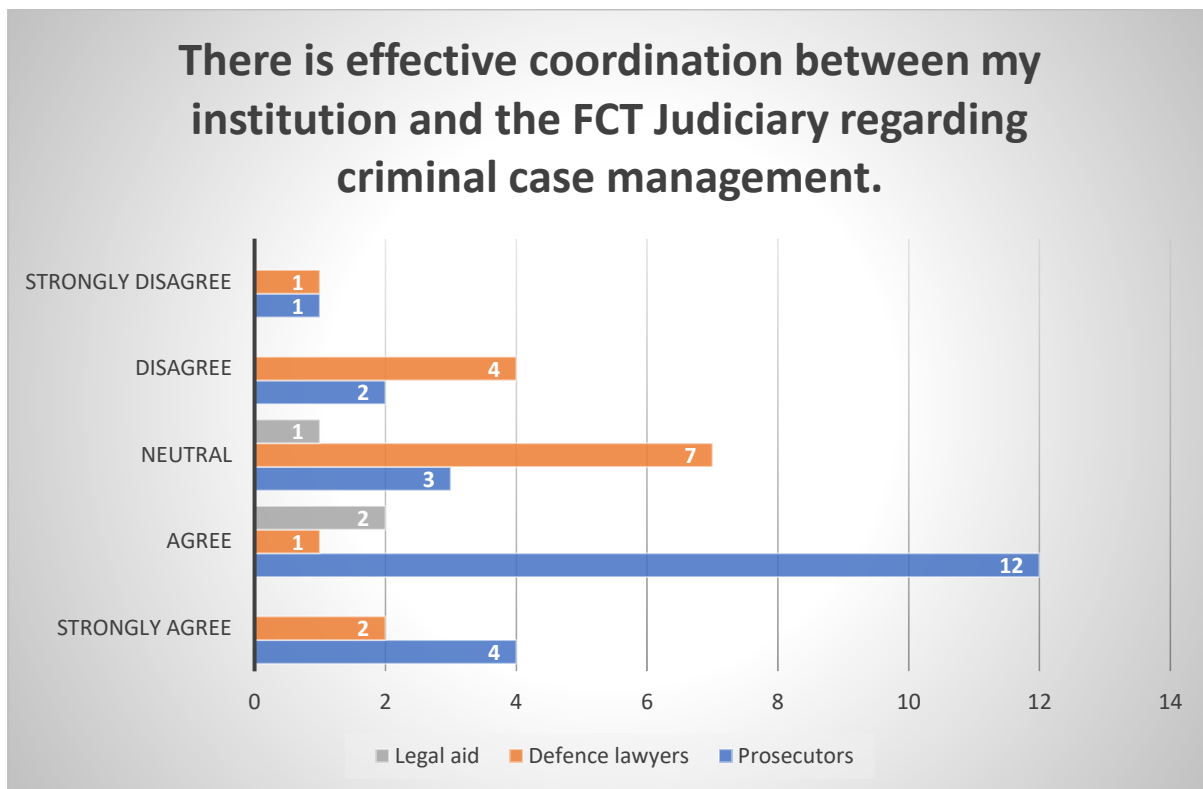


Figure 4.7. Opinion on the existence of effective coordination between institutional stakeholders and the FCT judiciary.

The perception of coordination between the judiciary and other criminal justice institutions varies. 16 prosecutors (from agencies like the Ministry of Justice, EFCC, and Police) indicated that effective coordination exists, while a few expressed concerns over poor coordination. Among defense lawyers, 3 agreed that coordination was effective, while others were more neutral or disagreed. While there is a perception of some level of coordination between the judiciary and other institutions, the responses suggest that this coordination is inconsistent. This inconsistency may contribute to delays in the progression of criminal cases, highlighting the need for standardized protocols for communication and case coordination between stakeholders.



Figure 4.8. Influence of poor coordination between institutional stakeholders and courts on delays in criminal case management.

5 prosecutors reported that delays often arise due to poor coordination, while 7 noted frequent delays, and 4 reported occasional delays. Among defense lawyers, 4 identified frequent delays caused by poor coordination, indicating similar challenges across both prosecution and defense. Poor coordination between the judiciary and other criminal justice institutions is frequently identified as a cause of delays in criminal case management. This lack of coordination disrupts case flow, leading to extended case timelines and hindering the timely resolution of cases.

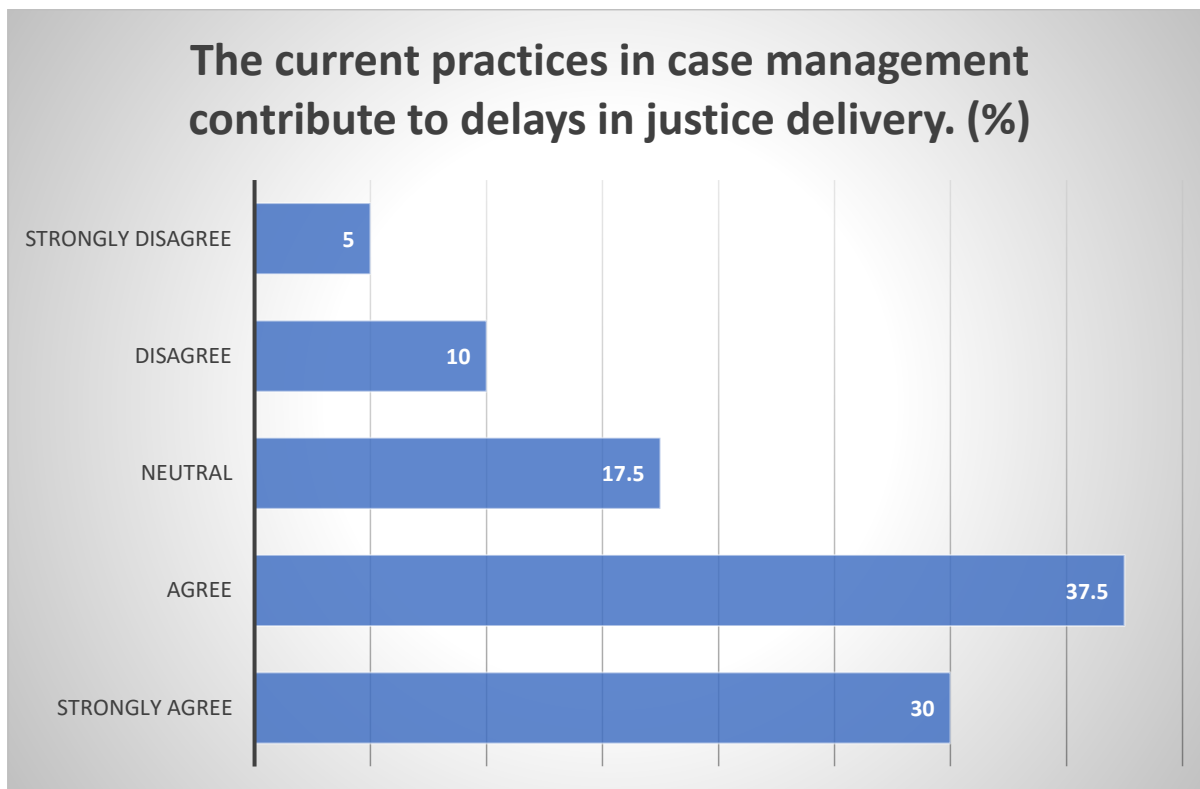


Figure 4.9. Need for effective stakeholder collaboration to ensure timely justice delivery.

67.5% of respondents agreed that the current case management practices contribute to delays in justice delivery. Only 15% of respondents disagreed with this assessment. A clear majority of stakeholders believe that the existing case management practices within the FCT Judiciary are contributing to delays. This consensus points to inefficiencies within the system, whether due to outdated processes, manual handling of files, or insufficient case monitoring mechanisms.

Whether a unified case management platform would lead to more timely resolutions of cases. (%)

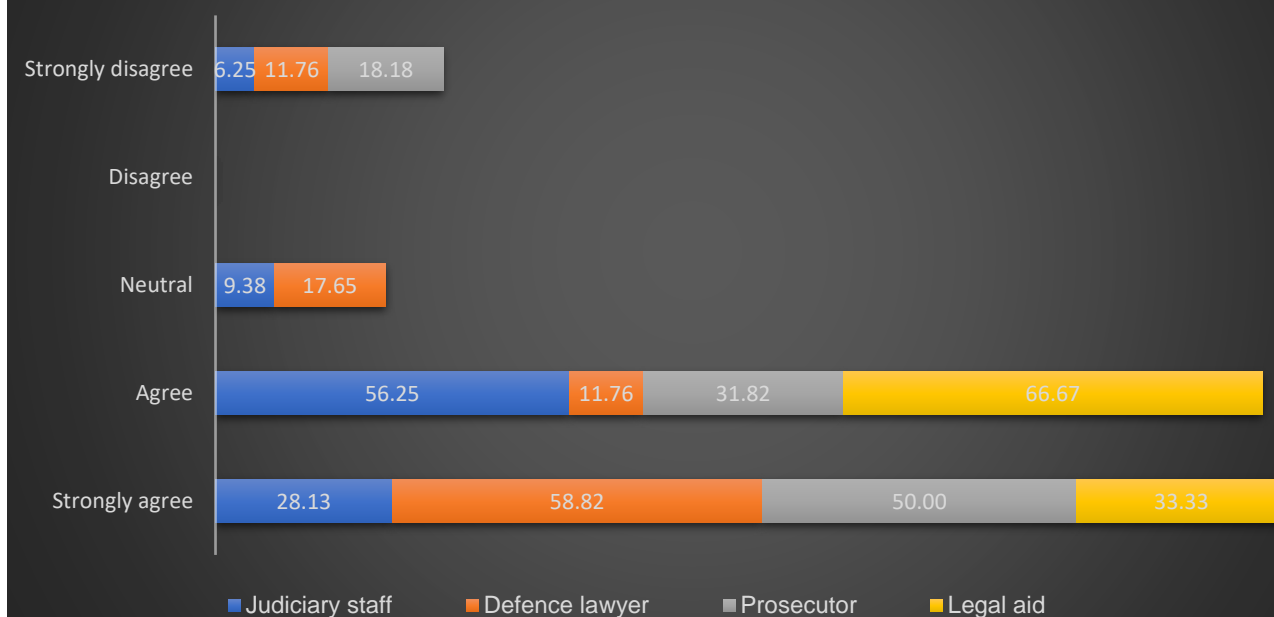


Figure 4.10. Opinion of stakeholders on the influence of a unified/centralised case management system on timely resolution of cases.

84.37% of judiciary staff agreed that a unified case management system would lead to more timely resolutions of cases. Prosecutors and legal aid providers also strongly supported the implementation of a unified platform, with 81.81% of prosecutors and 100% of legal aid respondents advocating for such a system. There is overwhelming support for the adoption of a unified or centralized case management system across all stakeholder groups. This would allow for more effective tracking and monitoring of cases, reducing delays caused by disorganization or fragmentation within the system.

4.3 Focus Group Discussion: Key Insights

The police representative highlighted delays in case assignments and inadequate case tracking mechanisms from the divisional to federal levels. While the Legal Aid Council maintains a case-tracking system, insufficient staffing and funding were identified as barriers to efficient case management. Major issues in the case of defense lawyers include delays in receiving proof of evidence, manual filing processes, and poor coordination between the court, prosecutors, and defense lawyers. For the Ministry of Justice, inconsistent communication, particularly regarding bail applications and suspect transportation responsibilities, was flagged as a persistent issue. Clerks and Registrars from the judiciary stated that the FCT High Court uses a hybrid system combining manual and digital processes, but the lack of centralization weakens its effectiveness. Although the Correctional Centres have a digital system to inform inmates of court dates, funding constraints and transportation challenges continue to impede case management.

All stakeholders strongly advocated for a fully digital, centralized case management system that would be accessible to all criminal justice stakeholders (police, prosecutors,

defense lawyers, correctional facilities, and courts). Such a system would streamline case tracking, ensure timely updates, and enhance coordination among parties.

The lack of adequate funding, staffing shortages, and logistical challenges, such as inmate transportation, were identified as major obstacles. These resource constraints affect all stages of case management, from case filing to trial and sentencing.

A key theme across all sectors was the need for clearer guidelines defining roles and responsibilities. Participants emphasized the importance of improved communication and coordination between the police, prosecutors, defense lawyers, and correctional facilities to ensure the smooth movement of cases through the system.

5. Discussion, Conclusion, Recommendations, and Future Research

5.1 Discussion

This section discusses the data in the context of the research objectives, highlighting how the goals of the study were achieved.

5.1.1 Efficiency and Coordination in Criminal Case Management

The literature highlights that criminal case management refers to the supervision of the time and events involved in moving a case through the court system, from initiation to resolution²³. However, the survey results and focus group discussion pointed to significant inefficiencies in the current system within the FCT Judiciary. The empirical findings revealed that only 6.25% of survey respondents strongly agree that the FCT High Court has a timely and effective case management system. This dissatisfaction with the system's efficiency was mirrored in the focus group, where stakeholders including police, defense lawyers, and court clerks mentioned the frequent delays in case handling. The police representative, for example, emphasized delays in case assignments due to inadequate case tracking systems. Defense lawyers raised concerns over manual processes, such as the delayed service of proof of evidence and charge sheets, which further slows down the movement of cases. In terms of coordination, the literature discusses how poor coordination between justice institutions is a major cause of delays in case management²⁴. This was confirmed by the surveys, where 81% of respondents indicated that stakeholder collaboration is essential for timely justice delivery. Additionally, the focus group participants consistently raised concerns about poor coordination between the police, prosecutors, defense lawyers, and correctional facilities. For example, the Ministry of Justice representative highlighted how bail applications sometimes proceed without proper notice to the prosecution, due to communication gaps.

These findings address the first objective; to identify key stages in the criminal case management process within the FCT Judiciary. The research has identified several critical stages, including the police investigation, case filing, trial preparation, and coordination between courts and correctional facilities, all of which are hindered by delays and inefficiencies.

²³ Solomon and Somerlot (n [3]) 3

²⁴ Ajaja (n [10])

5.1.2 The Impact of Current Case Management Practices on Justice Dispensation

The literature extensively discusses the role of case management in ensuring timely justice delivery, emphasizing that "delayed justice is denied justice". It is noted that case management systems whether manual or computerized should be designed to track the progress of cases through the system and identify bottlenecks²⁵. However, the research findings suggest that the FCT Judiciary's case management practices are falling short in this regard. The survey results revealed that 67.5% of respondents believe that the current case management practices contribute to delays in justice delivery. This was further supported by the focus group findings, where judicial representatives admitted that their hybrid system, which uses both manual and digital processes, is ineffective and prone to errors. For example, the judiciary's use of Microsoft Excel to track case progress was deemed insufficient for handling the volume and complexity of cases. The consequences of these inefficiencies are dire. The literature provides evidence of the widespread problem of prolonged pretrial detention in Nigeria, with 68% of inmates in Nigerian prisons awaiting trial²⁶. Focus group participants reinforced this concern, with the correctional service representative pointing out the frequent delays in transporting inmates to court due to logistical and funding challenges. These delays result in prolonged pretrial detention, exacerbating the backlog of cases in the court system.

Thus, the second objective; to assess the current case management practices and their impact on justice dispensation was addressed. The study has shown that current practices contribute significantly to delays in justice delivery, from the initial police investigation to the final court hearing, creating a bottleneck in the judicial process.

5.1.3 The Role of Technology in Improving Case Management

One of the most prominent themes emerging from both the literature and the research findings is the role of technology in improving case management systems. The literature discusses the importance of technology in modern case management systems, particularly in tracking cases, scheduling hearings, and storing case-related documents²⁷. In contrast to the manual systems still in use in many Nigerian courts, modern digital systems offer real-time updates, automated reminders, and better coordination between stakeholders. In the FCT Judiciary, the lack of advanced technology is a critical problem. The survey revealed that 87.5% of respondents believe that technology is crucial for improving case management efficiency. However, the court's current use of technology is extremely limited. The focus group participants expressed frustration with the court's reliance on manual processes, noting that even the limited use of digital tools, such as Microsoft Excel, is inadequate for managing the large volume of cases. The correctional service representative described how their internal system digitally tracks inmate court dates, but this information is not integrated with the judiciary's systems, leading to communication breakdowns between the court and correctional facilities. This disjointed use of technology further delays case processing and results in the mismanagement of cases.

²⁵ Justice For All (n [9]) 1

²⁶ Ajaja (n [10])

²⁷ Rooze (n [1]) 58

These findings meet the third objective; to understand the role of technology in improving the case management system. The data from both the literature and the fieldwork illustrate the need for the FCT Judiciary to adopt a centralized, digital case management platform that can integrate the activities of all stakeholders involved in the criminal justice process.

5.1.4 IT Applications and Their Use in the Court System

The literature highlights the benefits of adopting IT applications in case management, such as tracking case progress, scheduling, and managing documentation²⁸. These tools not only improve the efficiency of court operations but also enhance transparency and accountability. Unfortunately, the survey results indicate that 87.5% of respondents believe that IT applications are not currently being used effectively in the FCT High Court. This is a significant barrier to improving the speed and accuracy of case management. During the focus group discussion, court clerks and registrars admitted that while some IT tools are in use, such as Microsoft Excel for tracking cases, the system is not centralized and lacks the necessary integration to be truly effective. The fragmented use of technology between institutions, such as the police, courts, and correctional facilities, further compounds the problem. The focus group strongly recommended the development of a centralized digital case management system that could be accessed by all stakeholders involved in the criminal justice process.

These findings address the fourth objective; to identify IT applications used in case management within the court. While there are some limited use of IT tools, the study reveals a clear gap in the effective application of these technologies, emphasizing the need for an integrated system to improve case management.

5.1.5 Program Design for Attaining Criminal Justice

The literature stresses that a functional case management system requires not only technology but also proper training, coordination, and adequate resources²⁹. This was echoed in the empirical findings, where focus group participants consistently raised concerns about the lack of funding, staff training, and logistical resources in the FCT High Court. For instance, the judiciary representatives highlighted that while they had sufficient staff, those staff members lacked the necessary training to effectively use digital case management tools. Both the literature and empirical data emphasize that any attempt to reform the case management system must include investments in training and capacity-building. The survey results show that 34.37% of respondents believe that staff capacity is a major issue, and the focus group called for targeted training programs to ensure that court staff can effectively manage a fully digital case management system.

The fifth objective; to inform program design in case management for the attainment of criminal justice is therefore met. The data shows that for case management reforms to succeed, the FCT Judiciary must prioritize staff training, improved coordination between

²⁸ *Ibid*

²⁹ Security, Justice and Growth Programme, Nigeria (n [15]) 6

institutions, and the allocation of resources to support technological and logistical improvements.

5.2 Conclusion

The findings revealed significant inefficiencies in the current system, particularly in terms of coordination between stakeholders, the limited use of technology, and inadequate resource allocation. These issues have contributed to delays in case resolution, leaving many defendants languishing in pretrial detention for extended periods. The study shows that the FCT High Court's reliance on manual processes and fragmented digital tools is one of the key factors undermining the efficiency of its case management system. Despite having sufficient staff, the lack of capacity-building programs and inadequate technological infrastructure hampers the court's ability to manage criminal cases effectively. Furthermore, the focus group discussions and survey data emphasize the need for stronger collaboration between the judiciary, police, prosecutors, defense lawyers, and correctional facilities to ensure smoother case flow. The introduction of a centralized, fully digital case management platform accessible to all stakeholders is widely regarded as the most viable solution to improve efficiency and transparency. By addressing these systemic challenges, the FCT Judiciary can enhance its case management processes, reduce delays, and ensure more timely justice delivery.

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this research, the following recommendations are proposed to improve the efficiency of the criminal case management system in the FCT High Court:

1. **Adopt a Centralized Digital Case Management Platform:** The FCT Judiciary should prioritize the development and implementation of a centralized digital case management system which would integrate all criminal justice stakeholders, including the police, prosecutors, defense lawyers, and correctional facilities.
2. **Invest in Capacity Building and Training:** Adequate training programs should be provided for judicial staff and other stakeholders involved in case management to ensure that all personnel are equipped to effectively use digital tools and technology, thereby improving overall system efficiency.
3. **Enhance Stakeholder Collaboration and Communication:** Clear guidelines and protocols should be established to define the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders in the criminal case management process. Regular interagency meetings and coordination sessions should be institutionalized to facilitate better communication and ensure timely updates on case progress.
4. **Allocate Adequate Resources:** Proper resource allocation is essential for ensuring that logistical challenges are resolved and that the criminal case management system can function effectively.
5. **Standardise Case Management Protocols:** Develop and enforce standardised procedures for case filing, documentation, and updates to ensure consistency across all courts and institutions.

6. Monitor and Evaluate Case Management Practices: The FCT Judiciary should establish regular monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to assess the effectiveness of its case management practices.

5.4 Future Research

Future research could compare the criminal case management practices in the FCT Judiciary with other jurisdictions in Nigeria or globally. This would provide insights into best practices and lessons that could be applied to the FCT. Conducting a cost-benefit analysis of proposed reforms, particularly the implementation of a centralized digital case management system would provide valuable insights into the financial implications and potential long-term benefits of such investments. Longitudinal studies can also be carried out to track the long-term effects of technology integration on the efficiency and transparency of the judicial system.

References

Erwin Rooze, Differentiated Use of Electronic Case Management Systems 2010 3(1) International Journal for Court Administration 51 51.

Gallas and Gallas, Court Management Past, Present and Future: A Comment on Lawson and Howard 1991 15(2) Justice System Journal 605 616.

Joan Monye, Patience Obiagbaoso, and Richard Obi, Where are we in Curbing Delays in Administration of Justice in Nigeria? (Punuka Attorneys & Solicitors, 13 October 2020) <https://punuka.com/where-are-we-in-curbing-delays-in-administration-of-justice-in-nigeria/degwu> accessed 12 October 2024.

Justice For All, How to Guide: Improving Performance in Courts: Introduce a Case Management System and Reduce Trial Delays (2015) https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/e413_j4a_c2_performance_in_courts_final_v4_web.pdf accessed 11 October 2024.

Justice Talwant Singh, Court & Case Management (High Court of New Delhi, no date) https://www.nja.gov.in/Concluded_Programmes/2019-20/P-1167_PPTs/4.COURT%20&%20CASE%20MANAGEMENT.pdf accessed 11 October 2024.

Niranjan Bhatt, Case Management: A Modern Concept (Paper presented at the International Conference on ADR and Case Management, organised by the Law Reform Commission, 3–4 May 2003) 1.

Reiling, Technology for Justice: How IT Can Support Judicial Reform (Leiden University Press 2009).

Security, Justice and Growth Programme, Nigeria, Case Management and Tracking (2010) 6 https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/case_management_system_and_tracking.pdf accessed 11 October 2024.

Solomon and D Somerlot, Caseflow Management in the Trial Court: Now and for the Future (American Bar Association 1987)

Tunde Ajaja, Disappointment and Frustration for Litigants Denied Justice by Snail-Speed Proceedings (Punch, 18 November 2023) <https://punchng.com/disappointment-frustration-for-litigants-denied-justice-by-snail-speed-proceedings/> accessed 11 October 2024.

Yusuf Ali, Judicial Case Management: Effectiveness or Interference (Paper delivered at the 21st Commonwealth Law Conference, Livingstone, Zambia, 11 April 2019) 5 <https://www.commonwealthlawyers.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/C12-Barakah-E.-Ali-Nagode.pdf> accessed 11 October 2024.

Appendices

Appendix A: Questionnaire for Group A (Judiciary Staff)

Questionnaire to Determine the Case Management in the FCT Judiciary

This questionnaire aims to gather insights into the efficiency, challenges of criminal case management within the FCT Judiciary.

* Indicates required question

1. Court no *

2. What is your designation within the High Court? *

Mark only one oval.

- Registrar
- Court Clerk
- JRC Staff
- Other: _____

3. The criminal case management in the FCT Judiciary is timely and efficient? *

Mark only one oval.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

4. Identify the primary factors contributing to inefficiency in criminal case management. *

Check all that apply.

- Inadequate staff
 Poor coordination
 Manual file handling
 Limited technology
 Other: _____

5. Technology is critical in improving criminal case management efficiency? *

Mark only one oval.

- Strongly disagree
 Disagree
 Neutral
 Agree
 Strongly Agree

6. Are IT applications used for managing criminal case? *

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
 No

7. What IT applications are used for managing criminal cases? *

8. What are the challenges encountered using the manual system of case management *

9. Are there training and capacity-building initiatives for court staff target at case management efficiency? *

Mark only one oval.

Yes

No

10. Do you believe the High Court has enough staff to manage technological case management? *

Mark only one oval.

Yes

No

11. Collaboration among various stakeholders (judiciary, law enforcement, correctional services, legal practitioners) is sufficient to ensure timely justice delivery. *

Mark only one oval.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree

12. What are the primary challenges faced in implementing or maintaining current IT case management systems? *

13. The implementation of a unified case management platform would lead to more timely resolutions of cases. *

Mark only one oval.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Appendix B: Questionnaire for Group B (External Stakeholders)

Questionnaire to Determine the Efficiency of Case Management in the FCT Judiciary

This questionnaire is tailored for non-judicial stakeholders and focuses on their interaction with the FCT Judiciary, the challenges they face, the impact of case management on case resolution, and how technology can improve coordination.

** Indicates required question.*

1. Institution *

Mark only one oval.

- Police
- Correctional services
- MOJ
- Legal Aid Institutions (Legal Aid, Human Rights Commission, FIDA, etc)
- Other prosecutors (EFCC, ICPC etc)
- Defence Lawyers
- Other: _____

2. There is effective coordination between my organisation/agency and the FCT Judiciary regarding criminal case management. *

Mark only one oval.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

3. The current practices in case management contribute to delays in justice delivery. *

Mark only one oval.

- Strongly disagree
 Disagree
 Neutral
 Agree
 Strongly Agree

4. How often do delays in criminal case management arise due to poor coordination between the judiciary and your organization/agency? *

Mark only one oval.

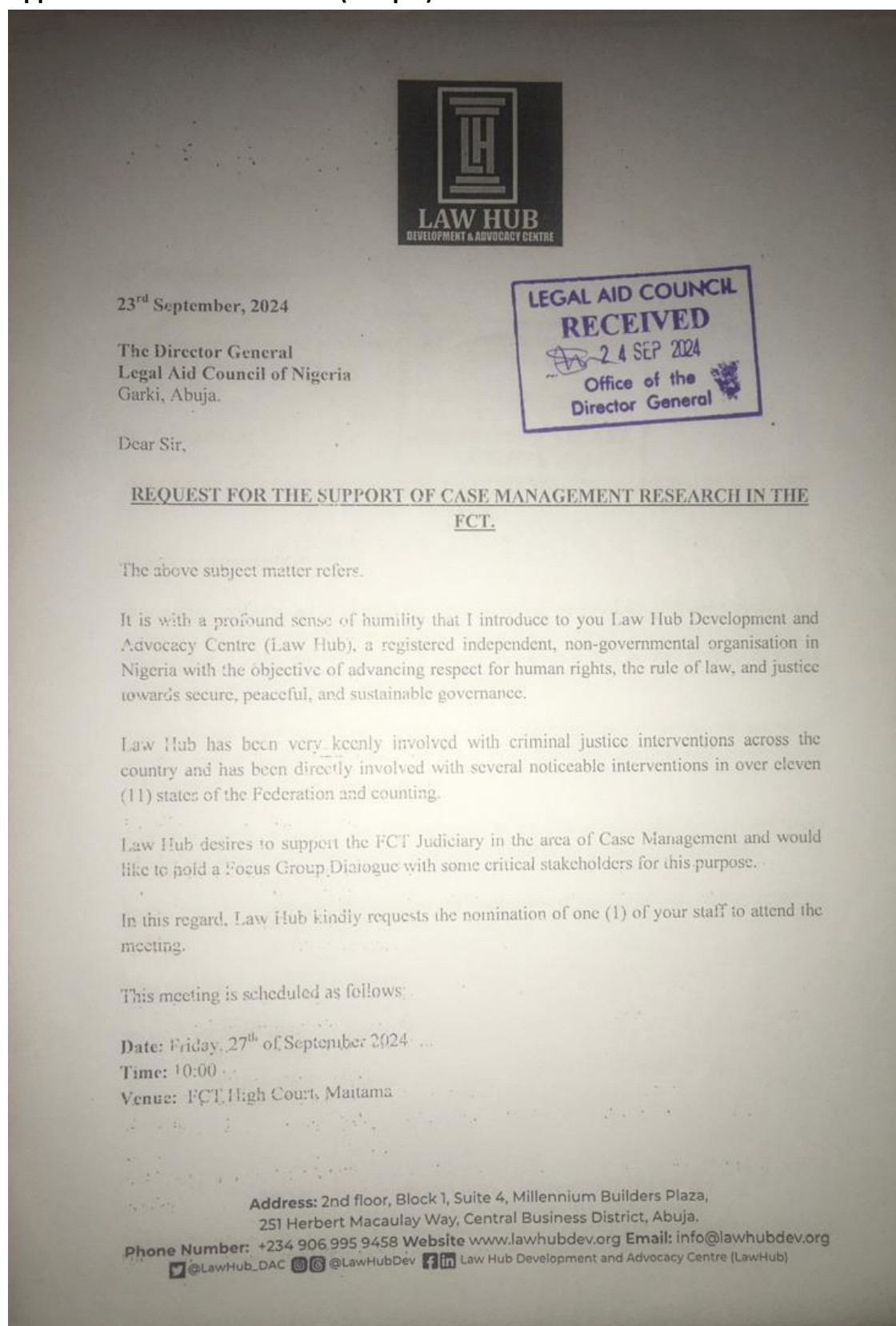
- Never
 Occasionally
 Sometimes
 Often
 Always

5. The implementation of a unified digital case management platform will reduce delays in case handling due to better coordination with the FCT Judiciary. *

Mark only one oval.

- Strongly disagree
 Disagree
 Neutral
 Agree
 Strongly agree

Appendix C: Letters of Consent (Sample)



Appendix D: Photos from Focus Group Discussion





