Corrupt Practices among Academics as Perceived by Undergraduates: Implication for Counselling and National Development

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Abstract
This study investigated the various corrupt practices engaged in by academic staff in Nigerian universities as perceived by undergraduates. The sample was 1200 respondents of 600 males and 600 females who were purposively selected from all the faculties in Imo State University. One research question and one hypothesis guided the study. The mean score and z-test were used to respectively analyze the research question and hypothesis. The findings reveal that academic staffs in Nigerian universities to a large extent engage in different types of corrupt practices. There was no gender variation in the perception of the respondents. It is recommended that counselling center/unit be established in all universities. It was also recommended that defaulters be penalized in accordance with the stipulated penalty (ies) no matter how highly placed.

Keywords: *Corrupt Practices; Academic Indiscipline*

Introduction

The issues of corruption and people's involvement in corrupt practices have become an endemic and cancerous menace plaguing and interfering with all facets of development and levels of human existence in Nigeria. As rightly observed by Dike (2003), Federal Republic of Nigeria (2000) and Nwankwo (1993), the pervasiveness of corruption in Nigeria is such that it cuts across all levels of work and categories of people. It is disheartening to observe that corruption is now treated and seen as a necessary and harmless social exchange. Thus, slogans such as "grease the palm" and "sorting" among others are recklessly and frequently used by Nigerians openly without shame or fear of punishment or admonishment from any quarter(s). The thought of corruption brings to mind certain concepts such as improbity, unscrupulousness, selfishness, unfairness, unreliability, injustice, nepotism and malpractice among others.

With regards to its meaning, the diversity observed in its acts also reflected its definition and understanding. Olusegun (2001) defined it as the "putrefaction, tainting, debasement, perversion or venality, spoiling, destruction of purity or falling away from standard of integrity or rectitude defined by law, unheld by social norms or conscience or recognized by general conscience of mankind".

Corrupt practices on the other hand refer to those human behaviours or behavioural practices that deviate (significantly) from the norms and values of the society or which tend to break certain moral or social codes of conducts or administrative rules or procedures (Lawal 2006). It includes any situation in which the staff members have abused their position or public funds for personal gains. Included are falsehood, injustice,

fraud, embezzlement, bribery, hoarding, smuggling, money trafficking, theft/stealing/robbery, sexual abuse/harassment, exam malpractice, sorting of grades, commercialization of admissions, over use of power, certificate forgery and racketeering among others (Eze, 2006; Lawal 2006). No matter how it is defined, corruption or corrupt practices involve the violation of existing laws, rules, norms or code of conduct. It could be in the form of asking or taking a fee, gift or favour in exchange of personal benefits.

Though the aim of the paper is not aimed at analyzing the underlying intricacies of the definition of corrupt practices, it is important to note that the word "corruption" presupposes on the hand that in a given system, there is a standard or blueprint of behaviour expected of persons who operate or function in that system (Chuta, 2004). These standards or principles according to him are constructed around such absolute, universal and eternal values as honesty, fairness, uprightness, decency and modesty.

The high level of corrupt practices as observed in all levels and strata of life, development and society is a reflection of a sick nation. The entire educational system are not divorced from it. Our universities have adversely been permeated by corruption, which thrive in the larger society. Thus, Universities, which are supposed to be 'ivory towers' and/or citadel of learning for producing individuals with sound knowledge, character and integrity have become centers for producing high-level dishonest and corrupt persons, in addition to encouraging mediocrity.

Unfortunately, our universities that ought to be the highest echelons where teaching and learning take place are bedeviled with different forms of corrupt practices engaged in by members of staff (academic and non-academic) and students. In acknowledging this, Adamu (2003) remarked that the Nigerian academic settings are fast becoming centers or seats for corrupt practices. Universities have statutes that govern all the activities of the university and the behaviours or conducts expected of members of staff and the students of the university. Similarly, the academic staff of the university as a body or union has its own constitution and code of conduct that govern the activities and general academic behaviours of academic staff. These code of conduct are the ethics which according to Alutu and Aluede (2005) are the laid down guidelines, principles, code of conduct, rules and regulations or standards that guide the bahaviour of a group, body, association or organization. Principles according to them express the fundamental beliefs or ideals that individuals use in action and such beliefs or ideals help individuals in deciding between right and wrong.

One of the basic ethical principles that govern the conduct of academic staff is that no staff member should have a personal financial interest which conflict with the full performance of his or her duties. In other words, violation of this principle amounts to engagement in corrupt practice(s).

In the light of these explanations and for the purpose of this study, corrupt practices of academic staff are those unethical practices or dysfunctional practices and behaviours which academic staff members engage in as they discharge their expected roles and duties in the university. Engagement in these practices and behaviours has detrimentally affected the university educational systems, the products of university education and the nation at large.

Events taking place in our educational settings show that "standard" has been neglected and is seriously falling. In fact, Okebukola (2002) and Ndili (2004) observed that university education in Nigeria appears to be bedeviled by corrupt practices and crises of different kinds which is unmatchable to the available space, facilities and substandard textbooks, and handouts;(which students are forced to buy); admission malpractice, nepotism, cultism, money embezzlement and diversion of money, certificate forgery, overuse of power, and

poor supervision of students' work(e.g. research projects, teachings practice, laboratory practical, practicum etc.) among others.

As rightly pointed out by Okebukola (2002) and Ndili (2004), every university requires adequate facilities, human resources and infrastructure for effective teaching and learning. Regrettably, there is absence and gross inadequate provision of these facilities in our universities. These have resulted in lowered 'standard' in our universities and have probably encouraged engagement in different types of corrupt or unethical practices by academic and non-academic staff as well as the students.

The researcher through a pilot study and literature was able to identify some of the corrupt practices engaged in by academic staff members of the universities. These include:

1. Examination malpractice which covers all forms of fraud revolving around taking examination, marking, grading and scoring the scripts, working out the different results of the students, unduly failing of students. Others are allowing students to cheat or indulge in one form of examination malpractice or the other after reaching an agreement or collecting some payment in cash or in kind from the students, leakage of examination questions, and forcing students to pay for supervision activities among others.
2. Admission malpractices/Commercialization of Admissions.
3. Sexual Abuse/Harassment.
4. Nepotism/Favouritism.
5. Over use of power (such as observed in the intimidation and victimization of students; delay and withholding of academic staff assessment, promotions and suppression of younger academic staff etc.)
6. Instigating, inciting and encouraging students to riot.
7. Gangsterism.
8. Late submission and release of results.
9. Forcing/compelling students to buy handouts or textbooks and pegging their performance to it.
10. Joining and encouraging cultism.
11. Influencing the students' unionism (often negatively so that the students would not have opportunity to claim for their among other things).
12. Dereliction of duty (included are playing truancy/not attending lectures, not taking part in supervising examination, etc).
13. Use of non-academic staff or other undergraduates to mark the scripts of students, record their results; supervise students' projects and teaching practice.
14. Money embezzlement and diversion of university money, which are meant for different purposes geared towards enhancing teaching and learning effectiveness and efficiency.
15. Engaging in certificate forgery/racketeering.
16. Castigating/running down fellow lecturers or having open confrontation with fellow lecturers in the presence of the students.
17. Unlawful possession or stealing or taking away of equipment or teaching materials meant for enhancing teaching and learning effectiveness.

Poor and improper supervision of students' work such as teaching practices, research project writing, industrial attachment programmes, fieldwork, laboratory practicals, practicum etc.

In the light of all these, the present study aims at determining the undergraduates' perception of corrupt practices among academic staff of universities with intent to highlight the counselling measures that could be employed to stem the ugly practice and thereby enhance developmental stability.

Statement of the problem

Education is an instrument for development. Through it the child would be assisted to become self reliant, well adjusted and would meaningfully contribute to national development and stability. The accomplishment of this requires having well-mannered, high quality and reputable teachers at all levels of the educational system. Presumably, all academic staff in Nigerian universities should be sound in character and morals as well as being well grounded in their different areas of specialization. Unfortunately, our universities, which should be citadel of learning, are now filled with academic staffs that are highly engrossed in different forms of corrupt practices.

The consequences of corruption are enormous. It has not only negated the good objectives of educational objectives as enunciated in the National Policy on Education (Revised 2004), but has turned our institutions of learning into centers for moral decadence, crime propagation, lawlessness and social disintegration. Thus, standards, both in academic performance, general conduct and behaviour have really gone down.

Apart from denting the image of the country, it has affected the quality of our degrees and certificates by lowering the validity and reliability of the different assessment measures used in evaluating learning outcome. This fact is reflected in the attitude of the outside world (and even Nigerians) towards certificates obtained from Nigerian institutions of learning and the level of acceptance of Nigerian certificates and the products of Nigerian institutions of learning.

Against this background, the problem of this study therefore, is to investigate the perception of undergraduates on corrupt practices among academics with the intention of proffering counseling measures that could be used to stem it down and invariably, enhance development and national stability.

Purpose of Study

The main purpose of this study was to determine the perception of undergraduates towards corrupt practices among academic staff in the university. It will also proffer counselling measures that could be adopted to curb corruption.

In order achieve these objectives; one research question and one hypothesis were raised.

Research Question

What is the mean response of undergraduates' perception on the different corrupt practices engaged in by academic staff in the universities?

Hypothesis:

The mean responses of the respondents on academic staff involvement in corrupt practices will not vary significantly by gender.

Methodology

The study is a descriptive survey research, which sought to ascertain the perception of undergraduates on corrupt practices among academic staff.

The population of the study comprised all undergraduates in Imo State University, Owerri (IMSU). IMSU has 10 faculties covering about 60 disciplines with a total population of about 9000 students at undergraduate level.

From this population, a sample size of 1200 students was selected through purposive sampling technique. This was done in order to ensure that all the disciplines in the university were represented and to ensure that equal number of males and females undergraduates was included. Thus, there were 600 males and 600 females.

Data for the study were collected with a researcher-developed questionnaire titled Questionnaire on Corrupt Practices of Academic Staff of Universities (QCPASU).

The QCPASU has two sections: A and B. Section A elicited information on the bio-data of the respondents while section B has 18 items focusing on the different corrupt practices observed among academic staff of tertiary institutions. The response was on a 3-point response type of Low Extent (LE), Moderate Extent (ME) and High Extent (HE). The scoring is LE = 1; ME = 2 and HE = 3. In this way, the minimum score is 18, while the maximum is 54. The expected mean per item is 2, while for 18 items = 2 x 18 = 36.

Three experts of not less than senior lecturer cadre in Educational Measurement and Evaluation, Educational Management and Guidance and Counselling were used to ascertain the content validity of QCPUAS while the reliability was established through a test-retest method and the scores correlated using Pearson's product moment coefficient. In this way, a coefficient of 0.74 was obtained.

The data obtained were analyzed with mean (X) for the research question while the Z-test was used to analyze the hypothesis. Based on the scoring pattern, for the research question, any mean score that is less than 2 indicates Low Extent level of engagement in the specific corrupt practice(s) by academic staff, while any mean that is up to or greater than 2 reflects High Extent level of engagement in the corrupt practice(s) by academic staff. Similarly, any total mean score that is less than 36 reveal how Low Extent level of engagement in corrupt practices whereas any mean score that is, up to or greater than 36 indicate High Extent level of engagement in corrupt practices by academic staff. For the hypothesis, the decision rule is that the calculated Z-value at 0.05 level of significance was equal to or more than the Z-table value, the null hypothesis stated is rejected.

Results

The results obtained in respect of the research question and hypotheses are presented below.

Research Question
What is the mean response of undergraduates' perception on the different corrupt practices engaged in by academic staff in the universities?
The result in respect of the above research question is presented in table 1.

Table 1: Mean response of undergraduates' perception on corrupt practices engaged in by academic staff of Nigerian universities

	Statement	Mean (X) level of involvement of Male respondents N = 600	Mean (X) level of involvement of female respondents N = 600	Mean (X) level of involvement of all the respondents N = 1200
1	Examination Malpractice	2.96	2.94	2.95
2	Admission Malpractice or Commercialization of Admission	2.85	2.80	2.83
3	Sexual Harassment	2.78	2.83	2.81
4	Nepotism/Favouritism	2.59	2.65	2.62
5	Overuse of power	2.84	2.79	2.82
6	Encouraging students to riot	2.67	2.60	2.64
7	Gangsterism	2.68	2.65	2.67
8	Late submission and release of semester and Sessional Results	2.94	2.96	2.95
9	Forcing students to buy reading materials and pegging their performance to it.	2.95	2.90	2.93
10	Joining and encouraging cultism	2.57	2.51	2.54
11	Influencing students unionism	2.61	2.56	2.59
12	Dereliction of duty	2.89	2.87	2.88
13	Use of unqualified persons to mark scripts etc	2.72	2.70	2.71
14	Money embezzlement and diversion	2.84	2.78	2.81
15	Engaging in certificate forgery or racketeering	2.45	2.41	2.43
16	Castigating/running down fellow lecturers	2.38	2.40	2.39
17	Unlawful possession or taking away of university equipment/property	2.51	2.47	2.49
18	Poor and improper supervision of students' work	2.94	2.91	2.93
		49.89	48.43	48.99

Inference from the above result indicates that academic staff in the universities to a high extent level engages in corrupt practices.

Hypothesis
The mean responses of the respondents on academic staff engagement in corrupt practices will not vary significantly by gender.

The results of this hypothesis are presented in table 2.

Table 2: Means, Standard Deviation and Z-test of Perception of Male and Female Respondents on the corrupt practices engaged in by academic staff of universities

Sample	Size	Mean (X)	SD	Z cal	Z tab	Decision
Male	600	49.89	3.77			
				1.31	1.96	NS
Female	600	48.43	3.08			

Z cal value 1.31 < Z tab value 1.96 at 0.05 level. NS = Not significant. Hypothesis is accepted.

Discussion of Findings

The results obtained as presented in table 1 and 2 clearly reveal that academic staff members in the universities to a large extent engage in different corrupt practices. With respect to the research question, the mean response of the respondents' perception in all the listed corrupt practices as presented in table 1 were above the expected mean of 2. Furthermore, the overall mean response on the 18 listed items was 48.99 which is greater than the expected mean of 36. The findings is in agreement with Mallum, Momoh and Longbab (2006); Aliyu (2003); Adamu (2003); Ekoja and Igbo (2006) who found diversion of money for selfish purpose; over population of schools, over use of powers, sexual harassment, examination malpractice, joining cultism, nepotism and favouritism, certificate forgery, dereliction of duty among others, as some of the corrupt practices engaged in by university staff, teachers, parents and other Nigerians in different work places. The knowledge that these practices are prevalent in our institutions of learning irrespective of its educational level. The study also affirms the findings and assertions of Ndili (2004), Oku (2006) and Ike-Nwafor (2006) who found that teachers in institutions of learning, examination supervision/invigilators, staff of examination bodies, security agents, government and parents are among the educational stakeholders who have been causing, aiding, abetting, encouraging, perpetrating and sustaining examination malpractice which is a form of corrupt practice.

The result of the research hypothesis which sought to find if there is gender variation on the responses of the respondents' perception on the listed corrupt practices indicated there is no significance in their responses. In other words, both male and female respondents did not differ in their perceptions on the different corrupt practices engaged in by the academic staff of universities. It means that this type of bahaviour affects both male and female students. They are all victims of the ugly practice. This finding corroborates the findings of Alutu (2006) who found that views of male respondents didn't differ significantly from those of their female counterparts, on unethical practices of academic staff of universities. Since all the respondents were drawn from different faculties in the university, it means that corrupt practices exist among lecturers in all the faculties in the university where the study was done. Alutu (2006) also found that unethical practices are generally practiced in all the faculties of University of Benin.

Implications for Counselling and National Development

From the results of this study, it is arguably clear that corrupt practices of different types and magnitude exist among academic staff of universities. The university is the highest echelon for learning and knowledge acquisition as well as character training. Being a citadel of learning, the teaching staff should be custodians of uprightness, honesty, hard work, fairness, societal norms and values among others. It is therefore very

necessary that efforts be put in place to re-dress and purge our academic system of these ugly, unhealthy and ungodly practices of lecturers.

Counselling is therefore a very vital and potent tool that could be used to control these corrupt practices, which if left unchecked will continue to devastate, endanger and retard progress, growth and development. Counsellors have the onerous task of inculcating in its citizenry desirable values and norms as well as acceptable behaviours.

This being the case there is an urgent need to establish a counselling unit/centre in every university and other institutions of learning. Through it counselling assistance could be provided to both students, academic and non-academic staff of the university. Counsellors should as a matter of fact, consider it necessary to extend their counselling assistance to academic and non-academic staff. Since most of the group of individuals may not voluntarily come for counseling on issues of corrupt practices, Counsellors should therefore device effective counseling strategies that they could use to reach-out and control these unethical practices among university staff. Such strategies could be through orientation, seminars, conferences, lectures, media talks/ programs, invitation (to the affected lecturer(s), use of posters, and during ASUU meetings among other strategies. To effectively accomplish this task, the counselor should seek for the approval and assistance of the university authorities.

Counsellors can through these programs enlighten, remind, refresh and update the knowledge of lecturers on vital issues that they need for just and honest living, develop positive attitude towards work and to be more achievement oriented. Some of the issues to be addressed include; code of conduct of academic staff/ academic standards, university by-laws and culture, ethical values and moral standards and the effects of the various corrupt practices which they engage in on their personality, overall life, family, others and the society. Counsellors can also use these programs to educate lecturers on the importance of fairness, honesty, sincerity, diligence, conscientiousness, hard work, commitments to one's work, proper lecturer-student relationship, and the need to turn away from unhealthy and ungodly practices like delaying, withholding or "sitting" on the progress and promotion of their colleagues and subordinates, delaying and withholding the results of students, undermining their colleagues and running others down. Furthermore, Counsellors should explain to academic staff the consequences that surround sexual harassment such as contracting sexually transmitted diseases (e.g. HIV/AIDS, Hepatitis B, unwanted pregnancy and destabilization of one's marriage among others).

Much as the focus of the study is on academic staff, it will be necessary to extend the counseling effort to students since some of their behaviours encourage some of the ugly practices of lecturers. The already highlighted counseling programmes could be used to educate students as well. On the issue of examination malpractice, the counselor should assist students realistically to understand their strengths and weaknesses in respect of their academic work. They should also help students acquire desirable learning behaviours or study habits and skills. Possession of inadequate learning habits and skills is a very strong factor in poor academic performance. When students are assisted to acquire desirable or effective learning habits and skills, it will positively impact on their academic performance. When they perform well they will no longer seek or hunt for external assistance for better grades in their examinations. This will invariably block "market" for lecturers because it will prevent and protect them from falling prey to the unhealthy treatment from the academic staff and other perpetrators of examination malpractice.

Apart from examination malpractice, the counselor will through this avenue educate students and provide vital information on different issues such as relationship issues, cultism and its consequences, appropriate dress code and consequences of indecent dressing, university rules and regulations and types of school activities they can join where they can positively use their time and energy for self-development instead of joining cult groups among others. What the counselor could do or how counseling could be used to check corrupt practices among lecturers is in exhaustive.

Conclusion and Recommendation
Based on the findings of this study, it was conclude that corrupt practices of different types exist among lecturers irrespective of their disciplines. It was also concluded that there is no significant gender difference in the perception of corrupt practices among academic staff members in our universities.

In the light of these the following recommendations are suggested;
- Counselling centres/units should as a matter of urgency be established in all universities.
- Reported cases of corrupt practices should be promptly treated and thoroughly investigated. Defaulting lecturers should be sanctioned or punished without fear or favour based on the stipulated penalty for their offence
- Concerning the issue of examination malpractice, joining or encouraging cultism and certificate forgery or racketeering, defaulting lecturer(s) should be punished in accordance with the university's mapped out penalty for such offences or by-laws stipulated for such offences.
- Students should be encouraged to report any form of sexual harassment from the academic staff to the university disciplinary committee.
- Indecent dressing should be banned. Defaulting students should be turned back to dress properly, after which they will be allowed into the university . Lecturers should send out from their offices and lecture rooms/halls any indecently dressed student.
- Meritocracy should be encouraged, respected and practiced especially during the admission process. This will enhance the quality of students into course areas and will invariably reduce examination malpractice and mediocrity.

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