

Academic corruption and sexual misconducts: Implications for Nigeria's tertiary institutions of learning

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ABSTRACT

Quality tertiary education is at the heart of the development of any nation. This paper examined academic corruption and sexual misconducts in Nigeria's tertiary institutions of learning with the aim of detecting their root causes, negative effects and providing panacea to them. It reviewed existing literature and adopted a deterrence approach as its theoretical framework of analysis while using desk analysis technique. The paper, through the use of secondary sources of data discussed in details the manifestations of academic corruption such as plagiarism, admission fraud, cheating and causes of academic corruption and sexual misconducts. The study revealed that students and teaching and non-teaching staff of tertiary institutions of learning in Nigeria are deeply involved in academic corruption and sexual misconducts. The implications of Academic Corruption and Sexual Misconducts effects of these corrupt practices include diminished global competitiveness, stunted technological innovations, ridiculed professional excellence, inability to launch into global scientific map, bastardisation of educational standards, emergence of intellectuals with the burden of character deficits and relegation of academic certificates issued by Nigeria's tertiary institutions of learning amongst others. It concluded by stating the stark reality of compromised academic integrity in Nigeria's tertiary institutions of learning. It recommended value reorientation, appointment of professors and senior non-academic staff with uncompromising integrity as Certificates Screening Committee Members, use of preventive technology and dispassionate enforcement of global academic standards amongst others.

Keywords:

Academic Corruption, Sexual Misconducts, Tertiary Institutions

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1. INTRODUCTION

Governments and private entities world over underscore the strategic significance of human capital development so as to realize the vision of becoming top-players in the emerging economies in the world. The Federal and State Governments in Nigeria share this aspiration in producing world class manpower through the establishment of public tertiary institutions of learning. The ultimate expectations of these governments are that these tertiary institutions would have world class lecturers to impart current and in-depth knowledge, conduct researches, publish the outcomes and produce personnel that are nationally competent and globally competitive (Halidu, 2016). In this era of technologically-inspired globalisation where tertiary institutions of learning strive to meeting stipulated standards that can make them compete internationally and attract prospective undergraduates and staff of a diverse and cosmopolitan outlook, it is regrettable that Nigeria's tertiary institutions of learning have generally tended to perform below par as regards rankings with their peers worldwide (2021 Nigerian University System Rankings Report). Academic corruption and sexual misconducts are alleged to be endemic in tertiary institutions and these corrupt practices are seemingly reaching epidemic proportions globally (Alabi, 2017, Feday, 2017, Martinez & Ramirez, 2018, Shore, 2018).

1.1 Statement of the Research Problem

The educational system in Nigeria is perceived to be fraught with multi-faceted anomalies such as huge infrastructural deficits, incessant industrial action, poor staff motivation, inadequate funding and bureaucratic pathologies. Academic corruption and sexual misconducts are two ugly trends that are eating deep into the tender fabrics of the nation's tertiary institutions of learning. The spate of academic corruption and its sexually-related offences have generated debates and cast doubt on the potency of educational certificates and the efficacy of academic standards. The regulatory authorities in the higher education sector such as the National Universities Commission (NUC), the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE), and the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) had made concerted efforts towards ameliorating these quagmires yet they appear deep-rooted. It is against this dismal backdrop that this research paper was written with a view to examining the root

causes of academic corruption and sexual misconducts and their effects on higher education in Nigeria.

1.2 Conceptual Clarifications

Academic Corruption entails dishonesty, misconduct, fraud and indiscipline. These concepts refer to various misdemeanors on the parts of staff and students that negate expected norms of Universities, Colleges and Polytechnics. (Emaikwu, 2012, Azuka, 2014, Onyibe, Uma & Ibina, 2015, Alabi, 2017).

1.3 Sexual Misconducts

It is any unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favours or other verbal or physical conduct which makes submission to or rejection of such conduct either on particular individual. Simelane & Stanko (2001) as cited in Ogunbameru (2006) defined sexual misconduct as coercion and harassment in form of verbal abuse, physical contact of sexual nature of individual or group which is judged by the recipient(s) to have resulted in one or more of the following:- mental, physical and social discomfort, interferences with his/her work or academic performance. This could result from the threatened downgrading of marks, demotion, withholding of rights and privileges and creation of hostile environment for the victim on campus.

Tertiary Institutions means the Universities, Colleges of Education and Polytechnics which are either owned by the Federal, State governments or private organisations charged with different mandates aimed at actualising national development. The highest and final inputs in education are made at this level. It is characterised by the universalisation of knowledge, self-study and freedom in seeking and disseminating knowledge to any dimension and depth. At this level, systematic pedagogy gives way to self-study with emphasis on research projects, theses and dissertations. Every kind of knowledge receives its highest and most explicit level of expression be it the Arts, Sciences, Medicine, Engineering or Philosophy. This is the level where Universities, Monotechnics, Polytechnics and Colleges of Education are captured. Each institution is distinct in the certifications and degrees offered based on regulatory authorities' minimum standards. The Institutions may provide knowledge at a particular level yet the contents may vary according to the philosophy of a particular institution.

1.4 Methodology

The research is qualitative in nature and has adopted descriptive analysis. The study relied heavily on secondary data from relevant textbooks, newspapers, articles, journals and official reports.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Academic corruption and sexual misconducts appear to be very predominant and had given Nigeria's tertiary institution of many a negative image. Many empirical studies had been conducted by eminent progressive intellectuals in Nigeria's educational system with emphasis on academic corruption and sexual misconducts.

2.1 Manifestations of Academic Corruption

Academic corruption exists in various forms on a global scale. According to the Committee of Vice-Chancellors of Nigerian Universities, in 2018, academic corruption is common among staff and students of higher institutions of learning. Below are some of the manifestations of academic corruption being perpetrated by both the teaching and non-teaching staff namely

2.1.1 Admission Fraud

Admission into tertiary institutions of learning in Nigeria is perceived to be competitive and highly compromised in recent decades thereby giving room to fraudsters to taking undue advantage and preying on desperate prospective candidates (Chimezie & Nweke, 2016). The activities of syndicates which specialize in giving fake admission to prospective seekers cover both the public and private institutions with huge amount of money being lost by victims (Igbinovia, 1997, Emaikwu, 2012).

2.1.2 Cheating

In educational settings, cheating is considered as any attempt to obtain undue assistance in a formal academic exercise like examination (Exposito, Ross & Matteson, 2015). Cheating in examinations has also been acknowledged as one of the greatest challenges facing academic integrity in Nigeria, as students and sometimes with connivance with staff, deploy, alternative means of cheating during examinations (Kobayashi & Fukushima, 2012). Many reasons including lack of self-confidence by students and intense pressure to score high grades had been adduced to be responsible for examination cheating (Alabi, 2017).

2.1.3 Plagiarism

It is considered as the most common form of research misconduct. The part of the norms in academic writing is for researchers to cite all sources of information and data. As obtainable in most parts of the world, the level of plagiarism in Nigeria has been adjudged to be very high amongst students and academic staff of higher institutions of learning (Nwaokugha&Ezeugwu, 2017). For example, University of Calabar sacked five (5) of its lecturers and demoted ten (10) others in 2014 for plagiarism (Premium Times, 2013) while eighteen lecturers were reprimanded for plagiarism at the Delta State University in August, 2017 (The Eagle Online, 2017). Indeed, plagiarism is believed to have eaten deep into the fabrics of the educational system of the country.

2.1.4 Forged Degrees/Results

This is perhaps the crudest form of academic corruption perpetrated by students and staff of higher institutions. The most common result forged by students is alleged to be Senior Secondary School Certificate (SSSC) which is being conducted by either West African Examination Council (WAEC) or National Examination Council of Nigeria (NECO). This is because it is a pre-requisite to gain placements into institutions of higher learning and also for electoral politics in Nigeria. Evidences like the forgery of a doctorate degree certificate by one-time Rector of Igbajo Polytechnics who was arrested by the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission, (ICPC) and the case of Mrs. Kemi Adeosun, former Finance Minister in President Muhammadu Buhari's first term and Alhaji Salisu Buhari, a former Speaker of the Federal House of Representatives in the Fourth Republic (1999-2003) who never went beyond King's College in Lagos but laid claim to a non-existent Canadian University degree (Pm News, 2018, the Punch, 2018, the Guardians 2018).

2.2 Causes of Academic Corruption

The causes of academic corrupt perpetrated by academic and non-academic staff have been more diverse and controversial. They include as follows:

2.2.1 Stagnation in Career and Desperation for Promotion

Every academic staff of educational institutions especially universities are aware of the commonly used phrase "Publish or Perish". This signifies the level of importance placed on publications as parts of the conditions that need to be fulfilled for a lecturer to be positively evaluated for promotion. Due to insufficient publications, several lecturers have found themselves stagnant on a particular status for long (Olaleye & Oyewole, 2016). Some of these lecturers get desperate for promotion as years continue to roll while they remain at the same status. Such lecturers become vulnerable to engaging in academic corruption in a bid to pursue their career plan and get promoted.

2.2.2 Lack of Research Skill

There is a category of lecturers that are lacking in the required skills and knowledge to conduct research and scholarly writing that can engender fruitful publications and grants. This makes such lecturers resort to academic fraud such as plagiarism, asking for inclusion in articles as co-authors that they did not contribute to, swapping names for publications in order to take credit.

2.2.3 Greed for Money and Living Above Income.

Some teaching and non-teaching staff of institutions of higher learning have insatiable quest for money and have become avaricious as a result. Such engage in selling of hand-outs and extortion from undergraduates. Non-teaching staff in this category engage in admission racketeering, issuing fake transcripts or certificates (Kuranchie, Twene, Mensah & Arthur, 2014).

2.2.4 Nature of Recruitment of Staff

The nature and procedure of recruiting into the employ of institutions of higher learning in Nigeria is also a factor that causes academic corruption. In some instances, due process is not followed in the recruitment and selection exercises into the tertiary institutions of learning while merit is often sacrificed on the altar of sentiments and nepotism. This process inhibits proper checks that are meant to be done before the staff are engaged. Consequently, individuals with low morals are employed into such tertiary institutions.

2.2.5 Weak Disciplinary System

In Criminology, deterrence theorists posit that the penal (punishment) system is able to enhance conformity based on its ability to ensure certainty and severity of punishment to erring individuals (Zimring & Hawkins, 1973, Pestello, 1984, Decker Wright & Logic, 1993). In higher institutions of learning where infractions are not properly sanctioned or sentimentally administered, academic corruption and sexual offences might prevail.

2.3 Causes of Sexual Misconducts

A number of factors may account for the sordid reality of sexual misconduct and harassment in Nigeria's tertiary institutions of learning. Ogunbameru (2006) expounded on the matter of sexual harassment in Nigerian institutions. He traced the root causes of sexual misconduct to the ugly reality of lack of moral values, uncontrollable sexual desire (lust), the pursuit of pleasure, immaturity, iron-seared conscience, personality disorder, cheapness, and the problem of female students harassing their male lecturers and the causative factors responsible for that included ignorance of the consequences of Illicit sexual affairs, psychological background, peer pressure, laziness, fear and low intelligence quotient. He opined that in the glorious days of tertiary institutions in Nigeria, lecturers and students were both mentally and chronologically matured. They were deeply and religiously engrossed in their academic works, to the extent that some did not have time for hobbies and social activities. The values system then was very high. Lecturers and students would remain in libraries for so long for mental rumination and intellectual transactions. They struggled to network with their peers abroad. In contemporary times, the value system that exists in the larger society seems to have broken down irretrievably. Some lecturers and students are busy more with social activities rather than academic pursuits. Without sounding immodest, some lecturers may be above average in terms of academic soundness but are psychologically immature and morally deficient. These views of Ogunbameru corroborate with that of Oji, (1982) that the greatest social and economic problem facing this nation is the breakdown in the national ethics, social responsibility and general civility. In virtually all tertiary institutions of learning in the country today, are a group of lazy students who were academically weak in secondary schools. These lazy students have also found their ways to higher institutions of learning. They invariably find it very difficult to cope and pass examinations. Female undergraduates in

this category believe that they would use what they have (their bodies) to get what they want (good grades). Male undergraduates in this category either pay some amount of money to scale through or make arrangement to regularly arrange female undergraduates for the lecturers from among the weak ones. Since these female undergrad do not recognize or accept the value of hard work, they are always very eager to have illicit sexual intercourse with as many lecherous lecturers for good grades.

2.4 Theoretical Framework

This paper adopted the deterrence theory for its framework of analysis. One of the nuances of this theory is that a stiff disciplinary action discourages crimes in the society while a weak disciplinary action breeds contempt and perpetuate crimes. In higher institutions of learning where infractions are not properly sanctioned or sentimentally administered, academic corruption and sexual harassment might prevail. Deterrence theory resonates with the Biblical injunction that laxity in the enforcement of rules and standards can make the hearts of criminals (morally corrupt persons) to be greatly predisposed and vulnerable to be perpetrating and perpetuating evils (Ecclesiastes 8:11).

3. IMPLICATIONS OF ACADEMIC CORRUPTION AND SEXUAL MISCONDUCTS ON NIGERIA'S TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS OF LEARNING

For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction. The negative implications of academic corruption and sexual misconducts on Nigeria's tertiary institutions of learning include but are not limited to the following:

3.1 Ridiculed Professional Excellence

Urevbu (2018) espoused that Nigeria's tertiary Institutions of learning have failed to foster creativity in the school curricula. In one sense, the failure to foster creative thinking is part of the societal failure in the country. This is because the contemporary Nigerian society shuns creativity and worships mediocrity and materialism. In the long run, this affects the prospects of global competitiveness and technological innovations.

3.2 Inability to Launch Into Global Scientific Map

Douglas & Habler (2015) cited in British Council (2015) opined that every country in the world needs a high quality, inclusive and equitable school system that supports young people to develop the knowledge, skills and values to live and work in a globalised economy and to contribute responsibly both locally and globally. Regrettably, academic corruption and sexual misconducts would defeat this noble aspiration and as such, the reality of low penetration into the global scientific map subsists in Nigeria's tertiary institutions of learning.

3.3 Bastardisation of Educational Standards

Ofoegbu (2017) asserted that the age-long crises of academic corruption and sexual misconducts can be summed up as absence of ingredients for quality education. Evidences of lowered educational standards abound amongst the lecturers and students. A keen observer would be seeing the use of tautology in English language expression. For instances, bending corner, so therefore, still yet, reverse back amongst others. Whereas the correct expression should be thus: bend/corner, so/therefore, still/yet, reverse/turn back etc.

3.4 Emergence of Intellectuals with the Burden of Character Deficits

Husu & Tirri (2007) argued convincingly that schools can no longer concentrate on academic curricula alone, because they are responsible for empowering students and lecturers alike to negotiate the diverse values and social norms of their communities. The fact remains that lecturer's jobs go well beyond preparing students for standardised testing. The prevalence of academic corruption and sexual misconducts would result to having pseudo intellectual heavy weights that are at the same time morally bankrupt.

3.5 Relegation of Academic Certificates Issued by Nigeria's Tertiary Institutions of Learning

News of academic corruption and sexual misconducts are carried in the electronic and print media and the foreign missions in the country inevitably know of them. They report them to their home countries and this leads to loss of confidence in the quality of the certificates issued by tertiary institutions of learning in Nigeria where Nigerian students want to study

or work on the basis of their Nigerian Certificates in foreign countries (Okafor, 2012).

In sum, the words at the entrance of gate of a University in South Africa become very germane for distinct intellectual rumination.

"Destroying any nation does not require the use of atomic bombs or the use of long range missiles. It only requires lowering the quality of education and allowing cheating in the examination by the students. Patients die at the hands of such Doctors, buildings collapse at the hands of such Engineers, money is lost at the hands of such Economists. Financial crimes are planned, perpetrated and perpetuated at the hand of such Accountants. Humanity dies at the hands of such Religious Scholars due to religious prejudice. Justice is lost at the hands of such Judges. The collapse of quality education is indeed responsible for the collapse of developmental trajectories in nations of the world".

4. CONCLUSION

Quality tertiary education is at the heart of the development of any nation. This is because it produces the requisite knowledge to withstand the technological and scientific challenges of a competitive global economy. This paper interrogated the specific nature and causes of academic corruption and sexual misconducts in tertiary institutions of learning. Integrity is an essential part of the overall survival and sustainability of the nation's citadels of learning. As such, its absence/dilution would lead to devastating consequences for the future of higher education in the country. That academic standards have been eroded in Nigeria's tertiary institutions of learning is incontestable. This is because some of the certificates that are being paraded by some male and female graduates are alleged to be obtained through sexually-transmitted grades and conditional cash transfers in connivance with some fraudulent academic and non-academic staff. The de-legitimation and criminalisation of the prevalent national sub-culture of impunity and mediocrity which are responsible for the deterioration and retrogression of Nigeria's tertiary institutions of learning must be considered as a matter of urgent national importance.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations were made based on the salient points of this research paper:

Tertiary Institutions of learning in Nigeria should institute policies against academic corruption and sexual misconducts in their various campuses. Professors and senior non-academic staff with uncompromising integrity should be appointed as Certificates Screening Committee Members.

Quick and effective sanctions for academic corruption and sexual misconducts must be guaranteed. All categories of staff and students found guilty of academic corruption and sexual misconducts by unbiased Panels and Courts of competent jurisdictions should be shortlisted in the National Register of convicted corrupt persons and sexual offenders. The Register should be domiciled at the Federal and State Ministries of Justice, Education, Information and Culture, and all the archives of the regulatory authorities of tertiary institutions of learning. Value-Reorientation for Lecturers, Non-Teaching Staff and Students of Tertiary Institutions of learning. This should be spearheaded by Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission and National Orientation Agency.

Deployment of critical technologies such as anti-plagiarism software and Close Circuit Television Cameras. This would require increased budgetary allocations to all the tertiary institutions of learning. Software programme such as Turn-it-inis potent in checking for originality of research papers. If all undergraduate and postgraduate students' projects and dissertations are cross-examined through anti-plagiarism software, students will detest from copying and be more ingenious in their researches. Close-Circuit Television would reduce the incidences of sexual coercion and harassment within the academic community especially in lecturers' offices and laboratories.

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Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data is not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

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