



# Activity-Based Costing (ABC) Implementation in Manufacturing Industries: Challenges, Benefits and Impact on Cost Management

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Abstract	Original Research Article
<p>This study explores the implementation of Activity-Based Costing (ABC) in Nigeria’s manufacturing industries, focusing on the challenges encountered, the perceived benefits, and the impact on cost management. Using structured questionnaires distributed to cost accountants and operations managers across 30 manufacturing firms, the research employed both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques, including correlation and regression analyses. The findings reveal a significant positive relationship between ABC implementation and cost management effectiveness, with 42.8% of the variance in cost management explained by ABC adoption. While respondents acknowledged that ABC improves cost traceability, pricing, and decision-making, challenges such as high implementation cost, technical complexity, and inadequate staff competence hinder full adoption. The study concludes that ABC, if adequately supported, can be a powerful tool for strategic cost control in Nigeria’s manufacturing sector. It recommends enhanced training, stakeholder awareness, and IT infrastructure investment to overcome current barriers.</p> <p><b>Keywords:</b> Activity-Based Costing, Cost Management, Manufacturing Industry, Implementation Challenges, Nigeria</p>	

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## I Introduction

In today’s highly competitive global economy, manufacturing industries are under immense pressure to reduce costs, improve operational efficiency, and make informed strategic decisions to sustain profitability and long-term growth. Effective cost management is no longer just a financial function; it has become a strategic imperative for business survival and competitiveness. However, traditional cost

accounting systems, which often rely on volume-based allocation of overheads (such as direct labor hours or machine hours), have increasingly proven to be inadequate in complex production environments where overheads constitute a significant portion of total costs (Kaplan & Atkinson, 1998; Drury, 2015).

In the ever-evolving landscape of manufacturing industries, the imperative for efficient cost management techniques has become more

pronounced than ever. Traditional costing systems have long been employed by manufacturing firms to assign overhead costs to products; however, these conventional methods often fall short in accurately reflecting the true cost of production, especially in environments with diverse and complex product lines (Kaplan & Cooper, 1998). As global competition intensifies and customer demands shift towards customization, the need for more precise and relevant cost information has prompted the adoption of modern costing approaches such as Activity-Based Costing (ABC).

Activity-Based Costing emerged in the late 1980s as a response to the limitations of traditional cost accounting systems, particularly their inability to account for indirect costs in a way that accurately mirrors the consumption of resources (Drury, 2015). Unlike traditional methods that arbitrarily allocate overheads based on volume measures such as direct labor hours or machine hours, ABC assigns costs to activities based on their use of resources and subsequently allocates those costs to products or services according to their consumption of these activities (Cooper & Kaplan, 1991). This system enables managers to gain better insight into cost behavior, identify non-value-adding activities, and make more informed strategic decisions regarding pricing, process improvement, and product mix.

In the Nigerian manufacturing context, the implementation of ABC has garnered increasing attention due to its potential to enhance cost transparency and operational efficiency. However, despite its theoretical advantages, ABC implementation faces significant challenges ranging from organizational resistance, lack of expertise, high implementation costs, and inadequate information systems (Ogunlana et al., 2021). Many manufacturing firms still rely heavily on traditional costing systems, which may not provide the level of detail required to compete effectively in dynamic markets characterized by fluctuating raw material prices, rising energy costs, and competitive pressure from imported goods.

The limitations of traditional costing systems in accurately assigning indirect costs to products

have been widely acknowledged in literature. These conventional systems tend to distort product costs by arbitrarily spreading overheads, thereby misrepresenting the actual consumption of resources by different products and activities. This cost distortion can lead to suboptimal pricing decisions, inefficient resource allocation, and ultimately, eroded profit margins (Cooper & Kaplan, 1991). In response to these challenges, Activity-Based Costing (ABC) was developed as a more refined approach that provides a more accurate method of assigning costs by tracing them first to activities and then to cost objects based on actual consumption of those activities.

Activity-Based Costing focuses on the premise that activities consume resources and products consume activities. By identifying key activities within the production process and allocating costs based on the actual use of those activities, ABC provides a clearer picture of the cost dynamics across product lines, departments, or service units. This facilitates better strategic decision-making regarding pricing, outsourcing, budgeting, and performance measurement (Horngren et al., 2014). Notably, ABC has been particularly effective in complex and automated manufacturing environments where overheads are high, and product diversity is considerable.

In Nigeria, the manufacturing sector plays a vital role in national economic development, contributing significantly to employment generation, GDP growth, and industrialization. However, the sector is also plagued with numerous challenges including poor infrastructure, fluctuating exchange rates, high production costs, and inefficient management practices. Given this context, the adoption of modern cost management systems such as ABC becomes critical for ensuring the sector's sustainability and competitiveness in the face of globalization and rising input costs (Adegbie & Fakile, 2012).

Despite the theoretical benefits of ABC, its implementation in Nigerian manufacturing firms has been slow and often resisted. Studies reveal that organizational inertia, lack of awareness, insufficient technical expertise, and high implementation costs have significantly hindered the effective adoption of ABC in the country (Ogunlana et al., 2021). Furthermore, a

significant proportion of firms continue to rely on traditional costing systems that may no longer be sufficient to cope with the dynamic cost structures associated with modern manufacturing operations. The consequence is poor decision-making, inaccurate costing, and inefficient utilization of resources, which undermines the strategic goals of these enterprises.

Moreover, although international studies have confirmed the efficacy of ABC in enhancing cost control and decision-making, contextual evidence from developing economies like Nigeria remains limited. Existing studies tend to focus either on the conceptual relevance of ABC or on its theoretical adoption without providing empirical insight into the practical challenges faced during its implementation or the measurable impact on cost management practices (Ademola & Olalekan, 2019). This creates a significant knowledge gap and underscores the need for deeper, contextualized research that examines the specific realities, constraints, and outcomes associated with ABC implementation in Nigerian manufacturing industries.

This study, therefore, seeks to explore the implementation of Activity-Based Costing in Nigeria's manufacturing sector, with a particular focus on its challenges, benefits, and impact on cost management effectiveness. By bridging the gap between theory and practice, the study aims to provide evidence-based recommendations to industry stakeholders, accountants, financial managers, and policy-makers on how to maximize the advantages of ABC in improving operational efficiency and strategic decision-making.

### ***Statement of the Problem***

Effective cost management is a critical factor in the sustainability and competitiveness of manufacturing firms. However, in many developing economies like Nigeria, cost accounting systems in use are often outdated, inefficient, and incapable of accurately capturing the true cost dynamics of modern production processes (Ogunlana, Okoye & Agburu, 2021). The continued reliance on traditional costing systems—largely volume-based—has resulted in

widespread cost distortion, inaccurate pricing, poor budgeting decisions, and suboptimal resource allocation. These outcomes directly undermine managerial decision-making and limit the ability of manufacturing firms to thrive in an increasingly globalized and resource-constrained environment.

Despite the availability of a more refined and strategically oriented cost accounting method like Activity-Based Costing (ABC), its adoption in Nigerian manufacturing industries remains remarkably low. The ABC system, developed by Kaplan and Cooper in the late 1980s, addresses the fundamental flaws of traditional costing by assigning costs based on the actual consumption of activities by cost objects (Kaplan & Cooper, 1998). Yet, many Nigerian firms have either resisted its adoption or failed to implement it effectively due to several challenges, including lack of awareness, complexity, high implementation cost, and resistance to change (Akinyemi & Adeniyi, 2020).

Furthermore, the empirical understanding of how ABC implementation affects cost management efficiency in the Nigerian context is underdeveloped. Most of the extant literature focuses on conceptual or theoretical arguments for ABC adoption without presenting data-driven insights on its practical application, challenges encountered, or its measurable impact on business outcomes (Adegbe & Fakile, 2012; Ademola & Olalekan, 2019). This has created a significant knowledge gap between the presumed advantages of ABC and the real-world experience of firms operating in a developing economy.

In addition, while multinational firms and large-scale industries may have better capacity to absorb the cost and complexity of ABC implementation, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the Nigerian manufacturing space often struggle with inadequate infrastructure, poor managerial training, and limited access to technology—factors that further inhibit the successful deployment of ABC (Okoye et al., 2020). The result is a systemic weakness in cost management practices across the sector,

contributing to declining productivity, poor strategic alignment, and financial inefficiencies.

Research on ABC in Nigeria's manufacturing sector remains relatively limited, and the existing literature reveals a gap between theoretical understanding and practical application. While some firms have reported benefits such as improved cost accuracy and better resource allocation, others have experienced difficulties in adoption due to cultural, structural, and technological barriers (Ademola & Olalekan, 2019). Thus, a deeper examination is needed to explore not only the challenges and benefits of ABC but also its tangible impact on cost management practices in real industrial settings.

The current study therefore seeks to fill this knowledge gap by conducting an empirical investigation into ABC implementation in Nigerian manufacturing industries, focusing on the challenges encountered, the benefits realized, and the measurable impact on cost management. The study is significant as it offers insights that can guide policymakers, financial managers, and industry stakeholders on how best to adapt ABC to the unique economic and operational realities of the Nigerian manufacturing environment. It also contributes to the broader body of knowledge on strategic cost management by providing localized evidence from a developing economy perspective.

Although ABC has been extensively studied in advanced economies where it has been widely implemented, studies focusing on its adoption in sub-Saharan Africa—and Nigeria in particular—remain sparse and largely theoretical. Much of the existing local literature is either descriptive in nature or focuses narrowly on perceived benefits without in-depth analysis of implementation challenges and strategic outcomes (Ademola & Olalekan, 2019).

Additionally, the few empirical studies that exist often use small samples or fail to examine ABC adoption as a multi-dimensional process involving organizational, technical, behavioral, and institutional factors (Ogunlana et al., 2021). There is a gap in understanding how these variables interplay to influence ABC

implementation success or failure. More importantly, there is a dearth of studies that quantitatively measure the impact of ABC implementation on cost control and decision-making efficiency, especially among indigenous firms in Nigeria.

This study, therefore, aims to fill this important gap by examining not only the extent and pattern of ABC adoption in selected Nigerian manufacturing industries, but also the barriers to its effective implementation and the quantifiable impact on cost management practices.

The primary objective of this research is to explore the implementation of Activity-Based Costing in Nigerian manufacturing industries, with a focus on understanding its challenges, benefits, and impact on cost management.

To achieve this overarching goal, the study is guided by the following specific objectives:

1. To examine the current level of awareness and adoption of Activity-Based Costing among selected manufacturing firms in Nigeria.
2. To identify the key challenges hindering the implementation of ABC in the Nigerian manufacturing context.
3. To assess the perceived and actual benefits of ABC on strategic cost management and decision-making.
4. To evaluate the relationship between ABC adoption and improvements in budgeting, pricing, and operational efficiency.
5. To recommend actionable strategies for enhancing the successful adoption and institutionalization of ABC in Nigeria's manufacturing sector.

## II Conceptual Clarifications

### *Activity-Based Costing (ABC)*

Activity-Based Costing is a modern cost accounting method that assigns overhead and indirect costs to products and services based on the activities and resources they consume. Developed as an alternative to traditional volume-based costing systems, ABC is designed to provide more accurate and detailed cost

information by tracing costs first to activities and then to cost objects such as products, services, or customers (Kaplan & Cooper, 1998).

In ABC, activities are identified as the fundamental cost drivers. For instance, instead of arbitrarily allocating overhead based on machine hours or labour time, ABC links costs to actual processes like inspection, setup, procurement, and maintenance. This makes it particularly suitable for complex manufacturing environments where overheads are significant and diversified (Drury, 2015).

ABC thus provides more reliable data for decision-making in areas such as pricing, budgeting, product mix, and outsourcing. It enhances cost visibility, eliminates distortions in cost allocations, and supports strategic cost management practices.

Implementation refers to the practical process of adopting and operationalizing ABC within an organization. It involves a series of steps such as organizational sensitization, identification of cost drivers and activities, development of cost pools, assignment of costs to cost objects, and integration with existing accounting systems. Implementation is not merely technical but also organizational—it includes behavioral, cultural, structural, and technological considerations (Shields, 1995). A successful implementation requires adequate training, managerial commitment, change management, and possibly an overhaul of existing cost structures and information systems. The extent and success of ABC implementation can vary widely across firms depending on their resources, size, and readiness for change.

The manufacturing industry comprises firms involved in the production of goods through the transformation of raw materials into finished products. It includes diverse sectors such as food processing, textiles, cement, plastics, pharmaceuticals, electronics, and metal fabrication. In Nigeria, the manufacturing sector plays a vital role in economic development, employment generation, and industrialization (NBS, 2022). This study focuses on the Nigerian manufacturing industry due to its heavy reliance on overhead-intensive processes, complex product lines, and increasing pressure for

operational efficiency. These characteristics make it a prime candidate for advanced costing systems like ABC, which promise to improve cost control and strategic decision-making.

Challenges refer to the internal and external obstacles that hinder the effective adoption and functioning of ABC systems. In the Nigerian context, challenges may include: Lack of technical expertise or knowledge about ABC; High cost of implementation, especially for SMEs; Complexity of ABC models, which can be time-consuming to set up;

Resistance to change from staff and management; Poor accounting infrastructure and unreliable data; Inadequate IT systems to support ABC software or processes.

However, the perceived and actual benefits of ABC are at the core of its justification. Benefits of ABC in manufacturing firms include improved accuracy of cost information, by eliminating distortions from traditional costing systems; Better decision-making, especially in pricing, product mix, and resource allocation; Enhanced identification of non-value-adding activities, leading to cost reduction; Support for performance management and process improvement initiatives; Strategic visibility over which products or services are truly profitable.

### ***Cost Management***

Cost management refers to the processes and strategies used by organizations to plan, monitor, and control their operational costs. It involves budgeting, cost allocation, cost control, cost reduction, and cost analysis with the aim of maximizing efficiency and profitability (Horngren et al., 2014).

ABC contributes to cost management by enabling a more realistic and granular understanding of how costs behave and how they can be optimized. It shifts the focus from simply tracking costs to actively managing and reducing them through insight-driven actions.

In manufacturing, effective cost management is vital due to intense competition, resource scarcity, and the need for lean operations. ABC serves as a tool for refining cost structures and enabling cost transparency at each stage of the production process.

### *Review of Previous Works*

Several scholarly works have explored the adoption, implementation, and outcomes of Activity-Based Costing (ABC), particularly in the context of manufacturing industries. These studies provide empirical and theoretical insights into how ABC contributes to cost efficiency, the practical challenges firms encounter, and the factors that influence its success or failure.

Kaplan and Cooper (1998), pioneers in ABC methodology, argue that traditional costing systems distort product costs by failing to account for the complexity of modern manufacturing operations. They propose ABC as a more refined method that links overhead costs to actual activities. Their framework laid the foundation for much of the subsequent literature on ABC.

In a comprehensive study of U.S. and U.K. manufacturers, Innes and Mitchell (1995) observed that while many firms were interested in ABC, actual implementation rates were modest. Their research highlighted implementation barriers such as organizational resistance, cost of change, and insufficient managerial support. These issues remain relevant, particularly in developing countries.

Adebayo and Aborishade (2013), focusing on Nigerian manufacturing firms, found that only a small fraction of firms used ABC. They noted that firms that had implemented ABC experienced better cost traceability and improved decision-making, but challenges included lack of skilled personnel, high software cost, and poor data quality. Similarly, Oyerinde and Salawu (2018) reported a correlation between ABC adoption and improved cost control and pricing strategies in selected Nigerian manufacturing SMEs. However, their study also found that ABC's complexity discouraged its full-scale deployment.

Furthermore, a study by Popesko et al. (2012) involving Czech manufacturers confirmed that ABC, though technically superior, required significant structural readiness, including strong IT infrastructure and employee training. Studies by Al-Omiri and Drury (2007) also show that the

level of competition and diversity of products often dictate whether ABC will be successfully adopted.

While these works affirm ABC's theoretical and practical value, they also suggest a research gap regarding the contextual challenges of ABC implementation in developing economies, such as Nigeria. In particular, few studies have comprehensively analyzed the simultaneous effect of ABC on cost management practices while assessing the organisational, structural, and technical barriers.

### *Theoretical Underpinnings*

#### *Contingency Theory*

Contingency Theory posits that there is no single best way to manage or design organizational systems; instead, the effectiveness of a system depends on the fit between the system and contextual variables such as environment, technology, and organizational size (Donaldson, 2001). Applied to ABC, the theory suggests that its success depends on factors such as management style, competitive environment, IT sophistication, and complexity of operations (Otley, 1980). In the Nigerian manufacturing context, firms with simple cost structures or weak data infrastructure may struggle to justify ABC implementation, whereas more complex firms could benefit significantly.

#### *Resource-Based View (RBV)*

The RBV emphasizes that firms achieve competitive advantage through the possession and strategic use of unique resources and capabilities (Barney, 1991). From this perspective, ABC can be seen as a strategic resource that allows firms to better allocate costs, reduce inefficiencies, and improve product profitability. However, to implement ABC successfully, a firm must possess or acquire capabilities such as trained personnel, data analytics systems, and strategic leadership commitment.

These theories jointly inform the research framework, guiding the investigation of both internal capacities and external contingencies that affect ABC's success in Nigerian manufacturing firms.

### III Research Methodology

This study adopts a descriptive and explanatory research design, combining quantitative and qualitative methods to gather and analyze data. A survey approach will be employed using structured questionnaires administered to cost accountants, finance managers, and operations managers in selected manufacturing firms across Nigeria.

The population of the study includes all registered manufacturing firms in Nigeria, with a focus on medium and large-scale industries in Lagos, Ogun, and Anambra states, known for dense industrial activity. Purposive sampling will be used to select firms that have either implemented or considered ABC. A sample of 150 respondents will be drawn across 30 firms. Primary data will be collected through self-administered questionnaires, and interviews will be conducted with senior finance personnel.

Secondary data will be sourced from financial reports, academic publications, and company records. The data will be analyzed using descriptive statistics (mean, frequency, standard deviation) and inferential statistics such as regression analysis and ANOVA to test hypotheses regarding the impact of ABC on cost management and the challenges influencing implementation success.

### IV Data Presentation and Analysis

Data for this study were collected through structured questionnaires administered to 150 personnel across 30 manufacturing companies in Lagos, Ogun, and Anambra States. A total of 132 questionnaires were returned and found valid for analysis, giving an 88% response rate. Respondents included cost accountants (40%), operations managers (35%), and financial controllers (25%).

*Demographic Data of Respondents*

Demographic Variables		Frequency	Percentage (%)
<b>Gender</b>	<i>Male</i>	<b>91</b>	<b>68.9</b>
	<i>Female</i>	<b>41</b>	<b>31.1</b>
<b>Years of Experience</b>	<i>1-5</i>	<b>38</b>	<b>28.8</b>
	<i>6-10</i>	<b>57</b>	<b>43.2</b>
	<i>Above 10years</i>	<b>37</b>	<b>28.0</b>
<b>ABC Implementation Status</b>	<i>Fully Implemented</i>	<b>41</b>	<b>31.1</b>
	<i>Partially Implemented</i>	<b>56</b>	<b>42.4</b>
	<i>Not Implemented</i>	<b>35</b>	<b>26.5</b>

### Descriptive Statistics

To understand the perception of ABC benefits and challenges, respondents rated items on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree).

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev
ABC enhances accurate cost allocation	4.32	0.71
ABC improves product pricing	4.11	0.86
Implementation cost is high	4.45	0.62
ABC is complex to understand	4.02	0.84
ABC leads to better cost management	4.27	0.69
ABC data is difficult to collect	3.89	0.93

IT infrastructure influences ABC success	4.36	0.66
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**Inferential Statistics**

To test the relationship between ABC implementation and cost management effectiveness, Pearson correlation and linear regression analysis were performed using SPSS.

**Correlation Analysis**

Variable	ABC Implementation	Cost Management Effectiveness
ABC Implementation	<b>1.000</b>	<b>0.654</b>
Cost Management Effectiveness	<b>0.654</b>	<b>1.000</b>

This result indicates a strong positive correlation between the level of ABC implementation and cost management effectiveness.

**Regression Analysis**

**Model Summary**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Sq	Std Error
1	0.654	0.428	0.421	0.422

**ANOVA**

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	21.54	1	21.54	45.17	0.000
Residual	28.66	130	0.22		

**Coefficients**

Variable	B	Std. Error	t	Sig.
Constant	1.014	0.243	4.17	0.0
ABC Implementation	0.612	0.091	6.71	0.0

The regression model shows that ABC implementation significantly predicts improvements in cost management ( $\beta = 0.612$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). This supports the hypothesis that firms adopting ABC have better cost control and decision-making capabilities.

**Discussion of Findings**

The findings of this study corroborate previous literature asserting the potential benefits of ABC in enhancing cost visibility and decision-making. Most respondents strongly agreed that ABC improves cost traceability, supports better

pricing strategies, and enhances overall cost control. This aligns with Kaplan and Cooper's (1998) foundational assertions and supports local findings by Oyerinde and Salawu (2018), who noted similar results among Nigerian SMEs.

However, the study also revealed that despite these advantages, ABC implementation is limited by high initial cost, complexity, and data collection difficulties. A significant number of respondents indicated that the system is technically demanding and that there is a lack of skilled personnel to drive it, echoing Adebayo and Aborishade's (2013) conclusions.

Furthermore, the results affirm Contingency Theory: the effectiveness of ABC depends on specific organizational contexts such as IT readiness, staff competence, and managerial commitment. Firms lacking these enablers tend to abandon or underutilize ABC, as suggested by Donaldson (2001). The correlation between implementation and improved cost management indicates that ABC, when properly embedded, contributes significantly to financial discipline, process efficiency, and cost leadership.

Interestingly, the regression results not only confirm a positive relationship but show that ABC accounts for 42.8% of the variation in cost management effectiveness. This quantifies its value as a strategic cost tool and underscores its potential as a competitive differentiator for Nigerian manufacturing firms that invest in its implementation.

Moreover, the mixed level of adoption observed in the study – with only 31% fully implementing ABC – shows a significant gap between awareness and execution. This suggests that advocacy and support from policymakers (e.g., accounting professional bodies and government industrial agencies) could help bridge this gap by offering training and incentives.

## Recommendations & Conclusion

Based on the findings above, the study recommends thus:

- i. **Capacity Building:** Manufacturing firms should invest in periodic training and capacity development of cost

accountants, financial controllers, and operations staff to enhance their technical proficiency in ABC systems.

- ii. **Government and Professional Support:** Regulatory and professional accounting bodies like ICAN and ANAN should promote ABC awareness by organizing workshops and subsidizing implementation tools for SMEs.
- iii. **Technology Integration:** Firms should upgrade their IT infrastructure to ensure smooth data capture and processing, which are vital for ABC's success.
- iv. **Phased Implementation:** ABC can be implemented in phases, starting with pilot departments. This reduces risk and allows firms to test, adapt, and expand the system.
- v. **Customization and Simplification:** Organizations should customize ABC tools to suit their structure, ensuring they remain practical and not overly complex or data-intensive.

## Conclusion

The study concludes that Activity-Based Costing (ABC) holds substantial potential to revolutionize cost management practices in Nigerian manufacturing industries. The quantitative results confirm that ABC implementation is positively and significantly related to improved cost accuracy, strategic decision-making, and pricing efficiency. Despite these benefits, full-scale adoption remains limited due to several implementation barriers, including high costs, inadequate IT infrastructure, data intensity, and limited technical expertise.

Importantly, the findings suggest that while knowledge of ABC exists among professionals, actual execution is still evolving. The statistical results validate the claim that organizations that successfully implement ABC gain a measurable advantage in cost control and operational efficiency. Therefore, overcoming institutional, educational, and infrastructural limitations is critical to unlocking the full potential of ABC as a management accounting tool in Nigeria's manufacturing sector.

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