

**Rebuilding Academic Integrity among Vocational and Technical Education Graduates for the Acquisition of Saleable Skills: The Case Cross River University of Technology (CRUTECH), Calabar****Ogumbe, Boniface Ekwok , PhD**Department of Vocational and Technical Education,
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Michael Okpara University of Agriculture,
Umudike, Abia State.**Abstract**

This study was designed to ascertain strategies adopted by lecturers and higher education institutions in rebuilding academic integrity. Three specific objectives and research questions were stated to guide the study. The descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. A sample size of 214 was drawn from the population of the study is 487 respondents, comprising lecturers in the faculty of education, Cross River University of Technology (CRUTECH). A researcher developed instrument tagged student academic integrity and academic misconduct questionnaire (SAIAMQ) was developed for data collection. The instrument was face validated by three experts in the department of Vocational and Technical Education, CRUTECH. The instrument was tested for internal consistency through a pilot test consisting of 20 lecturers from another faculty other than education. The reliability coefficient of the instrument was found to be 0.82 using the Cronbach alpha statistical analysis which was adjudged good enough to guarantee the use of the instrument for data collection. A structured questionnaire was administered to the respondents personally and with the help of two research assistants. It was on the spot distribution of the questionnaire to ensure that the questionnaire was returned. This recorded a return rate of 94 percent. The Mean and standard deviation was used in answering the research questions. The result from the findings shows that most Business and Technical Education students know what constitutes academic misconduct. The result also identified steps in rebuilding academic integrity. Based on the results, some recommendations were made, among them is that educational institutions should made concerted effort to address all causes of academic misconduct in the education system.

Keywords: Academic integrity, Trust, Rebuilding Vocational and Technical Education**Introduction**

Ethics is the discipline concerning what is morally good and bad, right and wrong. A person's ethical views determine how he or she makes decisions; how he or she determines what is right from what is wrong. According to Chad(2009), ethics governs the way people live, the things they say, the way they treat people, and most important for this discussion,



how they perform his or her work. A lack of ethics leaves people stranded in a confusing world of dilemmas with no compass to guide them. In the business world, when ethics are disregarded, corporations fall and ultimately, the public suffers.

Societies seem to have forgotten those fundamentals that the country was founded upon: absolute truth, hard work, and the golden rule. The declining level of morality is apparent in today's culture. This moral problem has been shown to be present in many situations and occupations, affecting almost every part of the culture. Every sector of the society from business to education to government to the press and to the church is experiencing its own ethical failure (Copeland, 2005). The lack of integrity has been made very clear in the business world with the frequent reports of fraud or deception coming from many major companies. Insider trading, bribes, asset misappropriation, tax evasion, stock fraud, accounting fraud, and stock option backdating are just a few of the many examples of the types of problems that continually surface in the news today. The emphasis in today's workplace seems to be placed solely on meeting expectations instead of upholding reputation (Copeland, 2005). Fraud has lost the disdain that is once held, society has become desensitized by its habitual appearance in the news.

When observing these ethical breakdowns, Chad (2009) averred that one is forced to wonder where the root of the problem truly lies. Fingers are most often pointed at the place and institution trusted with training humans and propagating societal values- the school system and most especially, higher education institutions (HEI). Issues of academic integrity has come to the fore as rising cases of academic fraud and declining morals of HEI graduates.

Academic is used to describe things that relate to the work done in schools, colleges, and universities, especially work which involves studying and reasoning rather than practical or technical skills. Academic integrity is the commitment to and demonstration of honest moral behaviour in an academic setting. Having integrity means doing the right thing, even when no one is looking. It means upholding the academic honesty and ethical policies set forth by the University both within and outside the institution. HEI exists to provide multi-disciplinary and multidimensional services to the community. The ability of the university to achieve its purposes depends upon the quality and integrity of the academic work that its faculty, staff, and students perform. Academic freedom can flourish only in a community of scholars which recognizes that intellectual integrity, with its accompanying rights and the responsibilities, lies at the heart of its mission. Observing basic honesty in one's work, words, ideas, and actions is a principle to which all members of the community are required to subscribe.

The International Center for Academic Integrity defines academic integrity as a commitment to five fundamental values: honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility. They believe that these five values, plus the courage to act on them even in the face of adversity, are truly foundational to the academy. Without them, everything that academics and students alike do in their capacities as teachers, learners, and researchers loses value and becomes suspect. When the fundamental values are embraced utilized, and put into practice they become touchstones for scholarly communities of integrity. Rather than thinking of them merely as abstract principles, it is advocated that HEI use the fundamental values to inform and improve ethical decision-making capacities and behavior. The fundamental values enable academic communities to translate their ideals into action (Fishman, 1999).

Institutions of higher education share the responsibility, along with agencies such as family, schools, and church to promote individual and societal integrity and values. However, the image of higher education institutions (HEI) has been battered by scandals within the system

and the perceived failure of the system to impart values and skills needed for effective functioning in society. Issues of failing academic integrity have eroded public confidence in the educational system. Reported cases of academic cheating by both members of staff and students, in some cases, collusion between academic staff and students as well as other scandals has shaped poor public opinion about HEI in Nigeria. The list is endless when explored deeply. Of most concern to this study is how academic ethics and integrity affects business education students in higher education.

Business education is made up of programmes that help students develop competencies in business and finance management. Central to business are the issues of financial and business integrity in dealing in business associates, clients, investors and the public. The increasing rate of fraud is challenging the kind of training graduates are receiving in HEI, whether they are taught ethics and standards at all. Public's trust is key to business existence

Copeland (2005) stated that the business and accounting profession is fundamentally based on ethics and integrity. These foundations are the qualities that give the profession its trustworthiness and its reliability; the public expects nothing less. Through the scandals of the early 2000s of Enron, WorldCom, Adelphia, and various others, the business world's dependability, and consequently its ethics, were called into question. More worrisome for stakeholders is that young graduates from HEI, business education graduates inclusive, are enmeshed in fraud or activities that do negates the value of their profession and of themselves. It is worthy of note that these declining values did not begin at the workplace, but developed and practiced over time by graduates. It is commonly reported that internet fraud is mostly perpetuated by HEI students. Cases of cheating and academic infidelity rings loud on campuses. Most issues of youth misdemeanour have its origins in school campuses. This is against the backdrop of ethics, integrity and vision statements by universities. It just points to the fact that it is not stating the goals and missions that counts, but working towards its actualization.

Vocational and Technical Education is used as a comprehensive term in the educational process involving in addition to general education the study of technologies and related sciences and acquisition of practical skills, attitudes, understanding and knowledge relating to occupations in various sectors of economic and social life (Nigeria Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) (2008) in Okoye and Arimonu (2016). Therefore, VTE prepares individuals for occupational fields and for effective participation in the world of work. The concept of VTE is a single and inseparably used to describe the education for the acquisition of social acceptable skills (Okoh, 2000).

The concept of VTE has changed in scope and structure since its inception as observed by Seyi (2014). He further stated that as a component of overall education system, it has since increased in both prominence and complexity with its concomitant problems and prospects. With the advent of the Church and the imperial government schools were established to train clerks, interpreters and other functionaries for the colonial administration (Obinaju, 2019). Those who could attend schools were readily employed. In those days it was prestigious to be educated, beneficiaries were respected in the society and they cannot afford to misbehave. Again in those days' teachers, parents, educationists including students themselves were serious and strict. Success could be assessed in the most appropriate manner. Academic performance could correlate with performance and acquisition of skills as well as integrity was in the educational system (Obinaju, 2019). What is the scenario in today's educational system?

By contrast, today, not so much importance is given to the process of education. Children right from the primary schools are promoted irrespective of performance. Parents

interfere with school decisions; parents even decide promotion from one class or level to the other. Parents and teachers indulge in mischievous practices ranging from seeking undeserved favours for their wards, even to the extent financial inducements and bribery to enable promotion. In some situations, scores are changed, examinations scripts are exchanged, students are impersonated and many other academic misconduct (Obinaju, 2019). All these points to the issues of integrity and ethics both within the society and the educational system.

Higher education institutions in Nigeria are failing on their responsibilities of inculcating good ethical behaviours and maintaining high moral standards. Rather, they have become the springboard for societies' woes. It is commonly reported that there are more students that are into internet and online frauds than any other group of people. The promotion of indecent acts and social vices on campus through popular culture has spread to the society. This includes the promotion of gangsterism on the streets because of affiliation to cult groups on campus, the thriving sex work as a result of clandestine networks in higher education campuses. The entrenchment of bribe and fraud as cases of academic cheating rise and take very disturbing forms. Higher education institutions in Nigeria, unfortunately, have become venues for planting seeds of mistrust, fraud, corruption and violence instead of being venues for the development of and transmission of ethical values and setting foundation for good behavior and acquisition of long and self-sustaining skills (Akpan, 2008). Kolade (2011) noted that Nigeria universities are increasingly providing education to teeming youths without good character and integrity. Apparently, a cheat, who cheated through school, will cheat through life. Attitudes learnt in school, whether good or bad are most likely to be propagated in the society. Consequently, the failings of the educational system has become the problem of society.

Academic integrity reflects a shared set of principles which include honesty, trust, diligence, fairness and respect and is about maintaining the integrity of a student's work and their reward (Swansea University, 2018). Academic integrity is the guiding principles for all students assessment, from taking exams, making oral presentation or writing assignments, dissertations or theses assessment. Mitina, Kurbanov and Shmalen (2018) observed that the mission of any educational institution is to create an academic culture that fosters students' integrity both in and out of classroom. Adherence of students to academic integrity implies self-fulfillment of educational tasks, tasks of final control of learning outcomes, references to information sources. Observance of the copyright legislation norms and providing reliable information about results of every creature and scientific activities can also be termed academic integrity.

Academic misconduct is an act whereby a person may attempt to obtain for himself/herself, or for another person, an unmerited or unpermitted advantage. This shall apply whether candidates act alone or in conjunction with another/others (Swansea University, 2018). The university further stated that academic misconduct includes plagiarism, collusion, breach of examination regulations, fabrication of data, impersonation of others, and so on.

Statement of the Problem

The declining moral standards in higher education institutions have become a concern to all not just stakeholders. While companies and employers are complaining of the declining morals of graduates and the challenge to maintaining occupational standards,

norms and values, societies are worried about the integrity, values and ethics of graduates. Academic integrity has eroded over the years. School authorities including the government and education policy makers have developed and implemented various measures to curb academic misconduct but not much have been achieved. In our tertiary institutions, various educational interventions have been established in most universities in an effort to educate students about academic integrity and to prevent academic misconduct, unfortunately not much success have been attained. Nowadays student do not bother about the consequence of academic misconduct because of the pressure on them to obtain paper qualification that will earn them a job. This has created an increasingly public poor perception about the quality of university education. This realization is forcing institutions of higher learning to be proactive in rebuilding academic ethics. Such a task is the responsibility of both the institution and its staff. The task is made daunting as institutions grapple with what values and how to implement them. This paper attempts to refocus certain steps that could be taken by institutions and academic staff in rebuilding academic integrity.

Purpose of the study

The main purpose of the study was determining steps by higher education institution in re-building trust for academic integrity in Vocational and Technical Education in Cross River University of Technology. Specifically, the study sought to:

- i) Identify what constitutes academic misconduct in Business and Technical Education in CRUTECH.
- ii) Ascertain ways lecturers can increase academic integrity among Business and Technical Education students.
- iii) Identify ways the school administration can enshrine academic integrity among Business and Technical Education students?

Research Questions

- i) What constitutes academic misconduct in Business and Technical Education in CRUTECH?
- ii) What ways can lecturers increase academic integrity among Business and Technical Education students?
- iii) What ways can the school administration enshrine academic integrity among Business and Technical Education students?

Methodology

The descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study and carried out in CRUTECH. The population of the study is 487 respondents, comprising lecturers in the faculty of education, Cross River University of Technology (CRUTECH). A sample size of 214 respondents comprising lecturers were used for the study. This was arrived at using Krejcie and Morgan Table. The Stratified random sampling was used to stratify each Department as a strata, from where, simple random sampling was used to determine the sample size from each department.

A researcher developed instrument tagged student academic integrity and academic misconduct questionnaire (SAIAMQ) was developed for data collection. The instrument was in two sections. Section A sought for personal information about the respondents. Section B was on what constitute academic misconduct and steps to rebuild academic integrity by lecturers and institutions. The instrument was face validated by three experts in the department of Vocational and Technical Education, CRUTECH. The instrument was tested for internal consistency through a pilot test consisting of 20 lecturers from another faculty

other than education. The reliability coefficient of the instrument was found to be 0.82 using the Cronbach alpha statistical analysis which was adjudged good enough to guarantee the use of the instrument for data collection. A structured questionnaire was administered to the respondents personally and with the help of two research assistants. It was on the spot distribution of the questionnaire to ensure that the questionnaire was returned. This recorded a return rate of 94 percent. The Mean and standard deviation was used in answering the research questions. The instrument tagged Student Academic Integrity and Academic Misconduct Questionnaire (SAIAMQ) is a 4-point scale. The score codes for the points range from 1-4. The average score code is 2.50. It was decided that any item or cluster in which the respondent score a mean of 2.50 or above shows that the students are quite aware of academic integrity and/or academic misconduct.

Results

Research Question 1 What constitutes academic misconduct in Business and Technical Education in CRUTECH

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation of rating scores of respondent on what constitute academic misconduct (*n = 197*)

S/N	Academic Misconduct	\bar{X}	SD	Decision
1	Sex for grades	3.01	1.50	Strongly Agree
2	Exchange of examination scripts during examination	2.82	1.00	Strongly Agree
3	Falsification of experimental results	3.14	1.20	Strongly Agree
4	Giving students unmerited scores for money	3.20	1.21	Strongly Agree
5	Leakage of examination questions	2.91	1.02	Strongly Agree
6	Setting substandard questions	3.54	1.25	Strongly Agree
7	Doing assignment for students	4.00	2.00	Strongly Agree
8	Impersonation during examination	2.71	1.00	Strongly Agree
9	Sales of hand-outs	2.42	0.08	Disagree
10	Delaying release of examination results	3.13	1.2	Strongly Agree
11	Supporting others to do their work quickly	2.40	0.06	Disagree
12	Bringing papers into examination hall to be able to answer the questions correctly	2.91	1.02	Strongly Agree
13	Communication with a fellow candidate in examination hall	3.82	1.52	Strongly Agree
14	Favouring our Relations to enable them pass examination	4.00	2.00	Strongly Agree
15	Doing what parents demand of you to enable their wards go for NYSC	2.41	0.07	Disagree
16	Paying attention to areas one has interest in	2.14	0.2	Disagree

*SA- Strongly Agree

Table 1 indicates that 12 out of the 16 items constitutes academic misconduct as expressed by the item responses which fall above the mid-point of 2.50 except items 9, 11, 15 and 16 that do not constitute academic misconduct.

Research Question 2: What ways can lecturers increase academic integrity among Business and Technical Education students?

Table 2: Summary of Descriptive Analysis of ways can lecturers increase academic integrity among year 4 Business and Technical Education students

S/N	ways lecturers increase academic integrity among students	\bar{X}	SD	Decision
1	Infuse integrity into the classroom culture	4.00	2.00	Strongly Agree
2	Develop a moral vocabulary that contains values such as Responsibility, Respect, Fairness, Trustworthiness, Honesty	3.00	1.50	Strongly Agree
3	Respond appropriately when cheating occurs	3.50	1.25	Strongly Agree
4	Use quotes to ignite meaningful conversations	3.00	1.50	Strongly Agree
5	Help students believe in themselves	3.90	1.02	Strongly Agree
6	Valid Assessment of Students	3.80	1.00	Strongly Agree
7	Confidentiality	3.20	1.21	Strongly Agree

*SA- Strongly Agree

Table 2 shows the summary of the Mean and standard deviation scores of respondents on ways lecturers increase academic integrity among year 4 Business and Technical Education students. The result shows that all the items have mean responses above 3.0, indicating a high acceptance and agreement among the ratters. Since all the items have mean responses above 3.0, the respondents agreed that all the items are valid ways lecturers can increase academic integrity among year 4 Business and Technical Education students.

Research Question 3: What ways can the school administration enshrine academic integrity among Business and Technical Education students?

Table 3: Summary of Descriptive Analysis of ways school administration enshrine academic integrity among year 4 Business and Technical Education students

S/N	Institutions should	\bar{X}	SD	Decision
1	Develop and publicize clear, fair, academic integrity policies, procedures, and statements that can be effectively understood and consistently implemented	3.54	1.25	Strongly Agree

2	Promote positive aspects of academic integrity amongst all segments of the campus community. Promotional activities should include discussions of the fundamental values, development of ethical decision-making capacities, and highlighting the link between academic integrity and broader ethical concerns.	4.00	2.00	Strongly Agree
3	Educate all members of the community about academic integrity standards so that expectations are well understood as integral components of the community culture.	3.71	1.00	Strongly Agree
4	Practice the actions described in campus policies consistently and fairly. Provide support to those who follow the policies and uphold standards.	3.42	0.08	Strongly Agree
5	Develop, explain, and administer equitable, transparent systems for adjudicating integrity violations.	3.13	1.2	Strongly Agree
6	Stay abreast of current developments in technology and educational practices in order to anticipate increased risks and address potential problems.	3.40	0.06	Strongly Agree
7	Regularly assess the effectiveness of academic integrity policies, procedures, and practices. Revise and revitalize as necessary to update and improve.	3.91	1.02	Strongly Agree

*SA- Strongly Agree

Table 3 gives the summary of the ways educational administrators and institution can enshrine academic integrity among students. The result shows that all the seven items have mean responses above 3.0, indicating that all the ratters strongly agreed that all the items were valid means of enshrining academic integrity in HEI.

Discussion of Findings

The study identified ways and means lecturers can increase academic integrity among students. This includes infusing integrity into the classroom culture and developing a moral vocabulary that contains values such as Responsibility, Respect, Fairness, Trustworthiness and Honesty. There must be a commitment to honesty and reliability in every field, even more so in academics. Through these various forms of ethics implementation, it is hoped that the future of graduates and indeed, academic institutions can, and will, be brighter. This finding is supported by Copeland (2005) who averred that the erosion of academic integrity and subsequent destruction of ethical consensus was not the fault of institutions. Rather, it was caused by the individuals within these institutions. Thus, efforts by institutions to enshrine academic integrity must be championed by stakeholders, including lecturers and administrative staff.

Furthermore, the findings of the study revealed the process by which university administration can enshrine academic integrity within the institution. This included Educate all members of the community about academic integrity standards so that expectations are well understood as integral components of the community culture. Practice the actions

described in campus policies consistently and fairly. Provide support to those who follow the policies and uphold standards.

The lack of personal morality in today's society has made it necessary for there to be greater implementation of ethics through the education system, particularly, higher education institutions. This finding is in line with Christoph, (2015) who remarked after evidence that university leaders, as global leaders, can and do play a key role in strengthening ethical values and virtues. University leaders are leaders of future leaders. The integrity and ethical values of leaders, institutions and of the curricula of higher education are crucial in building trust and credible professionals.

Conclusion

Vocational and Technical Education is a professional discipline that requires academic integrity. Academic integrity is the foundation for responsible scholarship and achievement of real university education. Commitment to the development of academic integrity is the basis for a successful academic career. Avoiding academically dishonest behavior is the sure way to promote academic integrity, in our universities that would make for a corrupt free society.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made on the basis of the findings of the study:

1. Educational institutions should make conscious efforts to address all causes of academic misconduct and to stamp them out in our educational system.
2. Authorities of educational institution should encourage and empower the teachers to display a high sense of academic integrity wherever they are found.
3. All educational intervention measures, such as seminars, conferences and workshops should be organized regularly in the universities to help teachers and students develop academic integrity.

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