

Promoting Academic Ethics and Integrity in Nigeria Primary Education System

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Abstract

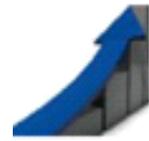
Ethical and academic Integrity is essential to the pursuit of academic excellence in learning. In recent times, primary education system in Nigeria has been subjected to reported and unreported cases of ethical and integrity breaches, making the goal of achieving sound primary education a major challenge. This could be as a result of various perspectives of what constitutes academic ethics and integrity in the Nigerian educational context. Therefore, this paper seeks to identify factors responsible for this development, which include education system, sociocultural environment, economic environment, infrastructure and institutional policies, and management systems. This paper also provides a synopsis of the different perspectives of academic ethics and integrity in Nigeria and how it impacts on the primary education in Nigeria. It concludes by presenting an overview of the major challenges associated with academic ethics and integrity and possible ways of instituting a culture of integrity in the Nigerian primary education system.

Keywords: Education, Ethics, Integrity, Primary, Values ,

Introduction

Ethics and Integrity is crucial to the pursuit of academic knowledge in learning institutions such as those in the Nigerian educational system. The Nigerian primary educational system has been replete with reported and unreported cases of academic integrity breaches, making the goal of achieving academic integrity a major challenge. This difficulty in achieving a culture of integrity in Nigerian primary academic institutions could be due to the diverse views and perspectives of what constitutes academic integrity.

The term “ethics” means the system of rules that governs the ordering of values (Bateman and Snell, 1999), or as Siropolis (1997:62) puts it “the rules or standards governing the conduct of a person or a profession”, and “ethical”, the behavior that live up to the standards set by the society; while “unethical” means the wrong behavior (that) does not “(live up to the standards set by the society). Siropolis, further indicates that there are three kinds of wrong behavior: Violation of law. Also teachers or students lacking responsibility to his own action or inaction and thus, shifting blame are other examples. Deviations from moral rectitude are wrong not because they dodge the fact or break the law but rather because they go against our moral fiber. The concepts of “trust”; responsibility” and integrity” are part of the value system of excellent school management. Ethical behavior builds on trust, and trust is essential ingredient of quality



management: various elements of quality management depend on trust, communication, interpersonal relations, conflict management, problem solving, teamwork, employee involvement, employment, and custom focus. This means that the excellent education proposed by the National Policy on Education cannot be successfully implemented without sound ethical behavior of the stakeholders. Much of the litigations, disturbances, loss of jobs and wastages in the education subsector have also been shown to be associated with ethical issues (Igwe, 2003, Amirize, 2005).

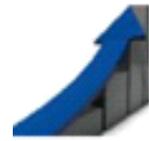
There is a need for a unified view and holistic approach to achieving integrity in the Nigerian academic arena. In the Nigerian educational system, there are diverse views of the meaning of academic integrity and what constitutes academic integrity. These views are informed by different factors that are peculiar to the educational stakeholders. The term encompasses the honesty involved in academic conduct, from teaching, learning, and assessment to the management of the primary educational process. The diverse views held are as follows:

Inclusion: Most of the time, when academic integrity is perceived in the Nigerian primary educational system, it is viewed based on the parties included in the required honest practices. It is usually held in relation to pupils and their academic conduct, with less emphasis on teachers or other staff members' integrity. This view is widely held in all the sectors of learning: primary, secondary, and higher institution.

Academic Performance: Some view academic integrity in connection with assessment and particularly as a form of dishonesty in examinations (cheating, collusion, impersonation, bribery, connivance, etc.). This view is incomplete as it focuses only on the students and also predominantly on assessment and a particular form of assessment.

Behavioral: There is the perspective of academic integrity as a form of transparency and self-discipline in any academic activity which is required of all stakeholders (pupils, teachers, and administrators). This view of transparency and self-discipline was presented by Olasehinde-Williams (2005). However, this view is not widely held in some of the Nigerian educational sectors, such as the primary education sector.

Climatic: This refers to the accepted way things are done in the Nigerian educational sector. There appears to be some discussion around integrity in relation to examinations but not in relation to other aspects of academic misconduct. This has presented the accepted way of doing things in the Nigerian primary educational systems which may not be entirely appropriate. Psychological perspectives of morality and motivation: In primary schools, views on academic integrity are more often related to cheating in examinations and tests, the emphasis is more on examination-related misconduct and rarely on overall academic misconduct. Furthermore, there is a morality angle attached to academic integrity-related issues. This presupposes that the pupil and teachers know what is right from wrong in the academic community. However, this view is



not ideal; teachers and pupils need consistent information and education about what constitutes academic integrity (Vardi 2012).

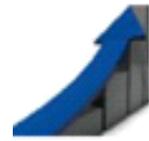
Academic Ethics and Integrity in the Nigerian Educational Context

The National Policy on Education (FRN, 2004) has very high promises for promoting Nigeria national ethics of discipline, integrity, dignity of labour, social justice, religious tolerance, self-respect and patriotism. The policy emphasizes respect for the worth and dignity of the individuals, faith in man's ability to make rational decisions; moral and spiritual principles in interpersonal and human relation; shared responsibility for the common good of society; promotion of the physical, emotional and psychological development of all children; and acquisition of competences necessary for self-reliance. It appears however, that ethical behaviors including trust, appropriate social and moral values, integrity and responsibilities are deeply eroding from Nigeria education. Many researchers (Mni, 2008) think that the general perception of many Nigerians is that national values on education have drifted to unacceptable standards since several decades – with corruption in high places, distortion of justice and high waves of indiscipline, dishonesty, cheating, lying, and administrative malpractice and other vices. The ethical standard of care includes compassion, acceptance, interest and insight for developing students' potential. Intrinsic to the ethical standard of respect are trust and fair-mindedness.

Perspectives of Academic Ethics and Integrity in Nigeria.

Presently, among the stakeholders of the Nigerian primary institutions of learning, there is a lack of awareness of the constituents of academic integrity. It is surprising though that this is not only among the pupils but also among some of the school-teachers. However, few of the teachers and management staff that have this awareness believe that pupils should be aware of academic integrity and all its constituents without being informed actively. This relates to the academic climate prevailing in the educational institution. Although cheating is viewed as a form of academic misconduct, some researchers (Olasehinde-Williams, 2006, Animasahun, 2014.) argue that the climate of academic integrity may be the most important factor affecting the incidence of pupil cheating. The data from a study of Nigerian students (Orim et al, 2013) suggested that students were more likely to get involved with academic dishonesty particularly when it is unrelated to examination cheating. This disposition was mostly due to their lack of awareness that a number of these acts constitute academic dishonesty (such as collusion, impersonation, pretense, among others). Also, there was the perception that the student will not get caught since the institutional authorities appear to focus more on examination-related issues.

Moreover, most primary institutions do not have adequate tools or the frameworks for detecting some of these other types of academic misconduct among their pupils or staff. Due to the lack of adequate tools, their academic climate and culture appear to be lenient towards non-examination academic misconduct, as expressed by Olasehinde-Williams (2006). With pupils and teachers holding these kinds of views, it is not a surprise that the environment will be mostly



conducive to and encourage academic misconduct activities. This gives rise to the question of the policies in place to check the occurrence of academic dishonesty in teachers and pupils. Regardless of the emphasis on high quality in education by the National Policy on Education (FGN 2004), it appears that academic misconduct has not been properly addressed, particularly with respect to those which are unrelated to examination. It is also noteworthy that there are a number of inconsistencies in the views of some teachers about where the responsibility lies for the monitoring, review, and revision of their primary institutional policies. This presents the need for institutions to keep the teachers informed and promote a consistent approach to the mitigation of academic misconduct or reorientation of the stakeholders

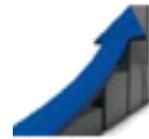
Major Challenges Associated with Academic Integrity in Nigerian Primary Institutions of Learning

There is little research on academic integrity in primary school although there are several investigations into examination malpractice. There should be a strong emphasis on academic integrity at these early stages, so that pupils are aware of what to expect in higher learning. Some of challenges associated with academic integrity include;

Favouritism: In some primary schools, the teachers assist some pupils, giving those pupils an unfair advantage over the others. Animasahun (2014), in his study on academic integrity in Nigerian primary schools, focused on examination malpractices and suggested that attitudinal reorientation is a possible solution. Animashun identified institutional stakeholders as being responsible for examination misconduct in the various primary institutions of learning. These stakeholders include the pupils, students, parents, teachers, school, government, law enforcement agencies, society, and religious agencies. Although these identified situations were in relation to pupils and students' examinations, the situations also affect their overall academic integrity competence.

Lack of Parental Skills: Animasahun (2011, 2014) claim that the reasons for the examination malpractices are not only due to the students but also due to the lack of parenting skills. Parents lack time and genuine love for children. They overindulge their children; abuse their children; and misuse their power, wealth, and opportunities just to influence the academic status of their children. Most parents have misplaced priorities, mounting undue pressure on children to pursue courses which they are not suited for. In situations where these claims are true, the pressure on such children could lead to academic misconduct.

Lack of Qualified Teachers: Factors identified in relation to the teachers as stakeholders in academic misconduct included lack of interest in the teaching profession, incompetence, intellectual laziness, bribery and corruption, teachers seeking favor from pupils and parents, sexual promiscuity, and continuous assessment malpractices by teachers and school counselors.



Incompetent School Managements: In relation to the school more broadly, the factors identified were irregularities in admission, admission of unqualified candidates, lack of/underutilization of guidance counselors, incomplete syllabus, poor invigilation, and pupils forced to share insufficient examination materials.

Funding and Supervisory Problems : The factors identified in relation to how the government's support has an effect on institutions' management included poor funding and monitoring of schools, overcrowding of classrooms, indiscreet setup of private schools, poor admission policies, automatic promotion, and subjective and politically motivated recruitment of teachers. There were also identified issues with teacher incentives, textbooks inadequacy, inadequate libraries, ill-equipped laboratories, and poor- quality teaching materials. In addition, they mentioned law enforcement agents as being contributors to the problem due to bribery and corruption, running errands for other perpetrators, and serving as shields for the perpetrators.

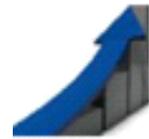
Eroded National Values: The society in general was mentioned as one of the contributing factors due to the authors' (Animasahun 2011, 2014; Oyebamiji 2011; Fadele 2007) views of deterioration of the value systems and carefree attitude towards patriotism which was observed in a number of Nigerian institutions. Oyebamiji (2011) & Fadele (2007) linked the occurrence to religious factors, stating that morality and religious teachings are no longer effective and that there are political influences on religious leaders. These authors (Fadele 2007, and Famoriyo 2007) focused on examination malpractices, listing factors which they felt were impacting on its occurrence, and most of these factors also influence the occurrence of academic misconduct in the Nigerian educational system more broadly. It is observed that in most Nigerian institutions, the responsibility for the prevention of academic dishonesty rests on the teachers and does not fully assume a consistent or comprehensive approach.

Lack of Orientation: Another challenge is that the in-depth knowledge about academic integrity is low across most of the learning sectors (primary, secondary, and higher institutions) primarily because institutional authorities give it a low priority.

Ethical behavior problems in Nigeria primary education may be classified as shown above; namely

- a. Violation of law, departure from the truth, and deviation from moral rectitude.
- b. They may also be classified in respect of those associated with lack of trust; lack of accountability or responsibility to one's duty action or inaction; lack of integrity, and poor value system (as the case of school- age children whose preference is getting rich now to getting education).
- c. They are also classified in respect of those expectations from teachers, non- teaching staff and those from students and pupils (as in the recruitment of qualified staffs)

The sources of ethical problems as enumerated by Fayokun and Adedeji (2008), are listed below

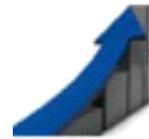


1. Contributing to delinquency of a minor
2. Interval absenteeism from school
3. Indecent dressing
4. Failure to prepare lesson notes
5. Failure to attend staff meetings
6. Beating or punishing students in disregard to rules and regulations for punishment.
7. Failure to make use of the blackboard for teaching
8. Lateness to the classroom for teaching
9. Deliberate negligence of duty
10. Examination malpractices (aiding or abetting)

Possible Ways of Instituting A Culture of Integrity in the Nigerian Primary Academic System

A strong corporate culture founded on ethical and moral values is sine qua non for continued education success. Stueart and Moran (2002) noted that organizations that are well respected and profitable are almost always marked by good ethical cultural practices. Since ethical behaviour most likely results from values held by the organization's leaders combined with systems that promote ethical behavior, school managers must be convinced that they are caring about how they operate the schools' businesses, otherwise theirs and the schools' reputation, and ultimately their performance and job are put at risk. Morally upstanding values and high ethical standards nurture the corporate culture in a positive – They connote integrity, doing the right thing, and genuine concern for stakeholders. School managers therefore need to create an environment of strongly held values and conviction to make ethical conduct a sustained way of life. In building school ethical culture, school managers may learn many things from profit organizations. The main purpose of enforcement is to encourage compliance rather than administer punishment. For instance, the Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN 2004) provides a code of conduct for teachers and students. There is also Examination ethics drawn at the 1986 National Conference on Examination project, held at Ota in Ogun State, Nigeria. This emphasizes on honesty, integrity, and dignity in study and good citizenship as values necessary for prevention of examination malpractice among students (Mni, 2008).

The compliance effort must permeate the entire school extending to all its units. The departmental heads, supervisors of academic, administrative and technical units must give serious and continuous attention to the task of explaining how values and ethical code applies in their areas. It should be noted that, the principal can do several concrete things to exercise ethical leadership: He should demonstrate the importance of ethics by his own behavior, should be certain that appropriate codes of behavior are in place and that employees (teacher and students) are well informed of them, and should monitor the behavior of employees to be sure they are complying. Specifically, he and his senior staff members should take the following leadership responsibilities:



1. They must set an excellent ethical example in their own behavior and establish a tradition of integrity. The school decisions have to be seen as ethical- “actions speaks louder than words”.
2. School managers, staff and students have to be educated about what is ethical and what is not; ethical training programmes have to be established and gray areas pointed out and discussed. Everyone must be encouraged to raise issues with ethical dimensions, and such discussions should be treated as legitimate topic.
3. Top management (principal and senior staff) should regularly restate its clear support of the school’s ethical code and take a strong stand on ethical issues.
4. They must reprimand those who have been lax in monitoring and enforcing ethical compliance.
5. They must be prepared to act as final arbiter in hard calls – removal or recommending removal of people from key position or terminating them when they are guilty of a violation.

Failure to act swiftly in punishing ethical misconduct is interpreted as lack of real commitment. Furthermore, the curriculum and teaching, learning, and assessment styles need to be modified to be more focused on pupils’ learning outcomes, with various creative assessments to ensure deep learning has occurred. This would include the use of detailed formative feedback practice. Although this is difficult to achieve, there could still be positive changes as a result of the reorientation of the staff. There is a need to focus on the admission policies at all levels of learning in Nigerian study institutions.

The policy and its use should focus on the admission of competent pupils, students and teachers. Skills support initiatives would help cultivate an ethical view and culture of academic integrity. This is important as a number of primary, secondary, and university institution stakeholders do not seem to consider the whole constituent of academic integrity of much concern. Also, in establishing these support skills, orientation sessions could be instituted for new pupils and staff which would foster the awareness of academic integrity, academic requirements, and institutional responses to academic misconduct cases. There would be the need to monitor pupils’ work and conduct reviews to check if they are acquiring and transferring the relevant skills across subjects.

Whenever academic misconduct arises, these should be dealt with consistently in line with the institutional policies with a focus on educating the pupils. Those involved in such cases of misconduct should receive guidance and support on appropriate academic practice, and following proper investigation, penalties can then be utilized as appropriate (as per the institutional policies). The consistent handling of penalties and the acquisition of transferable skills are important to the context of Nigerian learning institutions. The institutional policies would need to be assessed periodically to check whether their procedures and guidelines are working effectively. In reviewing the policies, there is a need to ensure that they are accessible, detailed, and clear to all academic stakeholders. There is the belief that integrity is more than just honesty though they are all important values for efficient and effective management. Honesty is



mostly not doing things that are dishonest and more or less expected of respected people. People with integrity though can be counted thoroughly and completely, complete work on time and keep promises. The school administrators need to follow this rule, keep the best interest of the school, staff, pupils students and parents in mind when taking decisions and in all aspects of their jobs.

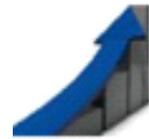
Conclusion:

Various elements of quality and excellent school management such as communication, interpersonal relations, conflict management, problem solving, team work, employees involvement and empowerment are dependent on attainment of ethical and moral values of the stakeholders of the school especially staff pupils and students. The purpose of the National Policy on Education cannot be achieved unless there is a success of ethical and value orientation efforts of schools. School managers should therefore be involved in efforts to build trust, promote value of integrity and responsibility; and to build, sustain, corporate culture of high ethics and values. Ethics and integrity can be transmitted, promoted, protected as the school corporate culture by words of mouth indoctrination and power of tradition, and by setting forth a code of ethics and values in written document. The code then becomes a cornerstone for cultural building and for developing a corporate conscience as well as a unifying force for the primary school. It also becomes a benchmark for judging the schools policies, actions and individual conducts.

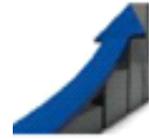
Suggestions

1. Schools should encourage academic integrity and code of ethics by: incorporating the statement into employees' training and educational programmes; giving explicit attention to academic integrity and ethics in recruiting and hiring or screening out applicants who lack compatible character traits; communication of values and ethics code to all employees and explaining compliance procedures; and importantly strong leadership commitment and endorsement of excellent ethical examples in their own behavior
2. Primary school administrators must be able to reprimand those who have been lax in monitoring and enforcing ethical compliance and must not hesitate to remove, recommend removal of people who are guilty of a violation.
3. The most likely way of instituting a culture of academic integrity would be to create awareness of what academic integrity is and what it constitutes, create enabling structures, and establish skills support initiatives across all levels of learning. The creation of enabling structures involves establishing key institutional guidelines which clarify what academic integrity entails and what it comprises, ensuring there are accessible institutional policies, and establishing defined and consistent response procedures and parameters. This clarity is important as the teachers, pupils and students may not have a complete view of what academic integrity entails.

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