



Prevalence, Causes and Effects of Academic Corruption in Rivers State Universities, Nigeria

Daisy I. Dimkpa¹

¹Department of Educational Foundations (Niger Delta University) [E-mail: daisdimkpadr@yahoo.com]

Abstract. This study investigated the prevalence, causes and effects of academic corruption in Rivers State universities, Nigeria. Data were collected from 400 respondents using a 'Prevalence, Causes and Effects of Academic Corruption Questionnaire' (PCEACQ). The data were analyzed using frequency counts and percentages. The results indicated that academic corruption was prevalent, especially among male lecturers, and that it involves parents, students, lecturers and administrators. The study showed the main causes of academic corruption to be students' poor study habits (68.8%) and poor entry qualifications (66%). It further showed that the effects of this corruption include delayed absorption of graduates into the labour market (91.5%) and poor quality of university graduates (87%). Some recommendations based on these findings are made.

Keywords: Academic corruption; Quality assurance; Education administration

1 Introduction

1.1 Definition and Concept of Academic Corruption

Generally speaking, corruption is difficult to define. This is because it is too broad and definitions agreed upon are rare, except they are applicable to limited and well defined cases (Allen & Waite, 2003). While Osipian (2007) refers to corruption as a word coined from a Latin word '*corruptio*', which expresses wicked behaviour, putridity and rottenness; Heyneman (2004) defines corruption as "abuse of authority for personal or material gain". This definition was further supported by Olopoenia (1998), that all manifestations of corruption are motivated by the desire to use the instrumentality of office for personal gains, (e.g. for the benefit of the official, his relations, ethnic group or

friends) at the expense of the general good. In his submission, Dike (2003) refers to corruption as failing attitude of people towards certain expectations by society that connotes negativity and is evident in all aspects of society; economic, social, religious and educational. It involves bribes and other dishonest means for achieving particular disgraceful ends which is an indication of an ailing society (Milovanovic, 2001). Corrupt practices are also those behavioural practices that tend to break certain moral or social codes of conduct, administrative rule or procedures.

Corruption as it is perceived in academia is defined as a misuse of public office for private gain (Osipian, 2007). Although some aspects of academic corruption are seen in the various definitions, the definitions only cover the aspects of administrative services such as teaching service delivery without considering the other aspects of academic corruption in which students are involved. In view of this lapse and for the purpose of this paper, academic corruption includes all forms of corrupt practices taking place in the academia and which have a direct negative effect on the quality and standard of education (e.g. examination malpractices, bribery, extortion and favouritism).

Academic corruption is a problem requiring scholarly attention because it impedes qualitative university education. One other reason is because of the low quality performance variable ratings which were reported to be below average in Nigeria, in which Nigerian universities were not ranked among the best 20 in Africa (Okebukola, 2005). More importantly, academic corruption is a problem due to the public outcry of fallen standard of education both in the news and print media. For instance, the demand for gratification by teachers among others, have led to the fallen standard of education in Nigeria (Babalola, 2010). Unfortunately, none of the studies cited have carried out a research on the prevalence, causes and effects of academic corruption in the universities, with special reference to Rivers State universities, which is the gap that the present study sought to plug. The quality of academic staff recruited by universities in Nigeria was identified to be low, which invariably contributes to the poor quality of graduates (Moja, 2000). The essence of quality of education as it relates to teaching and learning involves education geared towards a desired level of performance. Some of these quality requirements include adequate curricular content, appropriate teaching methodologies, adequate number of well trained teaching staff, adequate and conducive infrastructural facilities, classroom operations and interactions in expected levels among others. Furthermore, the quality of education depends on the characteristics of candidates admitted into the institutions of learning, e.g. entry behaviour of the candidates, their career interests, mental ability, living and health status and socio-economic background (Babalola, 2010).

Investigating academic corruption in Rivers State Universities has become necessary because experience has shown that some undergraduate students are

unable to communicate effectively in simple English, like completing a personal data form. This calls for concern since graduates from the universities would eventually work in the industries and affect the Nigerian economy. Therefore, the prevalence, causes and effects of academic corruption should be well understood if any meaningful progress is to be made in improving the quality of graduates in Nigerian universities. Some of the problems posed by poorly trained graduates include devaluation of Nigerian university certificates, under-employment, unemployment and lack of skills for graduates to fit into the changing world of the economy and technology. For example, there is a decline in trust about some schools, people and the procedures they follow, whereby some students are awarded undeserved degrees (Easterbrook, 2002:32). Consequently, it would have severe and negative multiplier effect on the entire society (Oyetola, Adesola & Yahya, 2010). Although there is no comparable data among countries on the gravity or intensity of corruption in the academia, Nigeria needs to revamp its university education if she must be recognized as one of the strongest economies in the world by the year 2020.

One of the ways of ensuring quality especially in relation to the students is to undertake research in this area. For instance, it was reported that the results of 116,000 candidates in the Universities Matriculation Examination (UME), which qualifies students for university admission was cancelled in 2010 (Jubril, 2010). Perhaps, one of the reasons for the cancellation of the results could be examination malpractices. Hence, it was observed that students who indulge in acts such as examination malpractices are not academically sound (Okebukola, 2005).

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the prevalence, causes and effects of academic corruption in Rivers State Universities, Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Examine the prevalence of academic corruption among students and lecturers.
2. Ascertain the main causes of academic corruption among students and lecturers.
3. Determine the effects of academic corruption on the quality of graduates.

1.3 Research Questions

The study sought answers to the following questions:

1. Does academic corruption exist among students and lecturers?
2. What are the main causes of academic corruption?

3. What are the effects of academic corruption on quality of university graduates?

2 Methodology

The study employed quantitative data in ascertaining the prevalence, causes and effects of academic corruption on quality of university education. The descriptive survey research design was used for the study. The justification for using survey was to obtain the opinions of a subset of the population on the subject matter in order for it to be representative of the entire population. There are three universities in the area, and two were randomly selected for the study. These universities have a population of 32,416 students and 956 lecturers in Port Harcourt municipal, Rivers state of Nigeria. A sample of 400 respondents comprising 200 students and 200 lecturers were selected from four faculties (i.e. 50 respondents per faculty) in two universities in Port Harcourt municipal, Rivers State of Nigeria using proportionate random sampling technique. The participants were made up of 100 male and 100 female students, as well as 100 male and 100 female lecturers from each of the two universities. The justification for selecting 400 respondents for the study was because the study adopted the table of random sampling in which a sample size of 384 is considered adequate for a population of 10,000,000 (Universal Accreditation Course, 2003).

The instrument for data collection was a researcher-designed 'Prevalence, Causes and Effects of Academic Corruption Questionnaire'. The questionnaire consisted of two sections. Section A was for the respondents' personal data and Section B had 15 statements on the prevalence, causes and effects of academic corruption. The Yes/No pattern of response was used to mean agreement or disagreement to a statement. Validation of the instrument was ascertained by three lecturers in the field of Sociology, who confirmed the instrument as having face and content validity. Reliability of the instrument was done by administering the instrument twice on a sample of 40 respondents who were not part of the final study. The Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient for the two tests was established at 0.79, meaning that the instrument was consistent. The researcher obtained permission from the Deans of the four faculties where the participants were selected before administering the questionnaire. The data were analyzed using frequency counts and percentages. Percentage value of -60 and above was used as cut-off mark, which connotes high agreement with an item in the 'Yes' column.

3 Results

The results are presented in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1: Prevalence, Causes and Effects of Academic Corruption

Attribute of Academic Corruption	Students				Lecturers			
	Yes		No		Yes		No	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Prevalence								
Corruption is common in universities	116	58	84	42	142	71*	58	29
Involves parents, students, lecturers & administrators	158	79*	42	21	173	86	27	13
It exists among both the male and female gender	121	60*	79	39	139	69	61	31
It is higher in universities than other institutions	122	61*	78	39	146	73*	54	27
It is common among male than female lecturers	188	94*	12	6	163	81	30	19
Causes								
Poor entry qualification by students	86	43	114	57	178	89*	22	11
Compromising attitude of lecturers	152	76*	48	24	110	55	90	55
Poverty due to low salaries of lecturers	96	48	104	52	34	17	166	83
Poor study habits of students	84	42	116	58	191	95	09	0.5
Poor home background of students	139	69	61	30	108	54	92	46
Effects								
Poor quality of university graduates	167	83	33	7	184	92*	16	08
Low morals of students	143	71*	57	28	187	93	13	6.5
Inability of university graduates to perform tasks	26	13	174	87	116	58	84	42
Delayed absorption of graduates into labour market	189	94*	11	6	179	89	21	10
Inability of graduates to communicate effectively	143	71*	57	29	192	96*	08	0.4

*Significant

Table 1 indicates that in terms of prevalence, 116(58%) of students and 142(71%) of lecturers agreed that corruption is common in universities. It further shows that 158(79%) of students and 173 (86.5%) of lecturers agreed that parents, students, lecturers and administrators are all involved in academic corruption; 121(60.5%) of students and 139(69.5%) of lecturers indicated that it exists among both the male and female gender, 122(81%) of students and 143(76%) of lecturers indicated that it is higher in universities than other institutions; 188(94%) of students and 163(81.6%) of lecturers indicated that it is common among male than female lecturers. In terms of causes of corruption, 152(76%) of students indicated that corruption was caused by the compromising attitude of lecturers and 178(89%) of lecturers indicated poor study habits of students as the cause of academic corruption. Lastly, in respect to the effects of academic corruption, 167(83.5%) of students and 184(92%) of

lecturers were unanimous in agreeing that it contributes to poor quality of university graduates; low morals as indicated by 143(71.5%) of students and 187(93.5%) of lecturers; delayed absorption of graduates into the labour market as indicated by 189(94.5%) of students and 179(89.5%) of lecturers; and 143(71.5%) of students and 192(96%) of lecturers indicated inability of graduates to communicate effectively as one of the effects of academic corruption.

Table 2: Highest Scores on Prevalence, Causes and Effects of Academic Corruption

Attribute of Academic Corruption	%	Rank
Prevalence		
Academic corruption exists more among male than female lecturers	87.8	1 st
It involves parents, students, lecturers and administrators	82.7	2 nd
Causes		
Poor study habits of students	68.8	1 st
Poor entry qualification of students	66	2 nd
Effects		
Delayed absorption of graduates into the labour market	91.5	1 st
Poor quality of university graduates	87.8	2 nd

Note: % is average of students' and lecturers' choosing 'Yes' (in Table 1)

Table 2 shows that the two highest prevalence of academic corruption are that it exists more among male than female lecturers(87.8%) and it involves parents, students, lecturers and administrators(82.7%); two highest causes include poor study habits of students(68.8%) and poor entry qualification of students(66%). Lastly, two highest effects include delayed absorption of graduates into the labour market (91.5%) and poor quality of university graduates (87.8%).

4 Discussion, Conclusions and Recommendations

This study shows that academic corruption is commonplace in the universities as indicated by students and lecturers. The prevalence of academic corruption was found to exist more among male than female lecturers (87.85) and it involves parents, students, lecturers and school administrators (82.7%) as seen in Table 2. This shows a high degree of agreement by the two groups of respondents to the items. This finding is consistent with previous reports that parents pay bribes for their children's admission into universities; professors alter scores of students and teachers were involved in aiding and abetting students in examination malpractices (Osipian, 2007; Jubril, 2010). Similarly, the findings are in consonance with another report that points to university administration as the most corrupt and that both students and lecturers initiate bribe (Rostiashvili, 2004). In other words, the finding is in line with the

observation that corruption in the academia is one of the most prominent factors contributing to diminishing standard of university education (Kingston, 2011). The finding further corroborates the views that students alone should not take the blame because they were aided and abetted by lecturers (Jubril, 2010).

The highest causes of academic corruption were poor study habits of students (68.8%) and poor entry qualification of students (66%). The finding justifies earlier literature that the entry behaviour and mental ability of entrants could affect the quality of education and that bribe given to the university to facilitate students' admission by parents signifies their poor entry qualifications (Osipian, 2007; Babalola, 2010). In terms of the effects, delayed absorption of university graduates into the labour market (91.5%) and poor quality of university graduates (87.8%) were indicated as the main effects of academic corruption. This study confirms those of Okebukola (2005) who noted that students who engaged in paying bribes for good grades are not academically sound and Moja (2000) who reiterated that the quality of university products in Nigeria have dwindled from what it was in the early 1970s.

4.1 Limitations of the Study

Incidences of academic corruption border on the integrity and moral standards of individuals within a society. Thus, this study has some limitations. First, the data generated for this study were self-reported and, therefore vulnerable to deceit, ignorance and biases of the variables among the respondents. Second, there is the possibility that the outcome of the study could have been different if a larger sample size was used. Third, participants were selected from two universities in the area, limiting the study's applicability to universities outside Rivers State of Nigeria. Lastly, the population used belong to a culture where self disclosure is a problem since individuals hold secret what they regard to be personal matters.

4.2 Implications for Counselling

Preventive counselling strategies such as behaviour modification techniques should be used in view of these results by adopting the Cognitive Behaviour Modification (CBM) and video therapy. These two methods have been found to be useful in treating students who show tendency to engage in examination malpractice (Ossai & Omoni, 2007). Cognitive Behaviour Modification is a practice which involves the use of self talk or inner speech to change thoughts (cognition) and control overt actions (behaviour). The aim of using self talk is to replace irrational thinking with rational ones. According to Smith (2002), internalized self statements aid self control over adaptive or maladaptive behaviour. Video therapy on the other hand, involves visualizing relevant films

which are therapeutic in nature. In other words, it involves discussions on issues or images related to the resolution of a client's problem (Abuse Consultants, 2006). The success of video therapy in bringing about positive educational developments has been reported by Vitiello (2001). Adult counselling bureau should be established to cater for adult problems. This is necessary not only for academic staff alone but for the non-academic staffs who engage in bribe taking in order to admit students. Behavioural practice that is, playing a scene until a client discovers a new response that is appropriate for dealing with a situation is similar to this approach and should be applied. Punishment can also be used to reduce inappropriate behaviour. When used, the client must be ready with the help of the counsellor to describe how he/she would like to act. This is because maladaptive behaviour is learned and can be unlearned with gradual changes in behaviour (Akinade & Adedipe, 2004). Finally, this research calls for counsellors to evolve theories with which academic corruption can be properly explained in order to devise a better approach to its prevention and eradication.

4.3 Conclusion

The findings of this research are those that should be treated with the urgency they deserve if Nigerian universities will make appreciable progress in the near future in order to meet up with global challenges in higher education. Therefore, government and all stake holders must join hands in ensuring quality assurance, pursuant to the requirements for ranking Nigerian universities among the world class universities. Although university education should play a major role in actualizing the MDGs, academic corruption is a disadvantage in this direction. This is why academic corruption should be fought among lecturers and students while counselling is emphasized in bringing about quality management of staff and students so as to ensure ethical and moral uprightness which includes honesty, teaching right values and academic integrity, hard work and self discipline in order to ensure provision of quality university education in Nigeria

4.4 Recommendations

The following recommendations are made as a way forward:

1. Counsellors in the universities should organize seminars/symposia and workshops in enlightening the university community on good moral and ethical standards that help to prevent academic corruption especially based on examination ethics once in a semester, using orientation programmes. Invitation for such programmes should be extended to parents as well since they were identified as one of the people involved in academic corruption.

Emphasis should be placed on cognitive restructuring of behaviour and inculcating good morals in terms of good lecture delivery qualities, course content quality and staff-student relationships by learning essential skills as well as ethical behavioural standards. Family values should be emphasized, which used to be the pride of the African people in times past, especially on the part of parents.

2. Government should also strictly apply some anti-corruption measures in the universities such as the use of economic and legal means in addition to supplying lecture rooms and offices with surveillance cameras for monitoring activities of staff and students in the university.
3. In view of poor entry qualification of students as one of the causes of academic corruption, universities should ensure that only qualified students are admitted. This is a challenge for the Minister of Education to work closely with the vice chancellors of universities and for them to conduct more research on academic corruption. Counsellors should organize lectures for students, giving them tips on how to improve on their study habits. This can be integrated into the university orientation programmes or prior to the commencement of semester examinations.
4. In addressing the effects of academic corruption such as poor absorption of graduates into the labour market and general poor quality of graduates, the National Universities Commission should ensure that increase in student number be commensurate with staff and facilities.
5. Universities should be forced by NUC which ensures quality of education to comply with those criteria that enhance their qualification in the world ranking of universities such as number of students admitted, class size, number of academic staff with top terminal degrees such as PhD, student performance in tests, amongst others. Furthermore, designated committees should be formed for the purpose of monitoring lecturers' work in terms of ensuring that their course outlines are well covered for each semester and cross-checking entry of scores made by examination officers.
6. Staff and students caught engaging in bribery and extortion should be sent to the counsellors for group or individual counselling after facing disciplinary action.

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