

Students' Perception of Corrupt Practices among Nigerian Universities Lecturers

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The menace of corruption plaguing the Nigerian polity has slowly permeated the university system such that corrupt practices of diverse forms are perpetrated by university lecturers. The study therefore sought to ascertain the prevalence of corrupt practices among university lecturers as perceived by the undergraduates of the University of Calabar (UNICAL). The survey research design was utilized, one hypothesis was generated and using stratified as well as sample random sampling technique, a sample size of 300 was derived and a two part 20-item questionnaire was administered on them. Independent t-test was used to analyze the data and the result showed that both male and female undergraduates perceived prevalence of corrupt practices among their lecturers. Recommendation is that high quality staff with sufficient interest and aptitude should be employed through merit and criminal elements in the system be adequately punished.

Key Words: Corruption, indiscipline, decadence, immorality

Introduction

Every civilized society has its own values and norms and the aim of education is to inculcate these into their young ones. Such values include good character, integrity, honesty, hard work, and respect for constituted authority, order etc. However, as society changes, these values are not only watered down but malpractices of sorts have permeated it and the educational sector is not spared.

Corrupt practices refer to acts of abuse of diverse forms whereby persons take advantage of their positions, to engage in illegal, dishonest, unwholesome acts while rendering services. It refers to those behaviours or actions that work towards breaking certain moral or social codes of conduct or administrative rules (Tanzi 1996; Lawal, 2006). It is no longer news that Nigeria is one of the most corrupt countries of the world but the most unfortunate consequence of this is that the university system has not been spared from its corrupting influence since it is a microcosm of the larger society (Eze, 2006). It is also the lamentation of Okojie (2012) that corruption has reached a worrisome level in Nigeria and that the university system being an integral part of society cannot be insulated from the menace as the values that make for civility and positive development are gradual being eroded.

The university is looked upon as the Ivory Tower, the citadel of learning, producing men and women of integrity by men found worthy in character

and in learning. Unfortunately, the greed, the quest for material possession and rising to the top through cutting corners plaguing the larger society have crept in slowly and insidiously to this center of dignity that corrupt practices have become endemic therein (Odunaya & Olujunwon, 2010). The fact of the matter is that the quality of teachers is highly related to the quality of products; hence, the National Policy on Education (NPE) stated that no nation can rise above the quality of her teachers (FRN, 2004).

The teacher has been defined in part as a professional capable of imparting knowledge, attitude and skills to the learner (TRCN, 2002). That is to say, university teachers are expected to be of high caliber not just in knowledge but also, in skills, attitude and character. Also, the Academic Staff Union of Universities - ASUU (2006), has stated one of its principal objectives thus, "establishment and maintenance of a high standard of academic performance and professional practice". Yet, on the contrary, a culture of corrupt practices has evolved and reached endemic proportion. For instance, the study of Alutu and Alutu (2003) indicated that lecturers aid and abet examination malpractice. Indeed, corrupt practices manifest in diverse forms among lecturers. According to Galtima (2012) there is high level of corruption in the university system in terms of admission and other sharp practices.

There is also involvement in cultism, sale of inferior textual materials (handouts), admission and certificate racketeering, academic fraud and exam

malpractices (Kanno, 2004). Absenteeism, exploitation and extortion through forced sale of textual materials were perceived by students as the most prevalent corrupt practices among academics (Alutu & Alutu, 2006). Sexual harassment of female students by their male lecturers is also a very common occurrence and some of them carry on with impunity despite national attention and condemnation (Denga & Denga, 2004; Nwaopara, Ifebhor & Ohiwerei, 2008). Discrimination – social, political and ethnic is also posing a serious problem (Black & Poison 2007). According to Odetunde (2006) emphasis in education has shifted from hard work and excellence to success through political connections. Lecturers do not follow time table, they are rather busy conducting other businesses from their offices, exploiting students, both sexually and financially and being intellectually and academically lazy (Okoye, 2006).

Other forms of corrupt practices in the universities include certificate forgery, impersonation, plagiarism, gangsterism, rape, embezzlement of funds, unjust delay of payment of salaries and staff promotions and recycling of the criminal elements (Eze, 2006). Hence, parents, teachers, students, university administration, the government as well as the lecturers are all culpable of entrenching culture of corruption in the educational system (Olujunwon, 2001). The problem is therefore societal, systemic and individual, -students, teaching /non-teaching staff, parents and governmental. The government, through its neglect of the universities, poor funding and remuneration has inadvertently allowed these campus crimes to thrive. Though salaries and allowances have improved lately and university staff are far better off than their counterparts in other government establishments.

Corrupt practices are not necessarily new to the university system as the problem can be traced to the early days when lecturers pried open sealed envelopes to copy exam questions before sealing them back (Okojie, 2012). However, in recent years it has increased by leaps and bounds that it is almost wallowing up the system.

Apparently, the 60s', 70s' and up to the 80s' were the golden years of the education sector. The drift to decadence started in the 90s' and by the millennium years, it had snow-balled into this sorry state (Osawe, 2006). Increase in corruption in the larger society, the quest for material possession and the emphasis on paper qualification (certificates) instead of skills and lifelong learning, alongside admissions racketeering and lowered standards of admissions to accommodate the intellectually weak ones, plus the proliferation of part time programmes have all encouraged the influx into the universities candidates who are not materials for university

education (Odunaya & Olujunwon, 2010). Thus, such students become so desperate that they employ every available, albeit, unsavory means to succeed academically – bribing (sorting), sexual offers, impersonating, intimidation through cults etc. (Alutu & Alutu, 2006). In essence, they cheat their way through undergraduate and even graduate programmes. Unscrupulous and greedy lecturers with the quest to live large like some categories of people in the larger society who are forever flaunting their ill-gotten wealth, take advantage of these weaknesses, to exploit and extort.

Gone are the days when lecturers were employed strictly on merit, when search teams went to the uttermost of the world, to recruit the brightest and the best, who had the interest, aptitude and acumen. Nowadays, employment is by way of nepotism, favouritism, ethnicity and political party patronage and more often, it is the intellectually weak ones who gain from such connections (Hallack & Poisson, 2007). According to Obijiofor (2012), favoritism imperils the appointment of high quality staff and give preference to the appointment of second rate ones. Some of whom are the very ones who engaged in corrupt practices when they were students, who neither have the intellectual capacity nor the interest in academia, it is rather a major opportunity to enrich themselves. Hence, they continue with their cult activities which they started as undergraduate, to harass and intimidate others to submission, sexually harass young females with impunity since they came in through god-fathers, they are absent from class most of the time, they exhort, exploit and engage in diverse forms of sharp and corrupt practices.

Indeed, lecturers are known to commit untold intellectual atrocities and yet go unpunished (Alutu & Alutu, 2006). Consequently, students hardly know right from wrong anymore. For instance, cheating and impersonation in exams is now an acceptable norm to them because of this culture of impunity. The indication is that they are operating at the morality level of 5-year olds, the punishment and obedience orientation, first stage of Kohlberg (1986) stages of moral development. That is to say, as long as one is not caught and punished that particular action is not wrong. The situation is becoming more like academia without learning and character who in turn produce individuals devoid of learning and character. The poser therefore is, how pervasive are corrupt practices among lecturers? How are the corrupt practices of university lecturers perceived by their undergraduate students?

The purpose of the study therefore is to ascertain the prevalence of corrupt practices among university lecturers as perceived by their undergraduate students. To achieve this purpose, one hypothesis was formulated.

Hypothesis I: There is no significant difference between male and female undergraduate students in their perception of corrupt practices among university lecturers.

Methodology

The descriptive survey research design was utilized and the area of study is the University of Calabar UNICAL, Cross River State located in the Niger Delta region, within the south-south geopolitical zone of Nigeria. Calabar, the state capital is predominantly a civil service town, alongside with fishing, farming and petty trading, where Christianity forms the dominant religion. The population of study consist of all undergraduates of UNICAL. Using the stratified random sampling technique, 3 out of 10 faculties were selected, then departments within the selected faculties were selected. Undergraduates in selected departments totaling 4480 were sampled using the table of random numbers and the simple random sampling technique and a sample size of 300 was derived, 154 male and 146 females with age range of 18 to 25.

The instrument was of two parts - part 1&2. Part one require respondents bio data while part 2 was 20 - item questionnaire titled Corrupt Practices of Lecturers Scale (CPLS) and it consisted of statements the code of conduct for teachers stipulated by the Teacher Registration Council of Nigeria (2005). Responses were placed on the Likert Scale – Strongly Agree (4) Agree (3) Disagree (2) and strongly disagree (1). A maximum score of 80 indicated high level of corrupt practices while the minimum score of 20 reflected low level or absence of corrupt practices among lecturers.

Items of the instrument were validated through scrutiny by other experts in psychology and test and measurement. A test-retest was conducted on 60 undergraduates outside the sampled pool and the Cronbach Alpha Coefficient reliability estimate was employed to establish the reliability of the instrument. A reliability index of 0.69 was derived. The questionnaire was distributed to the participants in the classroom, by the researcher and two assistants and were retrieved on the spot. The data collected were coded and analyzed using independent t-test statistics and the result is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Independent t-test comparisons of male and female undergraduates' perception of corrupt practices among lecturers

Gender	N	\bar{x}	SD	t-cal
Male	154	61.78	11.11	1.069
Female	146	63.26	12.75	

P > .05; df = 298; t-crit = 1.96

The result on table 1 shows that there is no significant difference between male and female undergraduates in their perception of corrupt practices among lecturers since the calculated t-value (1.069) is lower than the critical t (1.96) at 0.05 level of significance. That is to say both male and female undergraduates, perceive high level of corrupt practices among their lecturers. The null hypothesis is therefore not rejected.

Discussion

The results of the study overwhelmingly point to the fact that corrupt practices exist among university lecturers. Both male and female undergraduates had mean scores of over 60 out of a maximum score of 80 (males – \bar{x} = 61.78; females \bar{x} = 62.26). The most prevalent practices as perceived by the student are (1) extortion through levies and imposition of textual materials (2) absenteeism (3) bribery, especially after the exams and (4) sexual harassment of the females. Hence the perception of both male and female undergraduates is that many of their lecturers engage are corrupt practices. This corroborates the findings of Alutu & Alutu (2006) which indicated that exploitation and extortion through sale of handouts as well as absenteeism were the most prevalent corrupt practices among lecturers as perceived by their students. Also Okoye (2006) stated that lecturers would rather be busy conducting other businesses in their offices, exploit student sexually and financially than attend their class. It is also not surprising that sexual harassment is perceived to be prevalent because according to Nwaopara et al (2008), some lecturers still engage in this obnoxious practice with impurity even inspite of its national attention and condemnation. This could be attributed to the fact that these category of lecturers lack adequate academic preparation, the commitment and the zeal for the job because as Obijiofor (2012) stated, through favoritism, preference is given to the appointment of second rate staff, to the peril of the high quality ones who would give dedicated services.

Counselling Implication

The result of the study has indicated a preponderance of sharp and corrupt practices among lecturers in university campuses. This is rather a negative trend, that the teacher who is the role model of his students, engages in unwholesome activities with impunity, is detrimental to societal order and stability as well as the pursuit of scientific, technological and human resources development of the country. Such corrupt practices undermine not only the growth and

development of the students themselves but also the legitimacy and tenability of the degrees/certificates issued by such universities. Guidance counsellor should therefore rise to the challenge posed by this menace through the Counselling Association of Nigeria (CASSON) at various levels.

Frequency of counselling programmes in the form of orientation, workshops, seminars and career talks should be increased and the campaign against corruption practices in schools should be mainstreamed into these programmes, right from the secondary schools. Also in order to deal with the corruption monster, counsellors should solicit the collaboration of religious organizations such as Muslim Women Association, Christian Women Association of Nigeria, Fellowship of Christian Students and other secular organizations such as All Nigeria Conference of Principals of Secondary Schools (ANCOPS) and committee of Vice Chancellors.

The meetings of Parents Teachers Association (PTA) of secondary schools should serve as fora for further sensitisation against corrupt practices since the future of their children and their society are at stake. The collaboration should also extend to the governing councils of universities to fashion out modalities for containing corrupt practices among university lecturers.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Corruption is a major disciplinary issue facing the Nigerian polity and the university being a microcosm of the large society has not been spared, as corrupt practices have slowly and insidiously infiltrated the university system in diverse forms. The most prevalent of these, based on the findings of this study are extortion, absenteeism, bribery and sexual harassment. In acknowledgment of this ugly disciplinary menace, government has put in place certain measures which include, on the spot inspection and monitoring of universities' activities, closure of illegal programmes before any verification of academic programmes and institutional accreditation exercise by the National Universities Commission (NUC); and the setting up of the anti-corruption units in the universities.

All these are steps in the right direction but the government still needs to demonstrate the will, sincerity, transparency as well as the commitment to:

- Merit, through which high quality lecturers who because of their interest and acumen would be dedicated to their duty. Quota is commendable for equity and fairness but let it be the most qualified who are used to fill the slot for each locality.

Nepotism, favoritism and ethnicity cannot yield the best quality of academic staff.

- Dole out severe punishment to erring academics and other staff members without delay, to serve as deterrent to other members of the community. Recycling criminal element in the system because of ethnic and other considerations only help to enshrine the culture of corrupt practices in the university.

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