



Curbing Academic Corruption among University Students in Nigeria: Implications for Quality Education

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Abstract

The Nigeria education system has been bedeviled with a catalogue of challenges among which are corrupt practices and other forms of misconduct such as extortion, sorting, upgrading of result, certificate forgery among others. Academic corruption primarily affects students, especially those who engaged in it. Its effect rubbishes the standard and quality of educational system of any country. The paper examines the concept of corruption/academic corruption, forms of academic corruption, causes and effects of academic corruption. It also explores ways of curbing and its implication on quality education. The paper suggested that individual and group counselling session be organized by the counselling units of universities in order to help broaden students' understanding, reshape their value system and change their attitude towards misconduct and discourage academic fraud.

Keywords: dishonesty, university, students, corruption, academic

Introduction

The university is a community of students, and staff involved in learning, teaching, research and other activities. Universities provide able, self-directed learners that are independent, confident, who will go into the society and give to the society through leadership or through civic duties. The universities also provide students with support, guidance needed to achieve success, set out standard of conduct and expectations students' behaviour and the procedure used to resolve matters concerning students' unacceptable behaviour. It holds individuals and groups responsible for the consequences of their actions. Failure to fulfil these responsibilities may result in the withdrawal of privileges or the imposition of sanctions (Amalu, Ntamu, Bekomson & Amalu,



2020). On the other hand, the universities expect students to conduct themselves in an appropriate manner in their daily activities and in their dealing with other students, staff other people both inside and outside the campus that contribute positively to an environment in which respect, civility, diversity, opportunity and inclusiveness are valued so as to assure the success of both the individual and the community. The students are also expected to adhere to high standard of ethical, and professional based on courtesy, honesty. All these is to assure the success of both individuals, community and the achievement of institutional goals. But unfortunately, the rate of corruption and other ethical problems among students in the universities has presented an unprecedented threat to higher education globally and Nigeria in particular (Committee of Vice Chancellors of Nigerian Universities, CVCN, 2018).

Concept of Corruption/Academic Corruption

The word corruption is derived from latin word “Corruptio” which means an expression of moral decay, wicked behaviour and rottenness. There is no single, comprehensive, universally accepted definition of corruption but certain definitional attempts have been proffered by different scholars. According to Ekpe (2012), corruption is the aspect of breaking away or departing from the moral norms, sound tradition, laws and values that derive a society. Ekpe (2012) further explained that corruption is universal, but its magnitude and character are defined by different socio-cultural contexts and time dimension. It is shrouded in secrecy and thrives in an environment of large discretion with little or no oversight, which implies absence of accountability. Corruption is the breaking of certain codes of conduct for the personal benefit of the perpetrators. It can be regarded as a deliberate conscious deviation and violation of rules, norms and cherished value of the society, while Ilechukwu, (2014) sees corruption as the abuse of office for private gain, for the benefits of the holder of the office or some third party. Corruption is a form of dishonest or unethical conduct by a person entrusted with a position of authority, often to acquire personal benefit (Dennis & Asangolo, 2017). Corrupt behaviour involves bribery, nepotism and misappropriation of powers. Corruption is not only financial or political but could also be academic (Okeke, 2018)

Academic corruption is an aspect of corruption that is perpetrated within the educational system. Academic corruption is a complex multifaceted phenomenon that has eaten deep into the fabric of the society. It occurs at individual and the three levels of educational system (primary, secondary, tertiary) of both developing and developed countries across the globe. Dennis, and Asangolo,(2017)describe it as a dishonest conduct which deviates from academic criteria and that adversely affects academic standards in an educational system Academic corruption according to Singh & Thambusamy, (2016); Stansescu and Iorga (2013) is a psychological construct that involves the use of unauthorized or unacceptable means in academic work. Teixeira and Rocha (2013) identified it as an act which covers areas identified as illegal, unethical or that go against the rules either in the coursework or in the university. Academic corruption includes all forms of



corrupt practices taking place in the academic environment and which has direct negative effect on the quality and standard of education (Dimkpa, 2011). According to Adedimeji (2015), it stems from moral impurity and it manifests in self-acts that are detrimental to the goal of education and advancement of society. It is seen by Amalu and Okon, (2018) as a deliberate behaviour or action that interferes with or hinders the pursuit of knowledge and result in misinterpretation of academic material, taking credit or recognition for academic work that is not one's own or fabricating data, records or tampering with university documents. In the context of this paper, academic corruption is any type of dishonesty, misconduct or cheating and other illegal fraudulent, activities that may occur in relation to formal academic exercise. Academic corruption in the university is a critical situation that impedes qualitative university education, undermine academic integrity as well threatens the students and institutional reputation. Therefore, all hands must be on deck to see that these social vice in the university is eliminated or curbed.

Forms of Academic Corruption

According to Idris, Asadi and Mokhtar (2016). Academic corruption among students may take the form:

1. using unapproved materials in an examination
2. Submitting a paper done by other friends
3. Copying in a test.
4. Permitting other students to copy materials in a test.
5. Plagiarizing partially or fully.
6. Browsing the internet during examination
7. Writing a paper for other friends
8. Fabricating research result and forging academic documents.

Causes of Academic Corruption

The following factors may cause academic corruption in the universities but are not limited to:

Desire to Graduate with Good Grades: This desire to graduate with good grades in order to obtain prestigious jobs has influenced some lazy and dull students to copy during examination or get involved in other forms of academic corruption to obtain and/or maintain a high grade (Orji, Madu, and Nwachukwu 2015). Also the desire to meet demands of various courses gives rise to



stress and anxiety, low achievement, motivation leading to low self-esteem and the need to get it done and quickly.

Too much Emphasis on Certificate Acquisition: Too much emphasis that is attached to certificate in Nigeria is one of the causes of academic corruption in the universities (Petters & Okon, 2013). Nobody wants to know the way and manner the certificate was obtained.

Lack of Facilities: George & Ukpong (2013) asserted that the inability to provide adequate physical facilities in any of the universities may give rise to academic corruption (exam malpractice). For example, students will communicate easily with one another, copy from each other in a crowded classroom environment with many desks and chairs.

Breakdown of Ethical Standards: In some universities, ethics is disregarded, the code of conducts are not followed, the values, norms or standard behaviours have been neglected and as a result students in those institutions have deviated from the beliefs and principles about what is right or wrong (Orji, Madu & Nwachukwu, 2015).

Prevalence of Corrupt Practices in the Society. Dishonesty in academic activities in schools is a reflection of the much broader erosion of ethical behaviour that has become common place in a society that tends to support self-centeredness over concern for others (Farrant, 2012). In other words, children and adolescents are familiar with the corruption at school because of its prevalence in the society.

Pressure from Parents: Pressure from parents demanding high grades from their children has made some students to indulge in examination misconduct in order to meet their parents' high performance expectation. Ikura (2012) asserted that children are most likely to cheat when their parents press them succeed. This parental pressure goes with children's rate of aspiration which invariably triggers them cheat to achieve the desired goal.

Peer Pressure: Peer pressure can influence students' attitude towards academic corruption (Okorodudu, 2013). For example, students that pass examination through fraudulent means can directly or indirectly discourage others to study harder or motivate them to do what they have done.

Non-Implementation of Existing Laws on Culprits: Some students engage in academic corruption because they see that others who are involved in such practices go unpunished. The punitive measures for corruption need to be strengthened (Nwankwo & Nweke, 2016).

Low Intellectual Ability: An average intelligence level is required for successful learning. Low achievers are cheap victims of academic corruption (Nnam & Inah, 2015). Students with history



of poor academic performances engage in corrupt practices such as examination malpractice to make up.

Lack of Adequate Preparation for Examination: Some students indulge in academic corruption because of failure to prepare adequately. Students get distracted by other social activities like face book, twitter and videos, talent shows and sport betting (Thompson & Ansoglenang, 2019). While some of them have poor attitude to learning.

Effect of Academic Corruption

Academic corruptions primarily affect students especially those engaged in it. The effects are numerous. Students lack the basic skill, knowledge and ability to compete with their counterparts in other parts of the world. Some of the major dishonest practices inherent at all levels of education systems attract several damaging consequences:

Loss of Credibility of Certificates: Certificates issued by universities noted for academic corruption often lack national and international recognitions. Candidates are often subjected to rigorous test and interview to test the credibility of certificates presented while pursuing higher degree or employment (Petters & Okon, 2013).

Failure in job Performance: Graduates lack necessary knowledge, skills and competence to perform creditably in commensurate terms with certificate presented. According to Nam, Nguyen, Nguyen, and Luu (2020) such individuals unable to defend their certificates and woefully fail in their job performance. This has serious implication on the gross domestic product of the country. It also has effect on the general quality and standard.

Lack of Confidence: It creates and heightens lack of confidence in many students who would have ordinarily passed an examination feel disappointed and alienated and lose confidence in themselves and in the educational system when less intelligent students perform better through dishonest means (Mgbemena & Ogbogu 2017).

Destroys Study Habit: Reading is a habit and when formed, it remains and help the students to excel with indulging in corrupt practices (Anzene, 2014). These vices destroy good study habits, initiative, creativity and efficiency because dishonest students may be seen progressing and always get free from their crime, the good ones may be tempted to believe that hard work does not pay any more and may join in the cheating believing that even if caught, will get away with it.

Decline in the Standard of Education: Academic corruption as stated by Samuel (2013) contributed immensely to the fallen standard of education in Nigeria. It has jeopardized the quality of education from primary to tertiary level, teachers, school, administrators, parents, students and



all stakeholders are involved in the ills of corruption which in turn affects national growth and productivity.(Dinebari and Eyichukwu, 2016).

Vulnerability to Related Crimes: Academic corruption can make a student vulnerable to other related vices such as lying, examination malpractice, stealing, violence, sexual immorality, fraud because they have unethical means.

Expulsion: Possibility of unfulfilled dreams and visions in the chosen career, if the student is expelled from the school or terminated at work place (Animashun and Ogunniran, 2014). When a student is expelled, there will be no certificate show whatever year the student might have into the educational career. For example, twelve students were expelled by College of Health Sciences and technology Kano because of examination malpractice.

Creates Dependency: Academic corruption encourages students to build on the foundation of dependency and this will make them unable to think analytically critically and independently because of over reliance on it, the more an individual relies on corruption, the more the person relies on it all the time as the only to succeed Emaikwu, 2012).

False Information: It generates false information on the ability of the learner before the lecturer or institutions, because learners who are dishonest higher grades than their mates who strictly adhered to school rules and regulations (Eke and Oladayo, 2017). Those who engage in corruption secure better job opportunities than the honest ones and this may result in inferiority complex which is a serious psychological problem.

Demoralizes Hardworking Students: It discourages students from studying harder and deny brighter students a chance for advancement. Good students are sometimes tempted to believe that if you can't beat them, you join them as they see the unserious students engage in the malpractice and get away with it. It could be contagious as more students tend to join in the act, believing that the end justifies the means (Amalikolo and Otto, 2017).

From the above discussion, it is obvious that academic corruption sows seed of fraud and criminal values in the society, these vices cannot allow individuals realize their future greatness because it renders the certificates useless and debases the foundation to assess the skill and capacity. Academic corruption not only promotes breakdown of moral and ethical standards in the society but it also prevents the achievement of meaningful and sustainable development.



Ways to curb Academic Corruption

No one can claim to have all the solutions to the eradication of academic corruption in Nigeria, but the writer believes strongly that the following measures will curtail corruption to the barest minimum:

1. The universities should provide students with periodic education on ethical values, the importance of upholding such values, the values of making and maintaining a good name can make a lot of difference. When students do not only know what is right and wrong but are persuaded and inclined to placing high value on doing what is right, academic corruption will be minimized.
2. The government and employers of labour should attach a greater importance to the display of skills and professional competence rather than certificate alone.
3. There should be societal re-engineering and re-orientation in order to revamp moral values.
4. There should be adequate sanctions that will be implemented such as banning of one caught from attending another higher institution or working in the school system.
5. Vigorous campaigns and seminars should be made to restore values of honesty, dedication to duty and study, hard work and perseverance.
6. The funding of the education sector should be improved upon so that adequate infrastructural facilities can be provided in schools. This will help to avoid overcrowding which can promote examination misconduct.
7. Individual and group counselling sessions for students should be conducted, this will help to broaden students understanding, reshape their value system, change their attitude toward examination and discourage academic fraud.
8. Proven cases of academic corruption should be reported accordingly and the relevant sanctions and punishment dispensed. This will help to ensure specific and general deterrence because unpunished corruption deepens corruption.
9. External and internal quality assurance mechanism should be set up to monitor and evaluate teaching-learning process on a regular basis.
10. Institutions of learning should not only create the unit to receive and deal with corruption complaint or reports but also encourage all stakeholders to report any case of perceived academic corruption. This encouragement goes beyond words of assurance of not divulging such information and identity. When affected persons report cases of suspected



misconduct, the institution should be willing to act timely on any report of victimization directly or indirectly so long as the individual can set up a causal link.

Implications for Quality Education

Education without quality becomes obsolete and unproductive. Education provides the acquisition of functional skill, moral identity and ambition to succeed in life and thereby improve the society. There is no nation that can achieve any development when the type of education given to people at all levels especially at the higher level is that which makes the individual become a nuisance not only to one self but also to the society. Education is seen as the key factor for national development and powering the citizens to master their environment in order to compete for survival (Mbachu, 2013). Mbachu (2013) maintained that education has to be a powerful instrument and of good quality to enable the recipient grow into functional member of his family and of the nation.

Quality education according to Norman (2013) is the skills and knowledge that is potentially able to reflect the level of attainment. It refers to what that level of education can do base on the intent of the same. Quality education is the one that provides all learners with the capacity required to become economically beneficial, develop sustainable livelihood, contribute to peaceful and democratic society through enhanced individual wellbeing. It also deals with standard, efficiency, relevance, appropriateness and values (Amaele, 2013). Quality education is a must affair if a society expects quality manpower for rapid development and transformation. The more the level of educational quality a society attains, the more critical issues like the dignity of labour, political stability religious tolerance, quality leadership, self-reliance and other experiences. But all these may not be feasible if an educational system is afflicted with corruption because academic corruption interferes with the basic mission of education, the transfer of knowledge by allowing students to get by without having to master the knowledge furthermore. This may lead to the production of multitude of graduates who lack basic skills and knowledge required for the socio-economic and technological transformation of the nation. It sabotages development by undermining the formation of educated competent and ethical individuals for future leadership and labour force. Many precious lives have been lost through the incompetence of the so-called professionals from the nation's Universities (Agbakwuru & Awujo 2017).

Conclusion

Academic corruption is seen as an ugly and unacceptable way of life that is crippling the integrity of educational system. Until we rise against this ugly trend, this immoral act among students would continue to rise and spread. Therefore, if the counsellors in the various institutions



thoroughly and persistently follow the mentioned ways, there will be drastic reduction in academic corruption among university students.

Suggestions

To resolve this perennial problem of indulging in academic corruption, the following suggestions could assist in stemming the tide: The paper suggested that:

- (1). Individual and group counselling session should be organized in order to help broaden students understanding, reshape their value system and change their attitude towards misconduct and encourage academic fraud.
- (2). For deterrence, those caught in the act of academic corruption should be promptly investigated and punished without compromise by the school authorities and the law if they are found culpable.
- (3). The government should invest more in public education sector by rehabilitating and constructing modern teaching facilities, collapsing structures and other educational equipment.
- (4). Religious organizations and clerics should focus more on morality and salvation messages rather than exaggerated messages of prosperity.
- (5). Parents should intensify efforts in socializing their children first through character training. They should be available and be actively involved in lives of their children in order to give them needed guidance and assistance.

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