

CORRUPTION IN THE NIGERIAN EDUCATION SECTOR: CAUSES AND REMEDIES

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses attention on the causes and effects of corruption on the education sector in Nigeria. It also proffers solutions to the menace. Indeed, the standard of education in the country has been negatively affected by corrupt practices manifested by school administrators, educators, students, students' parents and government agencies. Some of the identified causes of corruption were poverty, poor remuneration for educators and moral decadence among students and educators. The foregoing negative inclinations have a number of unfavourable effects; the most pronounced among them is lowering of the standard and quality of education in the country. The methodology utilized in the study is descriptive analysis. This study recommended, among other things, that quality assurance unit should be established to monitor teaching, admission and examination practices in all Nigerian schools.

Keywords: Corruption, Education, Education sector, Education standard

INTRODUCTION

Education plays a vital role in human life. Indeed, it is the main source of knowledge. Without knowledge, we cannot make progress (Oyelade, 2009). Kirya (2019) construed education as a driver of development. According to him, it is a fundamental human right and a major tool for engineering personal and social development.

It is against the background of the importance of education to human development that the Nigerian governments have come up with series of educational policies. Such policies were designed to streamline and invigorate activities in the three levels of schools in the country, namely primary, secondary and tertiary institutions. Consequent upon the huge investment in education, it has been the expectation of

policy makers and the government that the investment would bring about high-quality graduates, disciplined students as well as transparent school administrators and teachers.

The awesome expectations above have, over the years, remained a mere dream (Olopete, 2017; Onwuka, 2009). This is because a moral virus called corruption has crept into the Nigerian educational system and destroyed the credibility expected of our institutions of learning. Sadly, the expected standard of behaviour has been bastardized by those entrusted with operations in the education sector for their own personal gain to the detriment of others and the system. Thus, it is commonplace to find school administrators obtaining bribes for admission (Osipian, 2013), getting involved in bid-rigging in the procurement of textbooks and school supplies and also taking bribes from students to falsify examination results. Furthermore, “sex for mark” syndrome has become the order of the day in Nigerian tertiary institutions (Erunke, 2019; Bamigbola, 2019).

The endemic prevalence of corruption in the education sector, especially in Nigeria, has necessitated this study. The study seeks to achieve two major objectives, as stated below;

- i. To uncover the causes of corruption in the education sector.
- ii. To proffer lasting solutions to the identified challenges in the education sector.
- iii.

In order to achieve the objectives of this study, data were collected through secondary sources. To this end, relevant data were gathered from internet facilities, textbooks and journals.

Meaning of Corruption

Corruption has become an inevitable evil in the Nigerian society today. It is on this note that the term corruption has been defined as any form of action or omission enacted by a member of an organization by using the advantages of the position he occupies at the moment to violate the rules, regulations, norms and ethics of the organization for personal or selfish interest at the detriment of the organization or other parties involved (Azelema, 2008)

Corruption also means violation of established rules and regulations for personal aggrandizement or gains. Being a polymorphous issue in our society today, it has also been defined as deviation from the moral values and ethical standards of the society which needs reversal in all spheres of our national life. These immoral and unethical behaviours are capable of causing decline and decay in all sectors of the economy. In addition, the Catholic Secretariat Forum of Nigeria (2002) says corruption may be explained as gratification by an official person receiving anything in cash or kind in favour or disfavour of a person or group of individuals in the course of discharging his

official duties in an organization.

Educational corruption depicts a situation whereby members of an academic institution infringe on the rules, regulations and ethical standard of the institution for selfish reasons leading to production of low-quality graduates or professionals.

Empirical Framework

Corruption has been identified to be a major roadblock to economic growth and development of every nation of the world, most especially among the developing countries. Educational corruption was viewed by many scholars as a phenomenon that has contributed negatively to the educational achievement of countries. Today, corruption has turned many of our organizations or institutions to be a fertile land for potential frauds.

Pellegrini and Gerlagh (2004) analyzed the direct and indirect channels of the effect of corruption on economic growth. Their findings suggest that corruption retard and slow down growth and development of Nigeria through its effects on investment and trade policies. Their points of view were corroborated when looking at the rapid increase in the number of white elephant projects recorded from 1983 till date most especially under civilian administration in Nigeria. For instance, during civilian administration, political office holders use to divert money budgeted for project 'A' to 'B' for their selfish interest. It is on this note that many of our tertiary institutions are having many uncompleted projects which ought to have been adding great value to the quality of educational services coming out of them.

Glaeser and Saks (2006) did a research on corruption in America and their findings was that higher level of education tends to lead to higher awareness of international standards and thus, in theory, should reduce a person's inclination towards corruption. This is not always true. There was a case of an election in Nigeria where a Professor from a University was engaged as ad-hoc returning officer by the Independent National Electoral Commission and the whole process was characterized by many corrupt practices. How do we relate this to level of corruption expected from an educated person?

Dimkpa (2011) investigated the prevalent causes and effects of corruption in Rivers State University, Nigeria, using data collected from 400 respondents through the use of questionnaire. The result indicated that academic corruption was prevalent among male lecturers and it involves school administrators, parents, non-teaching staff, security personnel and others. This argument was supported by the highest number of workers in academic institutions. As a result of pressure on male lecturers in terms of meeting family needs, they may engage in some corrupt practices in order to enable them carry out all the financial obligations expected of them, most especially if payment of salaries is not regular or too meagre while compared with financial obligations before them.

Fisman and Svensson (2001) studied the effects of corruption on firm's performance and growth using the same firm-level data. They found out that the rate of bribery is negatively correlated with firm's growth. When the firm's recruitment policy is faulty, compensation and salary package are not based on merit, promotion is based on godfatherism and no transparency when it comes to the firm's financial resources, all these will not give room for the organization to grow as expected.

Arop, Ekpong, Nwannunu and Owan (2018) examined personnel management and corrupt academic practices in Universities in Cross River State, Nigeria. A sample size of 1400 respondents were selected comprising of 1200 students and 200 lecturers from two universities using purposeful sampling technique. The data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics and multiple regression. The results of the analysis revealed that discipline and remuneration of lecturers influenced lecturers' corrupt academic practices and that indiscipline and lack of supervision of university students have a joint significant influence on university students' corrupt academic practices in both universities.

From the foregoing, it becomes obvious that corruption is a polymorphous issue which includes maladministration in all spheres, siphoning of public funds into foreign accounts and personal projects, disrespect to the rule of law, looting of public funds through white elephant projects, massive laundering and bank fraud.

Nigeria's Education System and Standard

Nigeria is one of the developing countries of the world that believe in the transmission of knowledge and information from one generation to another, and that this transmission of knowledge should not be left in the hands of mediocre. It is this transmission of knowledge that is referred to as education which still remains as the greatest hope of many developing countries (Ogunsanya, 1982).

The philosophy guiding Nigeria's education system is to ensure sound and equal opportunities for all citizens of Nigeria to have access to quality education services starting from primary to secondary and to tertiary levels. The Nigerian National Policy on Education (1977) states that the main philosophy of Nigerian education is "the need to make education more relevant to the needs of individuals and the need to use education as a tool for national integration as an attempt to heal the wounds of the (Nigerian) civil war".

After independence in Nigeria, as part of our desperation and inspiration of our nationalists to bring about rapid growth and development to Nigerian society in all ramifications, an alliance was formed among all the regions in the country with different and separate educational system. Precisely, the 1977 National Policy on Education was the first that led to Nigeria's sudden departure from the old and inherited educational system. It was this National Policy of the year 1977 that made provision for the present system of education which is 6-3-3-4 still in use in Nigeria today.

Below is the breakdown of the Nigerian system of education.

- 6 years pre-primary/primary education
- 3 years junior secondary/technical education
- 3 years senior secondary/technical education
- 4 years tertiary education

Pre-primary/primary education

This kind of education is based on the discretion and arrangement of a child's parents. Pre-primary education is for a child between the ages of 3-5 years. The primary education is the education offered for pupils between the ages of 6-11 years. This first stage of the education system is the bedrock of all children pursuing a career in education.

Upon successful completion of the primary education, a common entrance examination is set, a summative evaluation yardstick through which successful candidates in this category are given admission to proceed to junior secondary schools to further their studies.

Secondary education

This stage of education is divided into two groups. The curriculum covering this stage of education is also in two divisions. The curricula of the junior secondary school comprises of Mathematics, English language, Integrated science, Social studies, Practical Agriculture and few related courses. After completing the junior secondary school and having passed the prescribed junior certificate examination, successful candidates are duly qualified to be admitted to senior secondary schools or technical colleges and Teachers' colleges depending on the child's academic ability in the various subjects as depicted in his/her junior certificate examination result.

The result obtained from junior secondary school becomes a useful information that would enable the school administrator or manager place such candidates in the appropriate class at senior secondary level. At the end of the three years educational programme, a summative evaluation will be carried out either through the West African Examination Council (WAEC), National Examination Council (NECO) or National Business and Technical Examinations Board (NABTEB). The outcome from any of these examination bodies serves as an input or requirement for continuation of education at tertiary level.

Tertiary education

According to Ashby commission's report of 1960, the establishment of tertiary institutions will help to meet the needs of Nigerians after secondary education within and outside Nigeria. Tertiary education is the third arm of educational system in Nigeria. It comprises of colleges of education, polytechnics and universities. At this level of education, students are given room to specialize in respect of their future

careers, where they will be opportuned to contribute towards the growth and development of the society at large (Azelema, 2008).

Below are some of the objectives of establishing tertiary institutions in Nigeria;

- a. To develop and imbibe the proper value orientation for the sake of the individual and the society.
- b. To help in the acquisition of both physical and intellectual skills.
- c. To develop individuals' intellectual capacities in order to foster their understanding and appreciate the environment where they live.
- d. To develop an individual towards having entrepreneurial spirit.

Causes of corruption in the education sector

Corruption has proven to be one of Nigeria's biggest challenge that is found in every sector of the society. Whether a big or small sector, there is every possibility of observing corrupt practices when thoroughly examined. It has become so rampant that even the education sector is not left out. Some of the causes of corruption in the sector are identified and discussed below.

- **Weak government institutions:** The Nigerian government has set up a number of agencies to supervise and monitor academic activities in schools. For instance, there is "quality assurance agency" under each of the federal and state Ministry of Education. This agency is assigned the duty of ensuring and sustaining high academic and moral quality in the primary and secondary schools. Discipline and incorruptibility are expected to be ensured by the agencies. Unfortunately, most of the agencies are not efficient; they have been enmeshed in corrupt practices (Human Rights Watch, 2010).
- **Poor remuneration and late payment of salaries:** The salaries being paid to educators in Nigeria are low compared to what obtains in other countries. The foregoing has reduced the purchasing power of teachers. To worsen the situation, teachers in primary, secondary and tertiary institutions are not paid their salaries regularly. There are some state governments owing their teachers up to five or six months' salaries. This ugly development has made many of the teachers resort to taking bribe from their students and involving in other corruption-related activities.
- **Poverty:** Ogaziechi (2021) described Nigeria as "the poverty capital of the world". That is saying that there is mass poverty in the country despite the numerous resources that are available in it. The poverty in the Nigerian society has rubbed off on teachers. Even if their salaries are paid regularly, the terrible inflation in the country will still place a big economic burden on them. The general feeling of poverty in the society has resulted in educators involving themselves in such vices as deceiving admission seekers and

collecting illegal money from them, extorting money from students' parents and engaging in sex-for-mark practices (Kirya, 2019; Erunke, 2019).

- Poor upbringing and unserious study habits of students: Many students lack home training. The basic moral values of hard work, respect for elders, courtesy, honesty and decency are absent in their lives. Consequently, such students do not handle their studies with the required seriousness and they go about lobbying for marks with money, materials and sex.
- Acceptance of corruption by the populace: In the Nigerian society, many people perceive corruption as a normal way of life. To them, there is nothing wrong in it. Law enforcement agents manning Nigerian roads do collect "Kolanut" (bribe) of N50 at will (Human Rights Watch, 2010). Judges and officials take bribe from litigants regularly (Ayodeji & Odukoya, 2014). These common corruption-related practices have been extended to the education sector. Nowadays, some parents are in the habit of bribing admission officers to get their children admitted into schools.

Corrupt practices in the education sector

In Nigerian tertiary institutions, corruption has led to production of low-quality graduates and professionals. This has worsened the unemployment situation and the frustration associated with this is that many of their products are not employable. Below are some of the corrupt practices in Nigerian tertiary institutions.

- Blocking: This has increasingly become a rampant form of examination malpractice. This term is aimed at preventing all forms of resistance from lecturers who may not be ready to succumb to the will of students with the primary motive of getting higher grades in examination in order to increase their cumulative grade point average. It is a form of examination malpractice which involves giving money in form of gratification to lecturers to unscrupulously raise students' scores. It is not limited to lecturers, but extends to non-academic staff in various departments or facilities so that examination questions can be leaked to them. Some stakeholders in examination are also influenced by covering up a student who copies from foreign material illegally taken to examination hall.
- Upgrading or jack-it-up: This is another form of examination malpractice where officers who are saddled with the responsibilities of computing results unscrupulously raise the grades submitted by the examiner or lecturer. In this kind of arrangement, a student who did not even prepare adequately for an examination may come out with higher grades. In such cases, some members of top management are part of this ugly arrangement in most of our today's tertiary institutions.

- Impersonation: The students in tertiary institutions do have an arrangement with another student of higher cognitive in that particular course to help them write an examination. Some students are paid in doing this, while some do not even collect anything in monetary value or otherwise because they believe that they are helping a friend towards having a higher grade or score.
- Sub-institutional corruption: This type of corruption involves some sub-institution of a tertiary institution. In this arrangement, school administrators like Vice-Chancellors of universities, Rectors of polytechnics, Provosts of colleges of education and their governing councils deliberately inflated the money value attached to a project contract at the detriment of having quality administration for the entire institution. Ghost-workers menace is not an exemption in most of our tertiary institutions, where those at the helm of affairs deliberately inflate the payroll by including fictitious names in school salary voucher in order to get more subvention for salary from government. The excess is siphoned by the members of management.
- Forceful sale of handouts and books: The sale of handouts and books by lecturers is regarded as forceful where the lecturer gets the list of students who have bought either the handout produced by him or a textbook he sells for the course. Students who do not buy are punished by the lecturer by reducing their merited scores in the examination. This becomes a form of extortion as some students like to buy to avoid being punished. Besides, where there is mass failure after the lecturer might have marked examination scripts, only the names of those students that bought the handout would be favourably considered, leaving the rest to their destiny.
- Students' research project-related corruption: These are forms of corruption relating to students' research projects in the award of a given certificate in Nigerian tertiary institutions. In some cases, allocation of project students to supervisors can be influenced by the student. Secondly, a lecturer may ask a research student to pay certain amount of money before a topic is approved. The lecturer may even instruct students under him to contract the typing and binding of it to him at a higher price than the rate they are doing it in the area. Another form of corruption in this category is where the lecturer in charge of students' projects in the department simply award grades to students who have not carried out any research work by compelling such students to pay a specified amount of money to him.
- Educational Administration: This has to do with recruitment, admission and promotion. Corruption takes place in various forms. For instance, entrance examination into institutions, most times, is not on merit but on who is actually seeking the admission. In the area of recruitment of staff (academic

and non-academic) into the educational system, this is done by who is pushing the file, giving chance to unqualified persons as well as depriving good hands the opportunity to contribute to the body of knowledge (Egbefo, 2012).

- Educational Management: The senior staffs such as the Head Teachers, Principals, Rectors, Provosts and Vice-Chancellors who happen to be in charge of their institutions' funds are fond of transferring these funds to their personal bank accounts for their personal use. They are also involved in placing ghost workers on salaries and over-invoicing of given contracts (Egbefo, 2012).
- Finally, other forms of corruption that are also identifiable in Nigerian tertiary institutions include sexual harassment of students by lecturers (Olugbamila, 2019; Kirya, 2019) and smuggling of what is popularly called 'microtintin' into the examination hall.

Effects of Corruption in the Education Sector

Corruption in the education sector promotes poverty, creates the condition for political instability and contributes to the blanket criminalization of teachers, proprietors, examiners and government agencies on educational system in Nigeria (Nwankwo & Nweke 2016).

Suleiman (2005) also notes that corruption, coupled with economic and political mismanagement, has led to decaying of infrastructure in schools, inadequate staffing, poor and falling education standards, and the disappearance of grants, trust funds, loans and of entire project without a trace.

Odunayo and Olujuwon (2010) state the implication of corruption and corrupt practices in schools as follows;

- Corruption conveys a wrong message to youth that corruption pays and that one can use an unjust means to get to the top and that honesty does not pay.
- Corruption undermines public interest in selection and certification processes in schools. A vivid example is the Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) in Nigeria which has been marred by irregularities, which made the universities to conduct Post-UME Examinations for candidates.
- Admission racketeering and favouritism in promotion can lower the morale of staff and allows mediocre to gain admission and shut out the brighter students.

- Other consequences of academic corruption in Nigeria are: erosion of moral values and poor rule of law, low academic standards, unemployment, and poor quality of university graduates.

A report of the survey carried out by Dabalén, Oni & Adekola (2020) found that:

- University graduates are poorly trained and unproductive on the job.
- Graduate skills have steadily deteriorated over the past decade.
- Shortcomings are particularly severe in oral and written communication, and in applied technical skills.

CONCLUSION

Education in Nigeria has been hampered by a number of factors one of which is corruption. The effect of this menace (corruption) on the country's education sector is so pronounced that nearly every segment of the country's education feels the pinch. Right from the primary school level to the tertiary institution level the menace is rearing its ugly head like a roaring lion. This study has therefore, identified the causes and effects of corruption on the country's education sector.

The identified causes of corruption in the education sector include poor remuneration and pay incentives, weak government institutions, poverty, favouritism and nepotism in students' admission, poor upbringing of students as well as employment of unqualified educators. Some of the effects of corruption uncovered in the course of this study are: falling academic standards, decaying of infrastructural facilities in schools and lowering of educators' morale.

It is against the reason of the negative effects of corruption on the Nigerian education sector that some essential recommendations were made in this study. If the recommendations are fully implemented, corruption would be drastically reduced and the quality of education in the country would appreciate considerably.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In dealing with corruption in the Nigerian education sector, the following recommendations were made;

- Educators at all levels should be paid fairly and promptly as this will discourage them from engaging in extortion, absenteeism and other corrupt practices. Motivated and efficient teachers are crucial for quality teaching.
- Anti-corruption strategies should be put in place to curb academic corruption at all levels. This include the use of technology especially during admission processing, result processing et cetera, as this will reduce human-to-human

interaction.

- Lecturers caught engaging in corrupt academic practices should be apprehended, and
- disciplined in order to prevent such unwanted attitudes from re-occurring in the future,
- and to serve as a deterrent to others.
- Use of tools that promote accountability such as performance evaluation report, code of conduct et cetera, should be enforced.
- Schools should constitute conference marking policy, and encourage swapping of examination scripts among competent lecturers within the same department for marking. When these are in place, both lecturers and students become unaware of where their examination booklets are being marked. This will reduce the rate of manipulation of examination scores.
- Standard recruitment procedures should be followed to ensure that the best candidates are selected.
- There should be establishment of quality assurance unit to monitor teaching and examination malpractices in all schools.
- Students should be supervised properly during examinations and in other academic activities. Those caught exhibiting corrupt academic practices should be suspended or withdrawn from the school system, to prevent them from passing such bad attitudes to other students especially the new ones.

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