REFORMED METHODS OF SANCTIONS, INVESTIGATION AND PUNISHMENT TO PREVENT ACADEMIC CORRUPTION, ENDING SEXUAL COERCION AND HARASSMENT IN NIGERIAN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS

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ABSTRACT

In our higher institutions, academic corruption is pervasive, and its prevalence has hampered both national progress and educational quality. Thus, the paper examined the issue of academic corruption by using content analysis and secondary sources of information, including internet-based documented materials, among others, with the goal of promoting reforms to the sanctions, investigations, and punishment of academic corruption, which includes collecting money to change students' grades; exchanging grades for sex; extorting money in exchange for typing; paying for grades; writing projects/seminar papers for students and falsification of data/research finding etc. The paper also examined other elements that contribute to academic corruption, such as indiscipline, inadequate oversight of academic staff, leniency in punishing "culprit" lecturers, flawed hiring practices for academic staff, and hiring of incompetent lecturers. The paper
suggests that student victims of sexual harassment should be encouraged to speak out with concrete evidence and perpetrators of such acts should be severely suspended and prosecuted in order to end academic corruption or bring it to a barest minimum amidst disturbing cases of sexual coercion and harassment in Nigerian tertiary institutions. It also suggests that Turnitin anti-plagiarism software should be used at all academic levels. The administration of tertiary institutions should safeguard the printing of exam papers, increase the number of invigilators, install CCTV cameras for test monitoring, among other measures. **Keywords:** Academic Corruption, Sexual Harassment, Investigation, Sanctions.

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**INTRODUCTION**

Broadly speaking, the concept of corruption is difficult to define. This is because its scope is too multifaceted and that makes it difficult to have a generally accepted definition among scholars and stakeholders. Albeit, it may have a definite description limited to some places and defined cases. Originally, corruption as a word was coined from Latin word *‘corruptio’* which means wicked behaviour, putridity and rottenness (Osipian, 2007). In his own submission, 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. It involves bribes and other dishonest means for achieving particular disgraceful ends which is an indication of an ailing society (Dimkpa, 2011). What we refer to as corrupt practices are those behavioural practices that tend to break certain moral or social codes of conduct, administrative rule or procedures and which negatively affect all aspects of society including economic, social, religious and educational sectors (Dimkpa, 2011).

Corruption as it is perceived in the tertiary institutions 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 involved by both students and lecturers. In view of this gap and for the purpose of this paper, academic corruption includes all forms of corrupt practices taking place in the tertiary institutions and which have a direct negative and concomitant effects on the quality and standard of education (e.g. students offering lecturers sexual intercourse for Mark's or 'higher grade', sexual coercion and harassment by lecturers, examination malpractices, bribery, extortion and favouritism).

Academic corruption in its various forms is a big challenge crying for solutions and requiring stakeholders’ attention because it impedes qualitative education in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. 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 Nigeria, the most populous African country is not ranked among the top 10 countries with the best educational system in the Dark Continent (Busari, 2022). 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). This is true because in Nigerian tertiary institutions of higher learning,
a significant number of students nowadays prefer "sorting" a slang for paying money for grades, instead of sitting down to study their books for good grades.

The exigency to critically delve into searching for feasible solution to this social problem is the crux of this paper as there is need to recommend and promulgate reforming methods of sanctions, investigations and punishments in order to prevent further academic corruption which also manifest in sexual coercion and harassment leading to academic decadence in Nigerian tertiary institutions.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

The Concept of Academic Corruption

Academic corruption involves all forms of deviation from justice, honesty, fairness, probity, impartiality and discipline expected from institutions of learning. Academic corruption actually stems from moral impurity and it manifests in selfish acts that are detrimental to the goal of education and advancement of society (Adedimeji, 2015). As Adedimeji (2015) further noted that academic corruption includes, though not limited to, plagiarism, fabrication, deception, cheating, bribery, sabotage, professional misconduct on the part of lecturers, impersonation on the part of students and professors as well as the use of institutional authority or name for personal gain in the process of higher education delivery or reception.

In Nigeria, we are often regaled with the reports of how lecturers sexually harass female students in sex-for-marks corruption while male students are extorted in cash-for-marks misconduct. Apart from plagiarism, commercialisation of admission or admission racketeering, examination malpractices, unethical sale of handouts, wrongful marks alteration and deliberate failure to teach students are some of the most pervasive forms of academic corruption on our campuses (Busari, 2022).

Forms of Academic Corruption

Academic corruption in Nigerian tertiary institutions manifest in the following forms:

Finance and Procurement Fraud Risks in Higher Education:

Research grants are a major opportunity for corruption in developing countries. Money meant for research is misappropriated through various means such as travel and workshop fraud – false or duplicate payments for travel and workshop reports for events that did not happen; payroll fraud – false or fictitious employees on research programmes; stipend fraud – false recipients/vouchers and invoice fraud – fake or enhanced Consultant or Vendor invoices or receipts. In addition, some projects might, unbeknownst to the donors involved, achieve duplicate funding, and the additional funding used for personal business and activities (Sharma, 2017).

Academic Fraud and Cheating:

Plagiarism occurs when a person presents someone else’s ideas, phrases, sentences or data as one’s own work. Another person’s work should always be properly and accurately referenced. Self-plagiarism involves submitting work that one has previously submitted (Gallant, 2011).

In his own submissions, Achibong (2012) highlighted the following forms of academic corruption associated with academic staff including but not limited to the following: Forcing students to buy text books with assignments attached; Forceful/compulsory sale of substandard text to students; Collection of money to change grades for students; Exchange of grades for sex; Extortion of money as typing fee; Writing project and seminar papers for students for money;
Leakage of examination question; Swapping of names for publication in order to take credit; Plagiarism/use of students ideas; Inclusion of name to publish paper one did not contribute to; Falsification of data/research finding; Taking adjunct lectureship in more than one place at a time; Absenteeism from work; Giving students exam without teaching; Allowing students to cheat in examination hall through poor supervision; Covering up exam malpractice cases; Awarding undeserved scores to students/arbitrary award of continuous assessment scores; Falsification of exam record and allowing students to mark students scripts among others.

The same author, Achibong (2012) went further to explain that The “publish or perish” syndrome in the Nigerian tertiary education system appears to be behind the four interrelated factors cited by her respondents. Some academic staff in their quest to meet the demands for promotion have resorted to using students’ work especially those they supervised without due credit to the students, ‘swapping’ the order of appearance of names on publications in order to take credit as the lead author and adding their names to work they simply paid the publication fees but did not make any academic contribution to. Added to these examples of dishonest forms of behaviour is the falsification of research data and findings (Achibong, 2012).

One of the problems plaguing the Nigerian tertiary education system is the dearth of academic staff, a problem that has been exacerbated by the rapid expansion in the establishment of universities, especially the private ones. This probably explains the indiscipline of holding more than one adjunct position alongside a full employment in a university by some academic staff. Such staff, in a bid to cover the various institutions they are committed to, are always on the move. This results in absenteeism and inability to adequately teach the students, appropriately cover the course content in a given semester or resort to trying to teach everything in two or three visits to the class. In the end some set exams for students on what they did not teach. These actions have other negative implications for the quality of education delivery and students’ performance (Achibong, 2012).

**Examination Malpractice:** is a disease that has festered and eaten deep into the moral fiber of Nigerian universities. Its manifestation is perverse and seems to be on the increase. The respondents in this study are indicting academic staff of participation in examination malpractice through poor supervision of students during examinations and unwillingness to report students caught cheating. Commenting on this issue Copeland (2005) asked “what kind of expectation for ethical behaviour is communicated when professors ignore cheating? Abdulkareem and Alabi (2004) on their part opined that many strategies so applied to curb examination malpractices within the university system tend to be ineffective. This situation according to them might not be unconnected to the fact that the student culprits are usually targeted by these strategies, brushing aside the contributory roles of others university members in the ultimate act. Although, the established procedure for handling cases of examination malpractice can be tiresome, ignoring offenders certainly gives the impression of either indifference or collusion. Another related issue cited by the respondents is the award of undeserved scores to students. These fraudulent practices are serious dents to the image and integrity of the ivory tower.

**Sexual Coercion and Harassment**

Sexual harassment occurs in many forms including actual or attempted rape or sexual assault; Unwanted pressure for sexual favours; Unwanted deliberate touching, leaning over, cornering, or
pinching; Unwanted sexual looks or gestures; Unwanted letters, telephone calls, or materials of a sexual nature; Unwanted sexual teasing, jokes, remarks, or questions; Referring to an adult as a girl, hunk, doll, babe, or honey; Whistling at someone; Cat calls; Sexual comments; Turning work discussions to sexual topics; Sexual innuendos or stories; Asking about sexual fantasies, preferences, or history; Personal questions about social or sexual life; Sexual comments about a person's clothing, anatomy, or looks; Kissing sounds, howling, and smacking lips; Telling lies or spreading rumors about a person's personal sex life; Neck massage; Touching an employee's clothing, hair, or body; Giving personal gifts; Hanging around a person; Hugging, kissing, patting, or stroking; Touching or rubbing oneself sexually around another person; Standing close or brushing up against a person; Looking a person up and down (elevator eyes); Staring at someone; Sexually suggestive signals; Facial expressions, winking, throwing kisses, or licking lips and making sexual gestures with hands or through body movements among others (Dimkpa, 2011).

The International Association of Women Judges asserts that sexual coercion and harassment are not limited to certain countries or sectors, but can be found wherever those entrusted with power lack integrity and try to sexually exploit those who are vulnerable and dependent on their power (Makerere University, 2006). Sexual harassment of mostly female students and female lecturers by male lecturers and professors is considered a serious problem in higher education, but is not widely studied, especially in developing countries. Despite few in-depth studies on the problem, media reports followed by public outcry against sexual harassment in tertiary institutions are common (Dimkpa, 2011).

**Ending Sexual Coercion and Harassment in Tertiary Institutions**

The responsibility for preserving an appropriate learning environment to curb sexual harassment primarily lies in school administrators, by making the elimination of sexual harassment a top priority by empowering teachers to take a stand against inappropriate name-calling and sexual comments. It is also necessary to educate students to know the difference between friendly teasing and bullying, between flirting and harassment. Also speaking out and taking punitive action against perpetrators should be encouraged (Adimula, 2018).

In determining an appropriate sanction, the most important consideration is the relative seriousness of the infraction and in order to end sexual harassment one thing is very key i.e the culture of silence should be discouraged. Adimula (2018) asserts that school administrators should, as a matter of necessity, set up independent panels to which victims of sexual harassment may report incidences of such harassment, establish whistle-blower policies that should involve protection of the victim who comes forward to expose incidents of harassment. It is necessary to state that ignoring the situation can often lead to a cycle of ongoing harassment and victimisation.

Students must learn to be assertive and establish strong personal boundaries. Also parental involvement is critical to long-term behaviour modification through counseling. Students should be discouraged from approaching teachers or lecturers to solicit grades before or after tests or examinations. The reality of such a situation where a student drops in on a lecturer to solicit grades is that it invites such harassment (Adimula, 2018).
Perpetrators of sexual harassment must face the law. They should either lose their jobs or be suspended depending on the level of sexual harassment of female students. In a situation where it is seen as normal for lecturers to harass the female students and get away with it, I think that should stop immediately and lecturers who are engaged in such must be put to shame (Adimula, 2018). It is not the victims themselves that should be made to feel ashamed, but the perpetrators. I think giving students the opportunity to be able to report will go a long way in bringing the issue to book.

**Factors Responsible for Academic Corruption in Nigerian Tertiary Institutions**

Several factors are responsible for the seeming increase in academic corruption in Nigerian higher institutions of learning most especially among academic staff as Achibong (2012) highlighted the following:

**Stagnation in Career and the Need to get Promoted:** This was cited as contributory factors to the prevalence of academic dishonesty among academic staff. There are two dimensions to this promotion related factor. First is the fact that some academic staff have stayed at a particular level/rank for so long owing to their inability to meet the requirements for promotion namely acquisition of higher degree and particularly publication of quality articles. The second dimension has to do with those that want to beat the system and get promoted by any means. Given this scenario, coupled with the lack of research skills by some academics, it is not surprising that respondents viewed emphasis on publication as a basis for promotion as a part of the reason for dishonesty among academic staff (Achibong, 2012).

**The Teaching Profession in Nigerian Public Universities is made up of Individuals with Varying Degrees of Passion for the Job:** Among the academic staff are those who exhibit greed for money, live above their income and lack the commitment and dedication needed to bring about quality education delivery. In line with the views of Achibong (2012), Ikharie (2003) also observes that Nigerian tertiary institutions are currently harbouring misfits within their belly and that there are those who call themselves teachers but who, due to their intellectual and ethical weakness, ought not to be associated with the ivory tower. Pressures from parents and students as well as the corruption in the society are certainly yielding undesirable fruits in the universities. It is no longer news that some students in their desperation to pass either entice the academic staff with money, gifts and even their bodies or on the other hand those in cults use threats to obtain their desires.

Poor supervision of academic staff, laxity in punishing “culprit” lecturers, faulty employment procedures in academic staff employment and employment of incompetent lecturers were equally advanced by Achibong (2012) as factors contributing to the increase in academic dishonesty among academic staff. These indicated causative factors are administrative in nature and seem to indict the university management. Some of the occurrences in the university system such as absenteeism of academic staff from duty, delay in preparing and release of students’ results and the non-formalized means of obtaining feedbacks from students especially about teaching quality seem to give credence to the opinion of respondents on the issue of poor supervision of academic staff (Achibong, 2012).

The delay in meting out deserved punishment to offending persons in the system owing to the bureaucratic process involved in the disciplinary procedure, the “man know man” (network of
friends or relations) and sacred cow syndrome in Nigerian society which shields culprits often provide the boldness for other academics with weak moral to indulge in academic dishonesty (Achibong, 2012).

The fact remains that the severity of a written sanction loses its bite and weakens the system if not promptly executed when necessary. Again, it is often difficult for the management tertiary institutions to cleanse the system of morally bankrupt academic staff due to students’ unwillingness to testify against them either because they benefit from the corruption or are afraid of reprisals (Achibong, 2012).

The employment of academic staff ought to follow the due process in order to establish the suitability of such an individual for the position, but this is not often the case as managements tertiary institutions are often under pressure to employ staff based on other considerations. Such action often brings in staff that heads of departments find difficult to manage because they are the untouchables with high connections. Commenting on employment of lecturers into the Nigerian higher institutions, Abudugana (2009) notes that there are those employed based on merit, due process, the man-know-man factor and some based on quota system. He partly attributes the alarming decline in the quality of education to the fact that quality and merit is not a major determinant of who becomes a lecturer in Nigerian tertiary institutions.

**Methods of Sanctions, Investigation and Punishment to Prevent Academic Corruption in Nigerian Tertiary Institutions**

There are various cross-national, national and institutional level initiatives to combat academic corruption in tertiary institutions. Ideally, advocating reforming methods of sanctions, investigations and punishments to prevent academic corruption in tertiary institutions is the responsibility of the various actors involved such as students, academic administrators, ministry of education officials, higher education regulatory agencies, professional regulatory bodies, civil society (especially professional and trade associations) as well as development partners.

Sanctions for students who indulge in sexual harassment can range from Dean’s warning and reprimand (which are rarely used in sexual misconduct cases; to disciplinary probation (which can range from three to 48 months); to suspension (either one or two years) to expulsion. In addition, the following may accompany these sanctions: censure from campus service, restriction of access to space, resources, activities, and institutions' housing. In addition to the sanctions described in this section, in situations in which respondents continue to be members of the University community (e.g., probation or suspension cases), respondents are required to complete the Community Integrity Program (“CIP”). CIP is a time-limited, individualized psycho-educational curriculum administered by a trained clinician. It serves to assist individuals in exploring harmful attitudes and behaviors, with an aim to empower individuals to actively contribute to a healthier and safer campus community. Sanctions for faculty and staff members can include counseling or training, written warning, financial sanction, unpaid leave of absence, suspension, demotion or termination in accordance with the employment policies governing the specific employee.

**CONCLUSION**

Academic fraud is rampant in Nigerian academic institutions and takes various forms, including sexual coercion, harassment, instructors skipping class, inappropriate evaluation of students, and
selling grades for sex or cash. Because of their low pay, the lack of punishment for offenders, and the fact that some of them are the victims of examination fraud, professors engage in academic corruption. The pay of professors should be raised, offenders should be penalized, and the fight against academic corruption should be stepped up in order to end academic corruption, sexual coercion, and harassment. The value and quality of education in Nigeria will significantly increase if academic corruption is adequately addressed by conducting thorough investigations and harshly punishing the offenders.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Most higher institutions schools throughout the world utilize anti-plagiarism software like Turnitin to identify plagiarism. According to a study, between 2010 and 2014, higher education institutions that used anti-plagiarism software saw a 44% decrease in plagiarism and a 3000% rise in the number of papers that were evaluated online. Additionally, the study discovered that higher education institutions utilizing Turnitin decreased plagiarized content by more than 30% in 12 out of 15 nations (Yang & Zhang, 2017). To ensure academic integrity, educational institutions in Nigeria should mandate the use of Turnitin throughout all stages of higher education.

Compulsory workshops on sexual coercion and harassment should be offered to all new students and staff as part of orientation programmes into the institutions. Securing examination printing process, increasing the number of invigilators in examination halls and installing of Closed-Circuit Television (CCTV) cameras for examination monitoring and anonymising exam answer scripts using bar codes with cyber-security measures to safeguard the “back end” of results database are very sacrosanct. Lastly, There should be rewards and incentives for colleges, polytechnics and universities for implementing policies, programmes, and strategies that research shows are most likely to and are succeeding in reducing and preventing sexual harassment among forms of academic corruption.

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