



# Academic Corruption in Higher Institutions: Implication for Quality Education

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## ABSTRACT

Corruption goes beyond offering money. This menace has crept into the inner precincts of the citadels of learning hence the tag 'academic corruption'. Academic corruption 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. This paper examined the implication of academic corruption on quality education. Quality education is such that provides learners with the capacity required to become economically beneficial, develop sustainable livelihood, contribute to peaceful and democratic society through enhanced individual wellbeing. It also deals with standard, efficiency, relevance, appropriateness and values. Thus, quality education is critical to a society that requires quality manpower for rapid development and transformation, and all these may not be feasible if an educational system is afflicted with corruption because academic corruption interferes with the basic mission of education. There is need therefore to avoid the sabotage of development by ensuring the formation of educated, competent and upright individuals for future leadership and growth.

**Keywords:** Academic corruption, Quality education, Higher institutions, Students, Society.

## INTRODUCTION

One of the key 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 of dishonest practices in the process. For when man is given qualitative education he becomes a creative and productive being and by extension agent of development or change. This is why [1] affirmed that, down the ages, some societies have made such waves and have contributed significantly to human progress either continuously or occasionally when they have been able to rise up to the desired standard of education. In other words, without qualitative education, a society is permanently sentenced to retrogression. It is in realization of this that Nigeria's philosophy of education is partly anchored on the beliefs that: (a) Education is an instrument for national development (b) Education fosters the worth and development of the individual for each individual's sake, and for the general development of the society [2]. Nigeria's philosophy of education therefore is based on the development of the individual into a sound and effective citizen (Ibid). To achieve this, the National Policy on Education provided further that the quality of instruction at all levels has to be orientated or tailored towards inculcating the following values:

- Respect for the worth and dignity of the individual
- Faith in man's ability to make rational decision
- Moral and spiritual principles in interpersonal and human relations
- Shared responsibility for the common good of society
- Provision of the physical, emotional and psychological development of all children and
- Acquisition of competencies necessary for self-reliance (Ibid).

However, today, hardly are these values inculcated in the students in tertiary educational institutions. Where they are being inculcated, they are half-heartedly or perversely transmitted as a result of corruption, hence, the challenge of unemployable graduates in the country. Today, individuals express concern about the quality of graduates that are churned out by our tertiary educational institutions. This is because most of the graduates are grossly deficient in competence or capacity.

### **Concept of Academic Corruption**

Heyman, [3] defined corruption as abuse of authority for personal or material gain, whereas [4] perceived it to be misuse of public office for private gain. [5], 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 goes beyond offering money. This menace has crept into inner precincts of the citadels of learning hence the tag 'academic corruption'. [6], 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. [7], 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 for public procurement projects, such as the construction of schools. [8], 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 of other aspects of academic corruption in which the students are involved. Because of this, [9] 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, [10] 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. All the same, academic corruption bears negatively on educational institutions, making it imperative to address this threat.

### **Levels of Academic Corruption**

Corruption remains one of the common social problems bedeviling all sectors of the national economy including education in Nigeria. In the educational system, corruption occurs at various levels as rightfully identified in [11], cutting across the political, administrative and classroom levels.

#### **a. 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. The policy makers especially the government in power and its ministers and commissioners often rule out areas of the polity that failed to vote them in to power. Decisions on educational 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'[10].

#### **b. Central Ministerial Level Corruption**

At this level abounds grand corruption which involves diversion of funds meant for procurement, construction and funds intended for allocation to lower levels of the system [11]. Funds for higher educational 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.

#### **c. 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.

#### **d. 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 Institutions of Learning**

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. [12], 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 manifests itself in the following forms:

##### **a. 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.

##### **b. Moral Corruption**

Moral decadence has been the order of the day in the 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.

##### **c. Admission Frauds**

This form of corruption occurs during admission process of new students whereby university officials and entrance examination bodies' officials are bribed to secure admissions for students. [10], 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 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.

##### **d. Instructional Delivery 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.

##### **e. 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, and etcetera). 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.

#### **Ways to Curb Academic Corruption**

As a way to curtail corruption in academic institutions, the following measures should suffice:

- i. There is need for learning institutions to provide staff and students with periodic education on ethical values, the importance of upholding such values, the values of making and maintaining a good name

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- can make a lot of difference. When the human resources of an institution do not only know what is right and wrong but are persuaded and inclined to placing high value on doing what is right, academic corruption will be minimized.
- ii. The government and employers of labour should attach greater importance to the display of skills and professional competence rather than certificate alone.
  - iii. There is need for societal re-engineering and re-orientation in order to revamp moral values.
  - iv. Efforts should be geared toward ensuring that adequate sanctions are meted out to those who come short of the rules guiding learning institutions.
  - v. Vigorous campaigns and seminars should be made to restore values of honesty, dedication to duty and study, hard work and perseverance.
  - vi. More funding should be allocated to learning institutions to enable to establishment of adequate infrastructural facilities in schools. This will phase-out sharp practices among individuals.
  - vii. Proven cases of academic corruption should not be swept under the carpet, and the relevant sanctions and punishment dispensed. This will help to ensure specific and general deterrence because unpunished corruption deepens corruption.
  - viii. External and internal quality assurance mechanism should be set up to monitor and evaluate teaching-learning process on a regular basis.
  - ix. Institutions of learning should not only create the unit to receive and deal with corruption complaint or reports but also encourage all stakeholders to report any case of perceived academic corruption. This encouragement should go beyond words of assurance of not divulging such information and identity.

#### Implications for Quality Education

Education provides the acquisition of functional skill, moral identity and ambition to succeed in life and thereby improve the society. There is no nation that can achieve any development when the type of education given to people at all levels especially at the higher level is that which makes the individual become a nuisance not only to one self but also to the society. Education is seen as the key factor for national development and powering the citizens to master their environment in order to compete for survival [13]. [13], maintained that education has to be a powerful instrument and of good quality to enable the recipient grow into functional member of his family and of the nation. Quality education according to [14] is the skills and knowledge that is potentially able to reflect the level of attainment. It refers to what that level of education can do based on the intent of the same. Quality education is the one that provides all learners with the capacity required to become economically beneficial, develop sustainable livelihood, contribute to peaceful and democratic society through enhanced individual wellbeing. It also deals with standard, efficiency, relevance, appropriateness and values [15]. Quality education is critical to a society that requires quality manpower for rapid development and transformation. The more the level of educational quality a society attains, the more critical issues like the dignity of labour, political stability religious tolerance, quality leadership, self-reliance, among others are achieved. But all these may not be feasible if an educational system is afflicted with corruption because academic corruption interferes with the basic mission of education, the transfer of knowledge by allowing students to get by without having to master the knowledge furthermore. This may lead to the production of multitude of graduates who lack basic skills and knowledge required for the socio-economic and technological transformation of the nation. It sabotages development by undermining the formation of educated, competent and upright individuals for future leadership and labour force [16].

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