

## CAPACITY IMPROVEMENT NEEDS OF AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION LECTURERS FOR FOSTERING ETHICS AND INTEGRITY IN NIGERIAN'S UNIVERSITY EDUCATION IN ABIA AND EBONYI STATES

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### Abstract

The study was carried out to determine capacity improvement needs of agricultural education lecturers for fostering academic ethics and Integrity in university education in Abia and Ebonyi States. Descriptive survey research design was adopted. Three research questions guided the study. The population was 29 which comprised all agricultural education lecturers from universities in Abia and Ebonyi States. There was no sampling as the population was small and manageable. A 33 items researcher developed questionnaire was the instrument for data collection. Each questionnaire item had two columns of need rating and performance rating. Three experts in agricultural education validated the questionnaire. The instrument was tested for reliability using Cronbach Alpha reliability method, and a coefficient of 0.82 was obtained. The researchers and three research assistants administered and retrieved the questionnaire from respondents. Data collected were analyzed using the Improvement Need Index (INI). Result showed that agricultural education lectures needed improvements in their ability to promote excellence in the conduct of examination, academic writing, among others. Based on this, it was recommended that these findings be packaged for retraining lecturers on academic ethics and integrity in order to rebuild trust in university education.

**Key words:** Capacity Improvement Needs, Agricultural Education, Lecturers, Academic Ethics and Integrity.

### Introduction

Agriculture which is primarily concerned with the growing of crops and rearing of animals is indispensable to the economy of Nigeria. Agriculture provides income, employment, raw materials to industries and foreign exchange earnings to individual's farmers and the nation at large (Olorod, 2019). However, in Nigeria, agriculture is taught as a programme of study in schools. The policy on education recognizes agriculture as a subject at basic level of education, agricultural science at senior secondary school, and agricultural education at the University level (Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN), 20134)). According to Olaitan (2017), Agricultural Education is a field of study in the area of agriculture which involves the teaching of agricultural programmes to pupils and students in a formal school setting, especially in primary and secondary schools and tertiary institutions. Also Egbule in Onuka (2016), posited that Agricultural Education is a type of education designed for training learners in the process of

agricultural production and methods of teaching the subject matter. In the context of this paper, Agricultural Education involves the teaching of educational and production aspects of agriculture, including equipping individuals with entrepreneurial skills for jobs in agriculture (Olorode, 2019). However, there have been growing mistrust in Nigeria's education system in providing wholesome living for the citizenry because of unemployment and decaying moral lives of graduates which worsen day-by-day. Education, enables the learner to acquire skills and develop emotionally and socially. It is also expected to equip individuals with skills for employment and moral rebirth among graduates in the society. But based on unemployment and moral issues that characterize agricultural education graduates at present, it seems that these graduates are not truly educated both in character and learning, which were the basis for graduating them by the university (Otunta, 2019).

The scenario captured above casts aspersion on the type of education the graduates received while in school vis-à-vis the lecturers who taught them. The lecturer is a person who helps students, especially those of tertiary institution to acquire knowledge, skills and attitude on a particular subject. The university lecture undergoes professional trainings and obtain relevant qualifications which enables the university to appoint him to teach (Onuka, 2016). In this study, a lecturer is a university teacher appointed to teach agricultural education programme in universities in Abia State. Upon accepting the offer of employment, the head of department assigns the lecturer a number of responsibilities, including teaching and administrative responsibilities. The university expects the lecturer to work in line with the condition of service of the university which reflects her academic ethics of the university (Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike (MOUAAU), 2017).

Ethics deals with what is morally right or wrong. According to Orié & Ibekwe (2014), ethics is the moral principle that governs a person's behaviours in the conduct of an activity. Thus, ethics guide the agricultural education lecturers in the conduct of their services in the university. To Allen and Mayer (2006), ethics guide people to behave aright in a situation where moral issues are involved. In the context of this study, academic ethics explains the body of rules and regulations that guide agricultural education lecturers in the conduct of their services in the university. Ethics seeks to answer questions bothering on human morality and relates to integrity. According to Soanes, Hawker and Elliot (2006), integrity is the quality of being honest and morally upright or steadfast to a strict moral or ethical code. The authors associate integrity with the following synonyms – honesty, uprightness, goodness, decency among others. Academic ethics and integrity in this study, thus represents moral code that governs the conducts of the agricultural education lecturer. Ethics and integrity seeks to promote values such as avoidance of cheating, maintenance of academic standards, honesty, in research and academic writing (Bretag, et al, 2011).

Literature is replete with information on academic ethics and integrity. For instance, Kalu and Iffih (2009) and Israelisten (2016), in their respective works, identified falsification of research result, plagiarism, dereliction of duty, sexual misconduct, bribery and so on, as unethical issues found in places of work including the university. This study was therefore delimited to dereliction of duty, examination malpractice, and promoting excellence in academic writing. Academic writing is an important tool for teaching and learning. The agricultural education lecturers are expected to publish as a condition for promotion. Unfortunately, out of desperation, some of them throw ethics to the wind and work against academic ethics. They

falsify research data and results and plagiarized other peoples' work. Plagiarism is the use of someone's else's words or work without acknowledging him (American Psychological Association (APA, (2015)). The university views plagiarism as a serious offence, accordingly, culprits can be queried, demoted, or reduced in rank or the author whose work is plagiarized can seek redress in law court (Bretag et al, 2011). These destroy the reputation of the lecturer who plagiarized. Academic writing is also a means of assessing lecturers for promotion, therefore plagiarism could be seen as a form examination malpractice.

Examination is a test of knowledge which could be spoken or in written form. It should be reliable and acceptable too to be able to determine the true knowledge of the learner after a period of instruction. According to Onyechere (2013) ,anything that reduces the reliability and integrity of any assessment system is regarded as examination malpractice. He maintained that examination are in various forms and manifest when students enter examination hall with banned materials or when the lecturers award underserved marks, leak question papers and give illegitimate assistance to the examination candidate (Lang, 2013).Cheating in examination also involves copying other peoples answers, bringing in unauthorized materials such as books, scientific calculators, handset and prepared answers to the examination hall (Onyechere, 2013). Examination malpractices could take place in the examination hall or after the examination. According to Lang (2013), the implication of examination malpractices is that it is impossible to use examination result to determine the knowledge or skills acquired by students; it reduces the quality of education and performance of holders of certain certificates. The author remarked that poor preparation by lecturers and student before examination, ineffective monitoring mechanism by relevant stakeholders in the university system, and failure to sanction those involved in examination malpractices are factors responsible for examination malpractice.

Examination malpractice may result from dereliction of duty, that is, a lecturer's failure to perform his official duty. The success or failure of agricultural education programme in the university depends solely on the lecturer. Besides teaching, the lecturer supervises students' project work, publishes books and journals, conducts examination and sometimes engages in administrative assignment: (Onuka, 2016). The lecturers' official assignments are specified in writing by the head of the department. But, these notwithstanding, there have been cases of dereliction of duties among lecturers. Absenteeism from duty without permission from the head of department or Vice Chancellor as the case may be, setting examination for courses not taught, postponement of classes at will, extortion of money from students and sale of unapproved textbooks occurs frequently among lecturers, (Kalu& Iffih, 2019). Others use their position to intimidate students to submit to sexual overtures (Ukoha, 2015). The agricultural education lecturer is not exempted from these misconducts.

These result to poor education outcome. It also implies that lecturers have low capacity to perform their services in line with conditions of service and academic ethics of their universities. This is evidence in the growing unemployment and poor moral background of the university graduates, especially agricultural education graduates.

In Abia and Ebonyi States, a number of universities offer agricultural education programme. The universities expects their lecturers to perform their duties and conduct themselves in line with condition of service, vis-à-vis academic ethics and integrity, to be able to realize the objective of the programme. But Alawa (2017) reported unemployment among graduates of agricultural education because lecturers have less capacity to perform their services.

Kalu and Iffih (2001) in their study, found unethical conducts among lecturers and students in the university of Nigeria, such as examination malpractice; plagiarism, falsification of research data, sexual misconducts amongst others. These findings are relevant in this study. It is therefore necessary to believe that the lectures do not have sufficient capacity to carry out their duties effectively this partly accounts for poor performance of their graduates both in character and in learning. If the lecturers do their work well. they should impart the necessary skills to enhance the employment opportunities of their students and improve their character in the society. This is bound to reduce unemployment and moral latitude even among agricultural education graduates. Therefore, the lecturers need capacity improvement to perform their work effectively. Capacity improvement implies that the lecturers will be retrained to update their skills so that they can perform honest and decent services to the university. This will help to build trust in the university system.

If the agricultural education lecturers cannot satisfactorily demonstrate capacity for academic ethics and integrity in the areas identified by the study, it means a gap is created and they need retraining to fill this gap. The gap is the difference between the knowledge possessed and what they are expected to know towards performing their services in line with ethics (Olaitan & Ndomi, 2000). To bridge this gap, it has become necessary to determine the capacity improvement needs of the lecturers in order to restrict training to certain areas and to avoid wastage of resources and time. Thus is the basis for this study.

The study is expected to provide information to the lecturers to enable them carryout their responsibilities in line with the rules and regulations of the university. It is also expected to provide information on the socio-legal implications of misconducts and appropriate sanctions for proven cases of academic ethics and integrity.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The main purpose of the study was to determine the capacity improvement needs of agricultural education lecturers for fostering ethics and integrity in Nigeria's university education in Abia and Ebonyi States. Specifically, the study sought to determine the competency needs of agricultural education graduates in:

1. Promoting honesty in academic writing,
2. Curbing examination malpractices, and
3. Discouraging dereliction of duty.

### **Research Questions**

1. What are the improvements needed by agricultural education lecturers in promoting honesty academic writing?
2. What are the improvements needed by agricultural education lecturers in curbing examination malpractices?
3. What are improvement needs of agricultural education lecturers in discouraging dereliction of duty?

### **Methodology:**

The study adopted survey research design. In a survey research, a population or a sample of it is asked questions about their opinions in a given subject using a questionnaire, (Feldman,

2013). The design is appropriate for the study because it sought the opinions of respondents on capacity improvement needs of agricultural education lecturers on academic ethics and integrity. The study took place in universities in Abia and Ebonyi states. The universities are Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike(MOUAU), Abia State, Abia State University (ABSU), Uturu, Ebonyi State University( EBSU), Abakaliki and Alex Ekweme Federal University(AEFU). Abakaliki. Details of the population according to institutions are as follows:MOUUAU 10, ABSU 9, EBSU 5 and AEFU 5. The area is chosen because agricultural education is offered in the universities there. The population of the study is 29, made up of all the lecturers from the universities, except the researcher. The census techniques were used to obtain the sample size as the number of respondents was small and manageable. The instrument for data collection was a-33 items questionnaire entitles “Capacity Improvement Needs in Ethics and Integrity for Agricultural Education Lecturers Questionnaire” (CINEILQ) developed by the researcher. The questionnaire had two response categories – the need rating and performance rating columns. The capacity need category had a four-point response scale of Highly Needed (HN), Averagely Needed (AN), Slightly Needed (SN) and Not Needed (NN). The performance response options were High Performance (HP), Average Performance (AP), Low Performance (LP), and No Performance (NP) with corresponding values of 4,3,2 and 1, respectively. The instrument was validated by three experts from Departments of Agricultural Education units of the Departments of Agricultural/Home Science Education and Measurement and evaluation, all from Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike. The instrument was also tested for reliability using Cronbach Alpha reliability technique, and this yielded a coefficient index of 0.82 which is judged to be reliable.

All the 29 copies of the questionnaire were all administered and retrieved by the researchers and research assistants who were briefed on what to do before the exercise. All the copies of the questionnaire were retrieved and analyzed using Improvement Need Index (INI), which were developed by Olaitan and Ndom, (2000) to answer the research questions. To determine the mean needed, the real limit of numbers were adopted. Thus 3.5-4 (Highly Needed), 2.5-3.44 (Averagely Needed) 1.5-2.49 (Slightly Needed), 1-1.49 (Not Needed). Any items with weighted mean of 1.5 or above was regarded as needed, while below that it was regarded as not needed. The weighted mean rating was represented by ( $X_n$ ), while the weight of mean performance of respondents for each item was represented by ( $X_p$ ). To determine the performance gap of the lecturers, the following steps were taken.

1. The weight of mean  $X_n$  of the need rating was determined for each item.
2. The weighted mean  $X_p$  of each item under the performance component was determined for each item.(Olaitan & Ndormi, 2000).
3. To determine the performance gap (PG), the researchers calculated the difference between the weighted mean for each item ( $X_n - X_p = PG$ ), PG could yield a zero (0), negative (-ve) or positive (+ve) values.
  - a. A PG of zero(0) means that there was no need for improvement because the level at which Agricultural Education Lecturer were operating the item was equal to the level that is required.
  - b. Where PG is positive (+), it indicates that improvement is needed because the level at which the lecturers know the items was lower than the level at which it is needed.

- c. Where PG is negative (-), it means improvement is not needed because the level at which the lecturers could performance that item is greater than the level at which it is needed,

**Results:**

The results of this study were obtained from the research questions answered through data collected and analyzed.

**Table 1:**Performance Gap Analysis of the Mean rating of the Responses of Agricultural Education Lecturers in promoting honesty in academic writing in Nigeria's University Education (N=29)

s/n	Academic writing: Capacity to:	$\bar{X}_n$	$\bar{X}_p$	$\bar{X}-\bar{X}_p$	Rmk
1	Explain the concept of academic writing.	3.21	3.02	0.19	IN
2	Explain forms of academic writing.	3.17	2.11	1.06	IN
3	Determine principles guiding academic writing and publishing.	3.50	2.00	1.50	IN
4	Determine important of academic writing.	3.21	2.41	0.80	IN
5	Explain the concept of plagiarism.	3.33	2.50	0.83	IN
6	Identify the social and legal implications of plagiarism.	3.41	2.50	0.91	IN
7	Determine ways of discovering plagiarism.	2.82	1.80	1.02	IN
8	Write proposal and research reports honestly.	3.50	2.30	1.20	IN
9	Teach academic writing to students.	3.55	3.01	0.54	IN
10	Conduct seminar on decent ways of writing.	3.02	2.00	1.02	IN
11	Guide students to choose topics correctly.	2.90	3.50	-0.60	INN
12	Punish students for fragment including query, demotion, dismissal.	3.50	2.80	0.70	IN
13	Determine the objectives of academic writing.	3.26	3.50	-0.76	INN
14	Carryout research and report it honestly.	3.60	2.50	1.10	IN
15	Show good example of academic writing to students.	3.50	3.00	0.50	IN

Remarks:  $\bar{X}_n$ =Mean of Needed,  $\bar{X}_p$ = Mean of performance Needed, PG=Performance Gap, IN=Improvement Needed, INN=Improvement not Needed.

Data presented in Table 1 revealed that the Performance Gap value of all the 15 items except 11 and 13 ranged from 0.10 to 1.50 and were positive. This means that agricultural education lecturers need improvement in these items to be able to write academic writings in line with ethics and integrity. The data also revealed that the PG value of the items 11 and 13 ranged from -0.60 to 0.76 and were negative. This implies that the lecturers did not need improvement in the two items because they could perform them at a level greater than what is expected of them.

**Table 2:** Performance Gap Analysis of the Mean Rating of the Responses of Agricultural Education Lecturers in curbing examination malpractices in university education.(N=29)

s/n	Examination malpractices: Capacity of lecturers to:	$\bar{X}_n$	$\bar{X}_p$	$\bar{X}_n- \bar{X}_p$ (GP)	Rmk
16	Conduct examination in line with the university examination ethics.	3.00	3.50	-0.50	INN
17	Identify forms of examination malpractice.	3.40	3.80	-0.40	INN

18	Determine the socio-economic causes of examination malpractices.	2.90	3.51	-0.61	INN
19	Prepare for examination with students ahead of time.	3.01	3.60	-0.59	INN
20	Analyze the effects of examination malpractices on the quality of examination.	2.85	3.07	-0.22	INN
21	Determine effective monitoring mechanism for checking examination malpractices.	2.90	3.40	0.50	IN
22	Punish culprits for proven cases of examination malpractices.	3.40	3.71	-0.31	INN
23	Participate in examination ethics and integrity seminars in the university.	3.20	3.80	-0.40	INN

Remarks:  $X_n$ =Mean of Needed,  $X_p$ = Mean of performance Needed, PG=Performance Gap, IN=Improvement Needed, INN=Improvement not Needed.

The data presented in Table 2 that the Performance Gap value of all the eight examination malpractice items ranged from -0.22 to -0.61 and were negative. This implies that the agricultural education lecturers did not need capacity improvement in the items because they can perform them at required proficiency levels. However, items 21 with GP value (+ve) need improvement in the item.

**Table 3:** Performance Gap – Analysis of the Mean Ratings of the Responses of Agricultural Education Lecturers in Dereliction of Duty (N=29)

S/n	Dereliction of duty: Capacity of lecturers to:	$\bar{X}_n$	$\bar{X}_p$	$\bar{X}-\bar{X}$	Rmk
24	Submission to the leadership of the university:	3.20	1.50	1.70	IN
25	Mentor students with high level of integrity and moral etiquette.	3.40	2.10	1.30	IN
26	Conduct lectures in accordance with time table which is accessible to students.	3.50	3.61	-0.11	INN
27	Complete course curriculum or scheme of work in good time.	3.02	1.55	1.47	IN
28	Conduct continuous assessment tests of students in line with the university guidelines.	3.95	2.40	1.47	IN
29	Set examination(s) and produce the result(s) in accordance with the university ethics and integrity.	3.40	3.80	1.53	IN
30	Organize the school farm projects and supervise students' participation.	3.72	1.20	-0.40	INN
31	Perform other duties that may be assigned to the agricultural education lectures especially, by the head of department.	3.20	3.70	2.52	IN
32	Develop decent relationship with students and colleagues.	3.40	1.51	1.90	INN
33	Accept penalties for proven cases of dereliction of duties.	2.81	1.20	1.61	IN

Remarks:  $X_n$ =Mean of Needed,  $X_p$ = Mean of performance Needed, PG=Performance Gap, IN=Improvement Needed, INN=Improvement not Needed.

The data presented in Table 3 revealed that their performance gap value for the seven out of 10 dereliction of duty items ranged from 1.30 to 1.90 and were positive. The implication of this result is that agricultural education lecturers needed improvement in the seven items to be able to discourage dereliction of duty and perform their duties in line with ethics and condition of service. The other items 26, 30 and 32 ranged from -0.11 to -0.50 and were negative. This means that the lecturers need not capacity improvement in the three items as they could perform them in line with the university ethics and integrity. However, it may not be easy to isolate the four items from the training module for dereliction of duty, therefore lecturers will be trained on the items as well.

### **Discussion of the Findings**

The findings of the data presented on Table 1, revealed that agricultural education lecturers need improvement in 13 out of the 15 items on promoting honesty in academic writing in Nigeria's university education. They include capacity to: explain the concept of academic writing, explain forms of academic writing and publishing, determine importance of academic writing, explain the concept of plagiarism and nine other items. These findings agree with APA (2018) which defined academic writing and classified forms of academic writing. The findings also agree with Bretag et al, (2011), that plagiarism has social and legal implications; it can destroy reputation of the lecturers who plagiarized and that authors whose works were plagiarized could take redress in law court. However, they do not need improvement in items 11 and 13 because they could perform them at a greater level expected of them.

The findings of the data presented on Table 2, showed that agricultural education lecturers did not need improvement in all the eight examination ethics and integrity items, except item 21; because they can perform them. The items are capacity to conduct examination in line with university examination ethics, identify forms of examination malpractices, determine the socio-economic causes of examination malpractice, prepare for examination with students ahead of time, analyze the effect of examination malpractices on the quality of examination and two other items. These findings are in consonance with the submission of Lang (2013) and Onyechere (2013) that examination malpractices manifest when students enter examination hall with banned materials and may be linked to poor preparation by students to examinations and failure to punish culprits for proven cases of examination malpractices. However, agricultural education lecturers need improvement in item 21. Thus, they lack capacity to determine effective monitoring mechanism for checking examination malpractices. This confirms the opinion of Lang (2013), that ineffective monitoring mechanism by relevant stakeholders in the university system is one of the factors responsible for examination malpractice.

The findings of the data presented in Table 3, revealed that agricultural education lecturers need improvement in seven out of the ten items on dereliction of duty in Nigeria's university education. They include lecturers' capacity to submit to the leadership of the university, mentor students with high level of integrity and moral etiquette, complete course curriculum or scheme of work in good time, conduct continuous assessment tests of students in line with the university guidelines and others. These findings confirm the study carried out by Kalu (2001), which found that some lecturers postponed classes at will, extort money from students and absent from school without permission.

### **Conclusion**

The study established that agricultural education lecturers need capacity improvement in some aspects of ethics and integrity to perform their services in the university to realize the objectives of the agricultural education programme. The perceived low capacity of these lecturers to perform their official duties resulted to poor performance of their graduates. The lecturers therefore need retraining to improve their capacity to perform their duties in line with the university ethics and condition of service. The study was therefore carried out to determine the capacity improvement needs of the agricultural education lecturers in academic ethics and integrity for rebuilding confidence in Nigeria's university education system. It is expected that if the lecturers are retrained in the identified areas of weakness in ethics and integrity they will build more capacity to perform their services in line with the condition of service and ethics of the university.

The study had therefore provided information on capacity improvement needs of the lecturers in ethics and integrity which were lacking but needed for high level performance and improved services of the lecturers.

### Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended that:

1. The findings of the study should be packaged in modules for retraining lecturers through workshop, seminar and work study to improve their services to the university.
2. Heads of academic institutions e.g. Head of Departments should adopt the findings of the study to improve their administrative style.

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