

Corruption in Higher Education in Nigeria: Issues, Challenges, and Implications

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Abstract

Against the background of the endemic and deepening corruption crisis in Nigeria, Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) in Nigeria seems to have been influenced and entrenched in corruption related activities such that achieving the goals and objectives of higher education becomes difficult. This paper takes a critical analysis of the various dimensions, issues, causes, challenges and implications of corruption incidences in Higher Educational Institutions in Nigeria. First, It argues that the issue of mismanagement and governance inadequacy, Ethnic bias/favouritism and the incorporation of intra institutional-elite competition as well as the political intrigues among the various intellectual divide of staff into the 'corruption umbrella' have tremendously increased the perpetration of corruption practices in most Higher Educational Institutions in Nigeria. Also the paper argued that the lack of autonomy and declining government financial support represents some of the drivers of corruption incidences in higher education institutions in the country. Furthermore, the threats to anti-corruption fight emanate from the behaviors of supposedly enlightened community seems promote the incidence of corruption in higher institutions of learning. The challenges of corruption in HEIs have the capacity to impact negatively on the quest for national social and economic development. Unless critical measures are taken to sanitize the system the dream of achieving sustainable national growth and development may be difficult

Keywords: corruption, higher education, academic culture, administration, institutions

Introduction

The incidence of corruption is one of the most topical issues of discourse in almost every institution in Nigeria today. The magnitude of its pervading nature constitutes serious problems such that it appears that institutions have become corruption endemic that, one can begin to talk about the educational culture of corruption in higher institutions of learning in the country. In a recently released publication, Nigeria was ranked among the most corrupt of the countries surveyed (Transparent International, 2018). In what seems like senseless squandering of hopes, Nigeria as a country was ranked as one of the most corrupt countries in the world in 2002, the second most corrupt in 2003, and the third most corrupt in 2004 (Omotola, 2006). Our higher

Institutions of education are not spared as they are at risk of imminent collapse if efforts at stemming the situation are not urgently discussed.

Corruption, as an ethical and social problem is a global phenomenon that affects especially higher educational institutions in Nigeria (Adegboruwa, 2007). All over Nigeria, the issue of corruption incidences especially in higher educational institutions is very high and appear to have undermined every aspect of educational development which can be a major obstacle to the process of growth and development in any country (UNDP, 2010). In a survey of 150 high level officials from 60 third world countries carried out by Gray and Kaufmann (1998), the respondents ranked corruption as the most severe obstacle confronting their development process thereby asserting the fact that corruption should receive priority attention in a country's development agenda.

The UNDP Anti-Corruption Practice Note of 2004, defined corruption as: "the misuse of public power, office or authority for private benefit through bribery, extortion, influence peddling, nepotism, fraud, speed money or embezzlement. Hallak and Poisson (2002) described corruption in the educational sector as the systematic use of public office for private benefit which have negative impact on access, quality or equity in education. Corruption connotes the perversion of generally acceptable standards and ways of doing things for personal or other forms of benefits, often with negative consequences for the entire system and society (Ackerman, 1999). The World Bank (2000) settled on a straight-forward definition of corruption as the abuse of public office for private gain. The definition of the World Bank (2002) is not new, rather it was chosen because it is concise and broad enough to include most forms of corruption that the Bank encounters, as well as being widely used in the literature of other researchers (Ghukasyan, 2003; Bajracharya, 2003; Altinyelken, 2004; Anderson, 2005; and Aluko, 2008). Accordingly, we can define corruption in higher educational institutions as the perversion of educational responsibilities, be it deliberately or not, for personal gains at the expense of the system.

A critical examination of these conceptions shows that corruption is a manifestation of one or a combination of the following indices such as fraud, Bribery, Forgery, Embezzlement, Extortion, Abuse of Office, selfish gain to the detriment of other people wellbeing among others. Recent academic attempts to correlate corruption and development appear to have settled upon a consensus that corruption is a negative phenomenon in every modern society, and that it is particularly 'catastrophic' in its impact on African countries (Szeftel 2000: 427) but the issue of corruption in higher institutions has been largely ignored. In the light of the assumption that corruption can lead to a lower incidence of development in higher institutions, we shall examine

with critical analysis the various dimensions of corruption in Higher Educational Institutions in Nigeria. Our overriding conceptual aim is to identify the threats of corruption and its implications on the development drives helping to pose questions as to o the extent possible, arrive at some general statements about the relationship between higher education development drive and corruption . We will build on existing insights in the literature in various ways for this paper.

Dimensions of Corruption in Nigeria

There are different dimensions of corruption. Two types relevant to this paper are;

i) Political Corruption and (ii) Institutional Corruption

Political corruption is basically the use of political power for financial gain. It includes the use of the control of the affairs of the state at whatever level (Iyayi, 2010). This nature of corruption involves vote buying by financial power to buy “favours” or secure political power so as to have the control of the state. Political corruption is sometimes seen as similar to corruption of greed as it affects the manner in which decisions are made through the manipulation of political institutions, deviations of rules of procedures and distortions in the institutions of government. Thus, government officials, political officials or employees who seek illegitimate personal gain through actions such as vote buying, illegal financial contribution, nepotism, patronage, graft, and embezzlement, payment in the form of gifts, legal fees, employment, favours to relatives, social influence or any relationship that sacrifices the public interest and welfare, with or without the implied payment of money, are usually considered corrupt.

On the other hand, Institutional corruption occurs in the administration or the implementation end of policies. It is the kind of corruption that citizens encounter daily at places like the hospitals, schools, police, taxing offices among others(Dike, 2007). . Some examples include procurement fraud, misappropriation of funds, illicit payment/receipts of money, misrepresentation of facts. Institutional corruption is seen as corrupt actions or policies within an organization that break the law, serve to subjugate humans in unlawful manners, discriminate against humans based upon race, ethnicity, culture, orientation, serve to degrade other humans or groups for that the person(s) own profit.

Furthermore, Corruption has manifested itself in several other dimensions in Higher Institutions in Nigeria. For instance, David (2002), explained that corruption takes the following dimensions;

- a. Siphoning of school instructional materials and other teaching aids to the black market especially by Principal Officer in schools, Vice Chancellors and bursar
- b. Collection of money for continuous assessment and inter-exams grades;

- c. Collection of money for change of grades or producing fake results;
- d. Outright selling of admissions without entrance examinations (especially in higher institutions);
- e. Charging compulsory yet irrelevant fees.
- f. Demanding sex for marks

David (2002), further cited other forms of corrupt practices in educational sectors to include; ghost teachers, diversion of school fees by Bursars or Principals, inflation of school enrollment data, imposition of unauthorized fees on students, diversion of scholarship fund allocated to the schools or to the students, diversion of monies in revolving textbook fund and diversion of community/parents contributions or supports to the school. Szeftel (2000) further postulated forms of corruption to include bribery; nepotism and embezzlement which are similar to those found in other sectors. Forms of corruption outlined by Hallak and Poisson (2007) include: Bribe, Bypass of criteria Non-use of legal criteria; Capture, examination leakages, Illegal use of public resources; Diversion of funds illegal use of public resources; Embezzlement, theft of public resources; Misappropriation illegal use of public resources; Favouritism, Fraud, Ghost worker, and Nepotism. In a similar study, Amundsen (2000) suggested five main dimensions of corruption, namely: embezzlement; bribery; fraud; extortion; and favouritism.

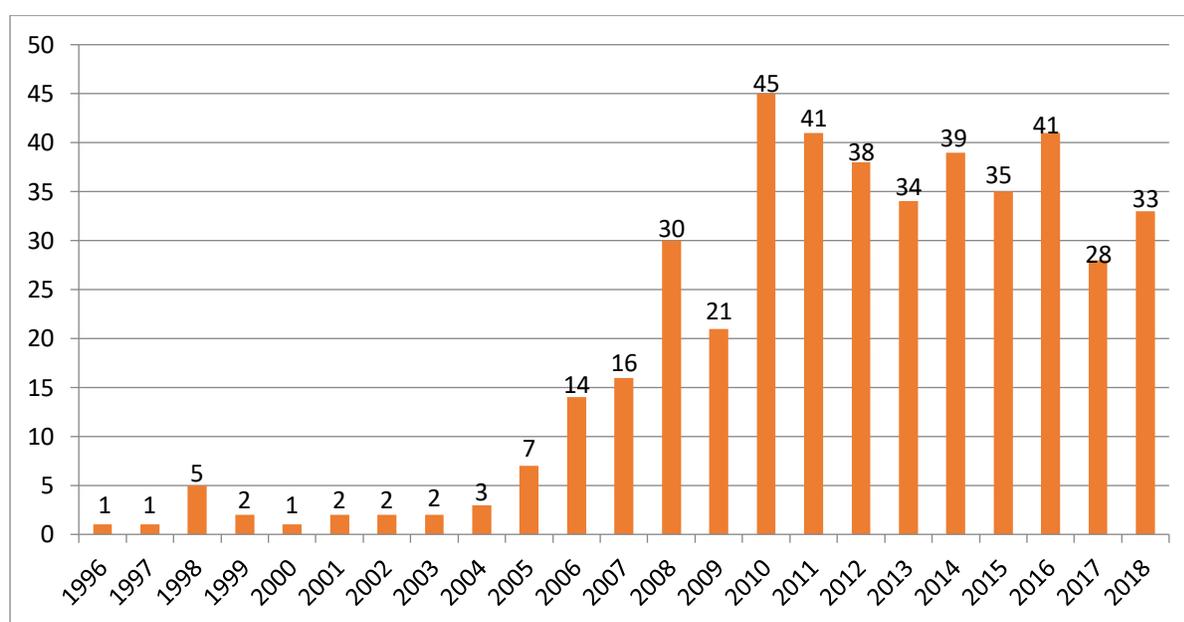
Analysis of Corruption Incidences in Nigeria

Nigerian Higher Education could boast as one of the best across the world in the 1960s and 1970s as it showcased the best of academic traditions and culture (Ajayi, 2002; Yaqub, 2002). During this quality-driven era, institutions lived up to their intellectual responsibilities of quality teaching, research, publication and community Services. However, from the 1980s, there have been a downward trend. Why is this so? First, any attempt to understand the plunging trend in the quality of education especially in higher institutions in Nigeria must of necessity begin with the history of the crisis and deeply rooted corruption in the Nigerian State. By implication, the deepening crisis of corruption issues of the Nigerian State offers a good point of departure in explaining the fall in the quality of the Nigerian educational system.

It would be recalled that the decade- of the 1980s was an era laden with economic recession in Nigeria, as in several other African countries of the world. While the entire country was engulfed in this struggle for survival, especially the rural settings, the universities suffered serious consequences. The most visible and terrible effect on university education was the downward trend in funding(Torulagha, 2013).. This resulted in a series of strikes and confrontation between

the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), accompanied by the search for greener pastures at home and abroad by academics. On the other hand, the military government through corruption tendencies and the need for educational incorporation had to co-opt articulate scholars and critics into top government positions such as Ministers, advisers and ambassadors. The potency of ASUU's engagement with the state over the sector's poor funding and management deficiencies led to the course of the latter in its deployment of force against the former, resulting in massive exodus of scholars from Nigerian universities to foreign lands resulting to brain drain and declining educational quality (Amuwo,2003; Uzochukwu, 2015). Those who were not so fortunate to leave the country like their counterparts had little or no choice than to devise alternative means of surviving and resorting to venturing into several other engagements - trading, part-time jobs etc., all with implications for their intellectual responsibilities.

Fig 1: Nigeria's ranking as the most corrupt country over the years



Source: Extracted from World Corruption perception index (The corruption perception index is the leading indicator of public sector corruption, that offers a yearly snapshot of the relative degree of corruption problem by ranking countries across the globe based on their perceived levels of public sector and institutional corruption drawn on 13 surveys covering experts assessments. From the table above, Nigeria failed to achieve an improvement over the year)

Causes, Issues and Cases of Corruption in Higher Education in Nigeria

There are some elements that have been perceived to be responsible with potentials and motivation for corruption thus making corruption endemic in our higher education institutions of learning in Nigeria considered detrimental to the educational development of our land , According to Buabeng (2016), it will be necessary to consider the following causes of corruption in our HEIs such as Unfair, or poor working conditions, Ineffective regulatory

regimes, Excessive bureaucratic structures/bottlenecks, Kinship, tradition, gift giving among others, Political interference, Unnecessary materialism (Greed and Selfishness) and Non-enforcement of law among others.

In view of the foregoing, some critical issues have emerged from the reinforcement of the processes and paces of corruption in higher institutions in Nigeria, some of them include:

i. Mismanagement of Funds, Facilities and Inadequacies on Governance

The task of governing the Universities rests with their management especially the Universities Governing Councils. Omofa (2005) pointed out, that issues on fairness, equity and justice have been replaced by considerations regarding identity, particularly ethnicity, religion and several other political factors by the various managements of higher education institutions. The effect of this is that Nigeria's best brains are left to roam the Streets while the mediocres fill the System as a consequence of these bad policies. Scholars now find it extremely difficult to be represented at reputable international Conferences owing to these constraints. The inadequacy of governance consists of inadequate enforcement of code of conduct and high ethical standards which prohibit corrupt practices, lack of accountability measures/check and balances procedures, poor reward systems resulting into monumental frauds in institutions of higher learning. Locally too, several hitherto reputable and regular journals disappeared for similar reasons.

ii. Academic Extortion by some Academics in the Institutions

Some academics have demonstrated skills in extorting money from students. In some cases, extortion of students manifests in the production and sale of handouts, otherwise known as lecture materials at exorbitant prices. Most of the materials are forced on students with the use of open threats of failure (carry-over) against them despite institutionalized sanctions against such practices. Though the authorities of most Universities have done quite well by discouraging the production and sales of handouts, in some other places, it has not been totally outlawed rather they have a regime of regulated pricing of such handouts being instituted in these universities (Omotola, 2006). In the case mentioned heretofore, the request for repricing must first be made by a majority of the students in a letter to the Head of the Department (HoD). The HoD will then liaise with the lecturer in Charge to work out the modalities and price. Such regulatory measures have also been put in place in condemning sales of books such that no lecturer is allowed to sell books directly to students. Again lecturers do usually impose binding fees on students for project works. In some other instances, lecturers undertake to write project/dissertations for students for a fee then deliver the finished product to the Student. Though these take place in several state Universities and third generation Universities and a lot of monotechnics, the

authorities of such institutions only play lip service to forbidding such practices as both lecturers and students enjoy it specially students who cannot study hard. Poor students specially the females pay in kind i.e 'sex for grade'.

Another form of extortion by liberal lecturers in some of these institutions is to give the student the freedom to do the work but they must type and finish the project at a given place dictated by the lecturer usually owned by his or her relatives. This corrupt dimension is the most common and seems to be gaining increasing patronage especially in the face of increasing economic hardship. Nkang (2012) warned that students should desist from forming themselves into "lecturers' boys" who act as agents to extort money from innocent students for lecturers' use then eventually give them a percentage of the total collection. Furthermore, the study of Nkang (2012) emphasized that such action is academic fraud and that when students learn and perfect the trade, then the cycle continues. The study therefore suggested that class/course representatives should be those with impeccable character that can influence their mates positively.

Another dimension of corruption among lecturers which is prevalent among male lecturers) is sex for high grades: male lecturers harass the female students with demands for sex in return for high grades while the male students pay their way through. Uzochukwu (2015) observed that these are the things that lecturers do that deserve severe punishment. however, the study pointed out that it is most painful because most of the female students harassed are married..

However, there has been widespread argument as to the question of who harasses who between lecturers and female students (Fayankinnu, 2004), the fact remains that sexual harassment has become a frequent feature of staff-students relations in Nigeria with a very recent example the BBC sex for grades scandal of the University of Lagos (BBC Sex for Grade Documentary, 2018). The academic dimension is that sex is now traded for marks. The sex for grade is carefully done that female students who refuse such lecturers advances are failed deliberately with the system being unable to take assist the student in any form hence most times the female students are at the mercy of their male lecturers. Erinosh (2004) explained that higher institutions in Nigeria do not seem to have institutionalized mechanisms for redressing this ugly female student's harassment.

iii. The Issue of Under-funding of Higher Education Institutions in Nigeria

It is glaring that Nigerian universities have not been adequately funded (Iyayi, 2010;Jaja, 2004). Aluko (2008) noted that even when money is allocated to these institutions, it takes the form of over-invoicing, allocation of contracts to oneself or agents of government and direct

embezzlement of funds by government agents as it is evidenced in recent pages of national dailies where huge money are looted by the executive arm of the government. This may have been made possible by the fact that some Vice Chancellors are mere puppets in the hands of the government of the day where institutions level of autonomy has been greatly reduced to the barest minimum such that there is no capacity to carry out major research projects, maintain capital projects and sustain itself. Yet the allocation to education has remained between 6-10% instead of the required 26% UNESCO recommendation for educational allocation.

iv. Politicking, Greed and Intra-institutional-elitist Competition in Higher Education Institutions in Nigeria

The complete politicization of our educational system is another cause of crisis in higher education institutions in Nigeria. It is such that while some HEI's enjoy good patronage from the system for playing along, others have become victims (Amuwo, 2003). The issue here is the issue of 'divide' and 'belonging to'. The divide represents politics in the system in terms of promotion, advancements or otherwise among both the academics and the students. Where such issues affects students, the academics and the students in the same divide or belong to the same association, cult, ethnic group connive to wrestle such from legitimately qualified persons. The result is that the system suffers for it (Ojiade, 2000).

Amaefule and Owete (2006) reported that the response of ASUU to this rancor among HEI's has not helped matters such that lecturers emphasized that during the period of promotions, they were not considered for promotion despite the fact they were more qualified than those who were promoted. The criteria and method of promotion was not known thereby they suspected that it was because they had no 'godfather' to push their cases for them. Promotion has been privatized and used as an instrument of reward to the 'my boy' academics and penalty for 'stubborn ones' who have refused to play along. The greed of academic managers is another case in point of corruption in Nigerian HEIs. It is such that several public officers especially in HEIs now display wealth which they cannot account for or explain the sources of the income that brought them such properties. It is all corruption..

v. Ethnicism, Bias and Favoritism among Higher Education Administrators in Nigeria

This is a mechanism for power abuse implying a highly biased (skewed) distribution of resources (Shamija, 2006). This is seen as a natural human proclivity to favour friends, family and anybody close and trusted but this has negatively affected the growth of our higher institutions of learning such that we have continued to hide under ethnicity, regional and religious politics to perpetuate corrupt practices making corruption in Nigeria a lucrative business. Sometimes, favoritism manifests in unfair promotions or bonuses. However it is equally an eye sore to publicly see

some forms of subtle indications of favoritism that are frustrating to employees and detrimental to educational culture. The major pitfall of favoritism is that it kills the motivation and work morale of diligent workers.

vi. Absence of Autonomy in the Governance of Higher Education Institutions in Nigeria

The place of unhindered freedom by higher educational institutions to make their decisions peculiar to their institutional needs and problems is virtually non-existent as the government interferes and directs affairs of higher educational institutions in Nigeria. Within developmental and educational research, there is a pillar called self-determination theory (Anderson, 2005). It states that for institutions to develop and perform their functions effectively there is need to create the right sort of environment. The desirable environment should be autonomy-supportive (non-controlling) such that higher education institutions should have provision for choice, rationale for imposed structures, recognition of participants feeling and perspective, opportunities to display initiative, useful feedback, no overt control and criticism and an appropriate reward system.

Implications of Entrenched Corruption to Higher Institutions Development in Nigeria

The corruption crisis in Nigeria's Higher Education Institutions (HEI)s has a lot of direct effects on national development. The first is the negative drain of manpower from HEIs due to the existence of corruption coupled with system impunity of those supposed to manage such institutions. Nigeria's best academics have been lost and others are still getting lost to the outside world especially through brain drain. Another effect is that higher education institutions in Nigeria appear to be low in ranking internationally which is not unconnected with corruption as resources and development go in incongruous directions. Misappropriations of finances among other factors help to entrench infrastructural decadence which is a bane on Nigeria's HEIs. The poor perception of certificates from Nigeria's HEIs is also evident here at home as employers now subject graduates to all forms of multi-stage test to ascertain the authenticity of their capacity. Again, absence support for infrastructural development affects availability of facilities for effective teaching and learning. The consequence of this is that those Nigerians who have access to quality education not get the best. Lecturers may not get job satisfaction and this has potentials to remove the interest of the teaching profession by professionally competent teachers, thereby leaving the teaching profession with basically quacks.

Efforts and Challenges in Fighting Corruption

Government efforts at combating the crime can be grouped into Legal, Institutional and International.

1. **Legal Measures:** various anti- corruption laws have been introduced in the country which include:
 - a. The Public Accounts Committee (FGN, 1966)
 - b. Money Laundry Act No.3 of 1995 and amended again in 2004 (FGN, 2004)
 - c. Advanced Fee fraud (FGN, 1996)
 - d. Foreign Exchange Act No.17 (FGN, 1995)
 - e. The Corrupt practices and other related offences act of 2000 and amended in Act 2003
2. **Institutional Measures:** Over the years, government has established various institutions to monitor compliance with anti-corruption laws. Their functions and allocation of responsibility are expressly defined in their enabling Act. They include:
 - a. The Code of Conduct Bureau: the code of conduct bureau derives its power from the fifth schedule of the Nigerian constitution which vested power on it to try and convict corrupt public officers (FGN, 1979).
 - b. Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC): the commission was established by Act 2004 charged with the responsibility of enforcing the fight against money laundering and economic and financial crimes.
 - c. Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences (ICPC): the commission was established by the anti-corruption law of Nigeria in 2000 and vested with the responsibility of fighting corruption by receiving complaints, investigating and prosecuting offenders.(Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Act 2020).
 - d. Budget Monitoring Unit (Due Process): this is under the presidency and it aims at reduction of high corruption index through effective and transparent public procurement procedure to ensure that the country derives maximum satisfaction from public expenditure.
3. **International Co-operation Measures:** Government has collaborated with different international stakeholders such as the International Monetary Fund(IMF), Transparency International (TI), Global Coalition for Africa(GCA) and World Bank in the fight against corruption. It has also signed Memoranda of Understanding with various countries like Turkey, China and Iran for information sharing and other actions aimed at fighting corruption.

However these measures were not effective due to the inherent structures of corruption embedded deep in almost every body and not just the government Also, in our universities of learning, there are cases of the establishment of Disciplinary Committees (SDCs) whom are

vested with the powers to curb indiscipline and acts of corruption in schools, but the question is, to what extent are they allowed to perform their duties? The senate bodies of higher educational institutions also serve as both regulatory body and control mechanism of any act of excessiveness in schools

Nigeria can take a cue from the example of the United States, such that in fighting to reduce corruption, they promulgated stringent adequate “checkpoints” to stop the sacred cows who may want to apply varied strategies including court processes to circumvent rules and regulations to prevent prosecution, therefore highly placed persons were charged separately if they try to obstruct justice (The World Almanac and Book of facts 2008)

Conclusion

This paper undertook a critical analysis of the various dimensions experienced in corruption by Higher Educational Institutions in Nigeria. The paper took a critical analysis of the various dimensions of corruption incidences in Higher Educational Institutions in Nigeria by arguing the issue of intra institutional-elitist competition and political intricacies among the various intellectual divides of staff increasing the perpetration of corruption in Higher Educational Institutions in Nigeria .

The paper argued that the absence of autonomy and declining government support, ethnic biases among others represented some factors driving the incidence of corruption in higher education institutions.. Furthermore, threats to anti-corruption fight emanate from the behaviors of supposedly enlightened community seems to promote the incidence of corruption in higher institutions of learning. the gravest threats to anti corruption itself emanate from the behaviors of so -called enlightened academics who promote and teach corruption through inappropriate behaviours, body languages to teach the younger generation to believe that personal effort and merit do not count and that success comes through manipulation, favoritism and bribery, sexual harassment.

Recommendation

To tame corruption in higher educational institutions in Nigeria, the following steps are recommended;

1. Higher institutions of learning should be empowered to use multifaceted strategic approaches by introducing specialized anticorruption Departments, highly independent in their functions that can identify corrupt acts and bring them to management attention.

2. Proper monitoring of all financial transactions in Universities which we discover to be the source of underfunding such that there should be strong mechanisms upon which offenders should be punished or disciplined or made to refund what they have corruptly acquired.
3. Critical measures to sanitize the system backed by other intra-corruption efforts of the institutions themselves should be adopted.

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