



Academic Corruption: A Bane of Higher Education Leadership Goals Achievement in Nigeria

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Abstract

Indisputably, the education sector in Nigeria is deeply enmeshed in all sort of corruption and this has remained a source of worry to all those who have quality education outcome at heart. The paper examined the implication of corrupt practices in the academia especially at the tertiary level on the achievement of school leadership goals. The paper succinctly viewed the concepts: academic corruption and educational leadership; the goals of educational leadership, the forms of academic corruption prevalent in the system, the levels of academic corruption, the causes and possible measures of control. The paper found that greed, poor education, lack of morals, weak leadership system and love of material things are the causes of corruption in higher educational institutions in Nigeria. The paper therefore concluded that educational leadership goals can be achieved if culprits of corrupt practices are punished and; suggested that: leaders of higher educational institutions, government and other organizations should provide regular character building opportunities in form of workshops, conferences, seminars and symposia to discourage all sorts of corruption among staff and students; periodic staff evaluation or appraisal basically on character elements such as morality, integrity, authenticity, honesty and accountability among others and; leaders of higher educational institutions should strive to lead by example for their subordinates to emulate.

Keywords: Academic Corruption, Leadership, Goals, Achievement.

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INTRODUCTION

The school system is one of the valued social institutions designed to pass on to the future generations (the students) a better society through, a better school system for educational goals achievement. The achievement of educational goals at all levels centres on students' academic success. Educational leadership comes in to play pivotal role in the realization of educational

goals generally by influencing the motivations and capabilities of the teachers, non-teaching staff, school climate and environment (Kapur, 2018). Educational leaders lay much emphasis upon students' achievement as they are involved in the formulation of challenging, caring and supportive environments that are conducive for student learning. In other words, school leaders develop and support teachers, create conducive working conditions; allocate school resources rationally as well as formulate appropriate organizational policies and procedures.

Leithwood et al (2004) identified educational leadership goals to include among others as: creating and sustaining a competitive school, empowering staff members to be involved in decision making, providing instructional guidance, developing and implementing strategic improvement plans, supporting, evaluating, developing teacher quality, goal-setting, assessment and accountability, strategic financial and human resource management and collaboration with other schools. Invariably, educational leadership as a form of academic management and quality control in the educational system cannot achieve its set goals and intended outcomes as mentioned above in a situation where academic corruption is the order of the day. In this context, academic corruption is the abuse of entrusted power or position by staff and students for private gain resulting in poor education outcomes.

The contemporary higher education institutions all over the world are consistently plagued with the menace of academic corruption and this in many ways has impacted negatively on the achievement of higher education goals hence the need for corrupt free higher education institutions in Nigeria is necessary.

Regrettably, the researcher has observed with dismay the issues of bribery, extortion, embezzlement of funds, fraud, exerting influence on official decisions for personal interest and nepotism. More worrisome is the fact that these issues of corruption in the school system occur across offices and hierarchies politically, administratively and at the classroom level thereby making them difficult to handle.

As it is at the leadership hierarchy, educational leaders play politics of nepotism and favouritism in staff recruitment, award of contracts, appointments and; allocation of courses and other educational resources. At the administrative hierarchy, admission racketeering (buying and selling of admission), request for money to sort and treat files by staff of higher education institutions is a common phenomenon in the system. Sadly, the bulk of academic corruption is more pronounced at the classroom level where lecturers indulge in grade for sex, money and other material gifts, extortion of money based on purchase of text books and handouts, unnecessary favouritism in the award of marks due to various reasons, leakage, of examination questions/answers, rewriting of examinations in the offices or homes and writing of graduating students' projects for money among many others are rampant.

The study on academic corruption in the higher education system in Nigeria is well informed and timely because any institution of higher learning that encourages corruption compromises the timely achievement of its set goals. Based on this back drop, the study strives to explore the negative implications of academic corruption on the realization of educational leadership goals in the tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

The Concept of Educational Leadership

The school system is one of the valued social institutions designed to pass on to future generations (the young ones) a better society, a better education system devoid of corruption and; to achieve general purpose of education in the society. The task to guide the functioning of educational processes for the realization of educational goals in the society has witnessed notable paradigm shifts. Gunter (2004) revealed that the labels used in defining this process have changed over time from educational administration to 'educational management' and more recently to 'educational leadership' or 'school leadership'. For this reason, educational leaders often share a common mission and responsibility of steering a highly complex organization (the school) to unprecedented levels of students learning achievement. Based on this, different leadership scholars have put up in a bid to define the concept, a good number of definitions to educational leadership. These groups of scholars in their different thought patterns perceived educational leadership as: a group of people in positions of authority and influence in the school organizational leadership structure- the ministers, commissioners of education, chairmen and directors of education; a process involving activities and actions to influence individuals and groups in the school setting for the achievement of educational set goals-organizing and directing talents and energies of teachers, students and parents to achieve common educational goals and; as an academic discipline in which learners enroll into and offer causes leading to acquisition of academic degrees and certificates in educational leadership.

On this note, Adiele (2020) defined educational leadership as a conglomeration of leadership positions which people occupy singly or collectively in pursuit of divergent educational goals and objectives by influencing the actions of group members towards the attainment of specified educational goals. However, educational leadership having more to itself than being in position of authority and exercising some powers attached to one's office or an academic discipline, Pont et al. (2008) posited that able leaders should create good team atmosphere that would allow programmes to grow and flourish. Therefore, to achieve the goals of higher education system in Nigeria through purposeful leadership, the higher education institutions should be sanitized of all forms of academic corruption.

THE GOALS OF HIGHER EDUCATION LEADERSHIP

The goals of higher education in Nigeria as spelt out by the policy are: to contribute to national development through high level relevant manpower training; to develop and inculcate proper values for the survival of the individual and society; to develop the intellectual capability of individuals to understand and appreciate their local and external environment; to promote and encourage scholarship and community services.

Unarguably policy formulation, implementation and students' learning outcomes are at the core of higher education leadership practice. In essence the goal of educational leadership in higher education institutions is to improve the quality of education and the education system itself by uniting the talents of forces of teaching and non-teaching staff, council and senate members as well as students union bodies. Kapur (2018) had also recognized that leading to the empowerment of subordinates to make significant decision is regarded to be the primary goal of

educational leadership. However, Leithwood et al. (2004) identified the following goals of higher education leadership:

Goal Setting, Assessment and Accountability

The leaders of higher education especially the council, the senate and the vice chancellors management team are charged with formulating and assessing the pros and cons of the institutional goals and ensuring that they are achieved, when the goals are formulated, the leaders make appropriate efforts that would lead to the accomplishment of the set goals. It is necessary that leaders of higher education institutions their responsibilities and ensure they lead professionally to achieve set goals.

Strategic Financial and Human Resource Management

The human resource management practice is one of the fundamental aspects of organizational leadership. The development of the ability to exhibit prudence in financial management by all those in leadership positions in the tertiary institution has been the dream of higher education leaders. The leaders are to be provided with training and developmental opportunities (Pont et al., 2008).

Developing and Implementing Strategic and School Improvement Plans

One of the goals of leading the tertiary education institution is to put into practice the school improvement plans. The higher education leadership is often confronted with the moves to develop the skills associated with productive planning and implementation of set objectives.

Providing Instructional Guidance

In higher education institution leadership, instructional guidance is an important goal set for leaders in every programme undertaken by students. This is to ensure sustainable advancement in student learning.

Creating and Sustaining a Competitive School

This is a goal for higher education institutions as they compete for better position in school ranking scale. It is the responsibility of leaders of higher education institutions in its operations so as to be able to maintain a good status within the school community (Kapur, 2018).

Instructional Guidance

Provision of instructional guidance is an important leadership goal in the educational system especially the higher institutions by ensuring the advancement of student learning. In pursuit of this goal, leaders of tertiary institutions adopts distinctive framework for assessing the works of lecturers in the formulation of professional standards and their use for purposes of continuing professional development and evaluation of the entire staff.

Supporting, Evaluating and Developing Teacher Quality

This goal is very important in the leadership of higher education institution. The leaders have to be capable enough to adopt the teaching programmes to the local requirements of the teachers. The leaders have to implement measures to promote teamwork amongst the teachers and get engaged in staff monitoring evaluation and professional development. The staff should be trained effectively to possess the knowledge about how to meet the needs of the students, Pont et al. (2008) apathy stated that the major goal of educational leaders is to support evaluate and contribute in the development of stage quality.

THE CONCEPT OF ACADEMIC CORRUPTION AND FRAUD

One of the major objectives of academic institutions is to achieve the highest standards of teaching and learning. Consequently, they strive to prohibit academic corruption and frauds such as cheating and all other forms dishonest practices in the process. Then, what is academic corruption? The word corruption originated from Latin word ‘*corrumpere*’ which means ruin or literally to break into pieces. Engaging in corruption can break or destroy someone’s trustworthiness and good reputation with others. It expresses wicked behaviour, putridity and rottenness; Heyman (2004) defined corruption as abuse of authority for personal or material gain, whereas (Osippian, 2007) perceived it to be misuse of public office for private gain, Olopoenia (1998) reiterated that all manifestations of corruption are motivated by the desire to use the instrumentations of office for personal gains. Corruption has been defined generally as acts of misconduct perpetrated for personal benefit and to the detriment of the goals and objectives of an organization. Corruption transcends offering money and it goes beyond what only politicians engage in, this menace has crept into inner precincts of our citadels of learning hence tagged “academic corruption”.

Kasozi (2014) viewed academic corruption to include all selfish acts that are contrary to the just and equitable delivery of higher education resulting from the moral impurity of staff and students that deviate from the expected ideal behaviours. In this context academic corruption comprises Plagiarism, fabrication, deception, cheating, bribery, sabotage, professional misconduct on the part of lecturers, impersonation on the part of students, the use of institutional authority or name for personal gain in the process of higher education delivery and reception. Mohammed (2021) had described corruption in the school system as any act that is inconsistent with the mission of an academic institution in providing the highest standards of education and learning. The manifestation of academic corruption are manifold and range from “petty corruption” in the form of bribery for admission, good grades, graduation or the hiring of teachers to “grand corruption” by political actors embezzling funds allocated is public procurement projects, such as the construction of schools. Adedimeji (2013) had viewed academic corruption as that which involves all forms of deviation from justice, honesty, fairness, probity, impartiality and discipline expected from institutions of learning.

In most cases, academic corruption is perceived to cover only the aspect of administrative and teaching services without consideration to other aspects of academic corruption in which the students are involved. Because of this, Dimkpa (2011) described academic corruption as all forms of corrupt practices taking place in the academia which have a direct negative effect on the quality and standard of education such as examination malpractices, bribery, extortion and favouritism. However, Kirya (2019) argued that not all forms of fraud in education amount to

corruption giving an instance that a student who cheats in examination without the involvement of a staff would only be guilty of fraud but not corruption. In whichever guise or nomenclature, academic corruption or fraud has serious negative implications for higher education institutions and the society at large. It is a problem begging for leadership attention.

LEVELS OF ACADEMIC CORRUPTION

Corruption remains one of the common social problems bedeviling all sectors of the national economy including education in Nigeria. The issue now is, where does the incident of corruption occur in the academia? Corruption in education system occurs at various levels as rightfully identified in Meier (2004) as political, administrative and classroom levels.

Government Policy Formulation Level Corruption

Corruptions at this level in education system occur while making decisions on how educational resources are allocated to fund educational budgets. Meier (2004) argued that such decisions are often biased along ethnic lines and can transcend to political blackmail. The policy makers especially the government in power and its ministers and commissioners often rule out areas of the polity that fail to vote them in to power.

Decisions on education policy may be made politically through informal networks of power, outside the appropriate organs and institutions, when politicians exercise undue influence over decision making in the sector. This can affect, for instance, decisions on whether to implement free universal education, engage in private-public partnerships, or build new schools, as well as decisions about government funding for schools and even about curriculum content. Sometimes governments make policy choices that are not feasible, for political reasons. For instance, universal primary education capitation grants may be insufficient and lead to schools charging fees to meet their costs. Political decisions about allocation of funds may lead to wastage when they result in unnecessary projects such as building schools in areas that already have many schools, leaving poor areas underserved. This worsens inequality and undermines equitable development. When public policy decisions consistently and repeatedly serve private interests rather than the public interest, this type of corruption is referred to as 'policy capture' (Kirya, 2019).

Central Ministerial Level Corruption

At this level abounds grand corruption which involves diversion of funds meant for procurement, construction and of funds intended for allocation to lower levels of the system (Meier, 2004). Funds for higher education institutions are often siphoned by politicians and corrupt ministerial officials. This second order corruption in education system occurs at the commencement of the educational policies implementation stage as observed in the state and federal ministries and the local or zonal school boards. Funds and materials meant for schools are oftentimes diverted for private use.

Administrative Level Corruption

The corruption at this level occupies in a descending order the third tier of the corrupt practices in the academia. At this level lesser corrupt practices are seen being carried out by school administrators who embezzle or divert petty cash meant for daily running of the school for personal use; taking bribes from subordinates to secure opportunity, favours or avoid punishment. Here also, academic corruption occurs openly during staff promotion and appointments.

School level Corruption

Academic corruption at this level appears to be more common and in various forms. This is probably because; it involves the key stakeholders in the system (staff, students and parents). Corruption practices here are instructional service delivery related. Examination malpractices, leaking of examination question papers, undue award of marks for monetary gains, mutilation of exam score for monetary gains, awarding of certificates to undeserving students, admission racketeering, sex for grade and grade for money among many others are some of the corrupt practices found at this level.

FORMS OF ACADEMIC CORRUPTION IN HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

In its generic sense, corruption in the educational system constitutes every form of unfair practices within an academic environment which undermines academic integrity and honesty thereby providing undue advantage to whoever that is involved in it. Damte (2018) had observed that academic corruption does not only involve the students in the school system. This perhaps suggests that academic corruption can be perpetuated by every stakeholder in the educational system especially in the institutions superintended by weak and character deficient leadership. Academic corruption can manifest itself in the following forms:

Financial frauds

This form of corruption specifically involves illegal, unjust, unapproved and unwarranted exchange for money or charge on any educational service rendered which are not included in the official receipt of the school.

Moral Corruption

Moral decadence has been the order of the day in our university system. Moral corruption here refers to indulgence of any educational stakeholder in any act capable of demeaning one's sense of morality. Sexual relationship between students and teachers and indecent dressing among the female students to lure male teachers into sexual acts are considered moral corruption. Other forms of moral corruption in the educational system are sexual harassment, sex for grade, rape etc. Sextortion according to the International Association of Women Judges is an aspect of moral corruption in the school system whereby sex rather than money is the currency of the bribe. Sexual harassment of mostly female students, faculty, and staff by male lecturers in the

universities system is considered a serious problem in the higher education institutions in Nigeria.

Admission Frauds: This form of corruption during admission process of new students whereby university officials and entrance examination bodies' officials are bribed to secure admissions for students. Kirya (2019) accused parents to be well-known actors and business people promoting admission frauds. Oftentimes, corruption of this kind begins with officials of the entrance examination bodies who are bribed by candidates to leak test materials in advance, sell examination questions, facilitate grade improvements and provide impersonators for entrance examinations which give the candidates involved unfair advantage to earn pass marks on entrance examination.

On campuses, admission frauds are observed among university officials in the admission unit who receive bribes to secure admission admissions for new and prospective students; favouritism and nepotism are the order of the day. Admission fraud in higher education is common and has the tendency of daunting the image and reputation of officers involved and the university.

Instructional Delivery or Teaching frauds

This kind of fraud in the higher education system is usually regarded as academic dishonesty because; it involves those unfair practices that go on in the process of delivering classroom lessons. Examination malpractices, mutilation or changing of examination scores, undue award of marks for monetary gains, reseating of examinations for financial benefits, leaking of examination question papers, plagiarism and essay milling among others are some of the fraudulent practices found among staff and students in the process of instructional service delivery in the higher education system.

Teacher absenteeism is another corrupt practice in the process of instructional delivery in the school system. It has been considered a serious and wide-spread problem in many countries including Nigeria. Another corrupt practice by teachers involves educational materials: lecturers often ask students to purchase their books and failure to buy may result to failing the course.

Teacher Management / Professional Conduct related Frauds

Corrupt practices in this category in the higher education system are observed in the appointment and promotion of teaching and non-teaching staff; allocation of courses and sundry assignments are based on personal relationship with superiors (HODs, Deans, etc.). Nepotism and favouritism of this manner has been an issue of mockery to meritocracy and decency in teaching profession. Consequently, nepotistic and tribal tendencies of school leaders have negatively affected the conducts of subordinates who go about engaging in all manners of corruption ranging from absenteeism, lateness to class, extortion, sextortion among many others with impunity.

CAUSES OF CORRUPTION IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN NIGERIA

Academic corruption exists in different forms and levels in the school system and its causative factors are not far-fetched. Dimkpa (2011) identified the following as major causes of academic corruption in higher education institutions:

- **Students' poor study habit:** Students' inability to develop and maintain a good study habit has been considered a serious factor for academic corruption mostly among students at the secondary and tertiary levels. Dimkpa (2011) revealed that 40% of Adult Nigerians never always read a non-fiction book from cover to cover after leaving school, and that an average Nigerian reads less than one book per year. This invariably influences the young school leavers from secondary schools to proceed to the university with a lazy mindset that reading is a stressful activity and may resort to cheating to pass examinations.
- **Greed:** This is one of the major causes of corruption among staff and students in the university system. It is greed that would cause educational leaders in the tertiary institutions to involve in bribery, embezzlement of funds, admission racketeering, 'sorting' among many other forms of corruption (Edeh, 2020).
- **Poor education:** Lack of proper education is one of the major causes of academic corruption especially among members of higher education community in Nigeria. Education in this context does not necessarily mean the ability to read and write only but comprises the acquisition of good morals and the knowledge that good name is better than money and material things. If educational leaders, staff and students are morally educated they would know the damage or harm corruption does on the reputation their institution.
- **Lack of morals:** Corruption is a serious issue in our higher educational institutions today. Morals are very essential in the teaching and learning process as they are focused on achieving the highest standards of excellence and learning. The lack of personal moral and ethical standards are one of the three categories of factors that promote corruption. The university must fully form and develop the moral vision and purpose of its staff and students.
- **Weak leadership system:** One of the root causes of academic corruption in Nigeria's educational institution is lack of honest and exemplary leadership. Studies have shown that when leaders are ready to sacrifice themselves, show commitment to their official assignments, develop a patriotic spirit and foresight, put the interest of their institutions first, their subordinates are unlikely to engage in corrupt acts. However, it is obvious that corrupt leaders will likely produce corrupt followers as Chinweizu (1995) reiterated that absence of political will (strong leadership) to do what is both right and necessary encourages corruption. Weak leaders lack the moral right and will to institute discipline or set up programmes or measures to combat corruption because they are involved.
- **Love of material things:** Inordinate love for material possessions and crave indulgence in frivolous and ostentatious lifestyle that are very common in the Nigerian society today, have negatively influenced the school system especially the higher institutions. In as much as it is natural and moral for individuals to desire material things, when it becomes excessive and inordinate, it is bad. Students who have already developed a lukewarm attitude to learning strive to cut corners to succeed academically while staff crazes to make money and material things illegally.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE CORRUPTION IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

Academic corruption in any guise has long lasting negative consequences on the image of organization, individuals involved and the society. However, Kirya (2004) outlined the implications of the corruption in present day higher educational institutions as:

- Corruption ruins the reputation of universities involved
- It blocks admission access for applicants who do meet requirements.
- Corruption wastes money spent on students who are not capable academically.
- Corruption threatens public health, safety and well-being when unqualified and incompetent graduates in professional fields are employed in construction, medical practice and other functions.
- Corruption and fraudulent practices in higher education break the link between personal effort and anticipation of reward.
- Corruption reinforces the norm that the ‘end justifies the means’ which can further erode integrity and cohesion in the wider society.
- Corruption and fraud make staff and students believe that personal success is attained not through merit and hard work but by cutting corners and subverting the system.
- Corruption makes examination and degrees obtained worthless.
- Corruption threatens the legitimacy of universities as knowledge producing and training institutions
- Corruption threatens equal access, quantity and quality of education.

MEASURES FOR CONTROLLING ACADEMIC CORRUPTION IN HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN NIGERIA

The possible measures for dealing with academic corruption in the higher educational institutions in Nigeria are:

Establish school environment that values integrity

Lack of integrity and other ethical issues have been identified as a major cause of corruption in tertiary educational institutions in Nigeria. Therefore, creating awareness, appropriate policies, programmes and procedures on academic integrity on the campuses will go a long way in re-orienting members of the school community especially those involved in academic fraud. A school environment established on the culture of integrity and respect for moral values keep both staff and students abreast of what is right or wrong.

Initiate proper system of social control

Instituting a process of regulating the conducts of staff and students’ to prevent negative deviance or tendencies and preserve the principles and values of the school stands to be a potential measure of dealing with academic frauds in schools for instance, shaming individuals who engage in crime by exposing them through public media such as radio or newspaper.

Ensure accountability and transparency

This refers to embracing accountability and transparency culture as a measure for promoting openness to reduce frauds in the school system. Instituting such culture of control and good auditing system is strong measure of preventing employees, students and other members of the community from diverting school resources (Kostadinova, 2012). Smulovitz and perzzotti (2012) reiterated that transparency and accountability play a key role in creating social mobilization against and awareness of corrupt behaviours.

Institute well designed governance structure in the school

Initiating a formidable framework of rules and regulations to prevent, detect and even prosecute corrupt practices will serve as a reliable measure to curb academic corruption among stakeholders in the system.

CONCLUSION

The need for a corrupt-free education system has been the challenge of school leaders especially at the tertiary level. Corruption is a notable barrier in a bid to achieving educational leadership goals in Nigeria. The study therefore, concluded that educational leadership goals in higher institutions are achievable if culprits of corrupt practices are punished.

Recommendations

- Leaders of higher educational institutions, government and other organizations should provide regularly, opportunities for character building in form of workshops, conferences, seminars and symposia on how to discourage all sorts of corruption among staff and students.
- Leaders of higher education should endeavor to uphold character development as a panacea for achieving corrupt-free educational institutions.
- There should be periodic staff evaluation or appraisal basically on character elements such as morality, integrity, authenticity, honesty and accountability among others.
- Those who occupy leadership positions in the higher institutions should show leadership by example for their subordinates to emulate.
- There should be strong and reward punishment system to checkmate corrupt practices among staff and students.

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