

Bribing for Scores and Academic Integrity among Public University Students in Cross River State

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Abstract

The menace of bribing for scores is an ugly trend that is gradually eating deep into the fabrics of the Nigerian educational institutions thereby eroding academic integrity. The thrust of this paper is to x-ray how bribing for scores affects academic integrity. Three research questions were posed to guide this study. The study adopted the descriptive survey design. The population for this study comprised of all university undergraduate students from public universities in Cross River State. Sample was drawn using the stratified random sampling technique. A total of two hundred students made up the sample. Data were analyzed using mean scores. Some of the findings of this study include that students bribe through various means such as giving lecturers money to get undeserved scores, submitting assignments with monies enclosed in brown envelopes and sexual gratifications. Also, it was revealed that many students bribe lecturers because they are compelled to do so by lecturers. Based on these findings, recommendations were made, including installation of closed circuit televisions in strategic locations to checkmate this menace.

Keywords: Academic, Integrity, Bribery, Scores, University, Students.

Introduction

The role of education in driving integrity in any nation cannot be overemphasized. Education develops strong character and inculcates societal values and norms into the young ones. Such values include discipline, integrity, honesty, hard work and respect for constituted authorities. However, as the society changes these values also change or are watered down, the same is true of the educational sector.

Universities are established to advance the frontiers of knowledge, transform lives and contribute to the health and wealth of the nation. The university is looked upon as the

ivory tower, the citadel of learning producing men and woman of integrity, worthy in character and learning. However this is not the case in recent times as observed by Uche (2014), that the menace of corruption plaguing the Nigerian polity has slowly permeated the university system to such magnitude that corrupt practices of various dimensions and forms are perpetuated by university lecturers and students. Nta (2012) lamented that corruption has eroded creativity, played down on values of hardwork and enthroned mediocrity in the nation's university system, and that some university lecturers are deeply sunk into this shameful abyss of moral decadence while also becoming sex bullies to the female students they are paid to teach.

The Nigerian University education system has been bedeviled by various corrupt practices which have eaten deep into the system. Uche (2014) lamented also that the present day university has become a haven for corrupt practices where corruption has become the rule than an exception. Admin (2014) observed that in Nigerian universities, academic and non-academic staff, students, senior lecturers and even professor are caught in the webs of bribery and corruption and that corruption seems to have become legitimate in the nation. Orizu (2014) maintained that corruption on the part of administrators, academic and non-academic staff as well as student have resulted in the lack of adequate infrastructure, admission racketeering, examination malpractices, grade buying and falsification of academic records such as transcripts, fraudulent allocation of degree results, misappropriation of funds, sexual harassment, victimization as well as syndicate plagiarism by students and lecturers in tertiary institutions. These vices erode academic integrity. Odunanya and Olojunwon (2010) observed that increase in corruption in the larger society, the quest for material possession and emphasis on paper qualification (certificate) instead of skills and lifelong learning, alongside admission racketeering and lowered standards of admission to accommodate the intellectually weak ones, plus the proliferation of part time programmes have all encouraged the influx into universities, of candidates who are not materials for university education, who become so desperate that they employ every available, albeit unsavoury means to succeed academically, including bribery (sorting), sexual offers and so on.

Integrity regardless of qualifier adjective is the state of steadfastly adhering to high moral principles or professional standards. A person of integrity does not compromise standards; such persons upholds values of humility, honesty; can be taken for his or her words and does not bend rules to suit anybody or situations (Okebukola 2015).

Academic integrity could be defined as the moral code of ethical policy of academia. This includes avoidance of cheating or plagiarism, maintenance of academic standard, honesty and rigour in research and academic publishing. Academic integrity is committed to five fundamental values of honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility. Olasehinde (2005) defines academic integrity as a state of steadfastly

adhering to high moral principles or professional standards and values in academics especially in teaching, learning and research.

In the same vein, Emiloju and Adenoju (2012) opined that the term academic integrity encompasses the honesty involved in academic conduct from teaching, learning and assessment to management of the educational process. Anderson, Adams and Synder (2016) also defined academic integrity as a form of transparency and self-discipline in any academic activity which is required of all stakeholders, students, lecturers and administrators. Babalola (2012) identified several factors that militate against the effectiveness of academic integrity in the Nigerian education system. Some of these include poor social attitude and perception of the value of education and academic integrity, non-inclusion of academic integrity courses in the general school curriculum at all levels, degradation of moral values and standards in schools, culture of indiscipline among teachers and students, employment of teachers without basic qualifications and non-implementation of sanctions/punishments to staff and students involved in academic misconduct.

Hallack and Poisson (2007) observed that corruption constitutes a serious threat to the successful attainment of education goals. Okojie (2012) stressed that corrupt practices that exist in universities take different dimensions ranging from cheating in examination, bribing lecturers to earn underserved scores/marks and non-processing of students' scores among others. Bribing for scores is one of the corrupt practices that are fast destroying the fabrics of academic standards and integrity.

The Nigerian Universities Commission (NUC, 2016) defined bribing for score as a practice whereby a lazy and academically deficient student bribes a teacher or other persons in authority in the university with a view to securing favour that will wipe out such academic deficiencies. Bribing for scores is a process by which student pay in cash or kind to be awarded unmerited marks by lecturers after examination or test (Chukwu & Lato, 2016).

Osunde (2012) also sees bribing for grades as a system through which deficient students engage in gratification of their lecturer with items such as money, expensive gifts and even sex, in case of female students, in order to obtain good grades in examination. He further observed that some lecturers frustrate students for refusing to cooperate by making them have carry-overs, extension, missing scripts and even poor grades because of failure to bribe them. According to Admin (2014), bribing for scores is a situation where students liaise with their lecturers and other officials to inflate grades in exchange for money or other forms of gratifications. Bribing for scores also known as “sorting,” “runs” or “blocking” has become a campus culture, in many Nigerian universities such that a student hardly graduated without “bribing” in one way or the other. Various tactics are adopted by lecturers to arm-twist students including irregular attendance in lectures, announcing through the course representatives that anyone who pays certain amount

will get extra marks, setting exams questions out of course contents, submission of assignments with money and buying textbooks for assessment. The trend has compelled students to keep a good percentage of their upkeep allowance obtained from their parents and even their school fees for that purpose. Admin (2014) further averred that lecturers used course coordinators or course representatives as agents to perpetuate their evil acts. Some persuade their course-mates to bribe for good grades in courses and get a certain percentage in returns. He also observed that students who intend to buy grade or bribe for scores usually hang around school when others are on holidays.

According to N.U.C. (2016), purchase of handout and books authored by lecturers; a few thousand naria in an envelope submitted with the course form to be awarded high marks; a female student's one hour sexual interaction with teacher in the office or in obscure hotel, buying the lecturers tyres for their car, dresses for the children and for the lecturer himself/herself and food items for the home are all aspects of bribery.

Causes of bribing for scores have been identified to include universities admitting students into courses they know nothing about, the general moral decadence and the high premium placed on certificates, greed and poverty and over-ambition, craze for wealth etc (Osunde, 2012). Academic corruption has adversely affected the standard of university education in Nigeria. According to Orizu (2014), bribing for scores has adverse negative effects on academic standards. Some of such negative effects include lack of credibility and recognition of academic certificates acquired in Nigeria by the international community, declining standard of education, inability to secure competitive and challenging jobs, and skills and moral bankruptcy among students who are the leaders of tomorrow, increased carry over courses, lack of commitment and dedication to academic works, a lack of belief in hard work, increase in rate of malpractices, and encouragement of laziness on the part of students/lecturers. UNESCO (2012) reported that many Nigerian graduates today cannot apply knowledge to real work situation, analyze and solve problems and cannot communicate effectively with colleagues even when those features are critical elements of skill development which young people need to obtain jobs in a competitive global economy driven by technology.

A study by Chukwu and Lato (2016) on the perception of students on “sorting” in Nigeria universities using 200 students from the South West Nigeria found out among others that bribing for scores is dangerously gaining ground in Nigerian universities; that lecturers use it to extort money from students and sexually assault female students. The report also revealed that the menace is demoralizing hardworking students who are compelled to also bribe disregarding their personal efforts. The researcher recommended an urgent need to checkmate the menace, if Nigerian graduates would be able to compete with their counterparts globally.

Orizu (2014) in his study observed that students are no more committed and dedicated to their academic work due to the belief that even after burning the midnight candle, they will still be compelled to buy grades. This is a simple way of grooming laziness and inept youths who will not believe in hardwork, who will be deficient in knowledge and skills required to develop the economy of Nigeria. He revealed further that in recent times, students prepare, if at all, lackadaisically for examinations. Students hardly read for examinations and most of them are only eager to enter the examination halls, sign the attendance register and bribe their way to the top. He further stated that today, it is not through reading that people pass, and that this spells a very bad omen for the Nigerian educational system. Students are no more interested in acquiring skills and knowledge for sustainable development but in acquiring certificates. Nta (2013) observed that the activities of randy lecturers demanding money and sex for grades are eroding the quality of scholarship, perverting the standard of moral value.

The menace called bribing for scores, a nickname for academic corruption, has become so endemic that the National Universities Commission launched a war against it. Over the years, the media has been awash with news about high level of moral decadence in the nation's educational institutions. Bribing for scores is a hydra headed monster of buying and selling of grades by students and lecturers. Bribing for scores has become a recurring special problem and is very popular within the university community. As lamented by Okoduwa (2012), this decay in ethical and academic standards in institutions of higher learning has resulted in the churning out of unemployable graduates, grave incompetence in the employed ones, morally bankrupt in the youth and disdain for Nigerian certificates in the international knowledge market place.

Despite efforts by the National Universities Commission at fighting the monster called bribery for scores through its declaration of war against it in 2005, the ugly trend seemed to have resurfaced in recent times in a greater dimension with its grievous consequences on the students in particular and the universities' delivery of quality education in general. The rate of bribery in Nigerian universities has become worrisome especially when those who are to manage the system are involved. It is on this premise that this study seeks to answer the following questions: why do students engage in bribing for scores and how can this menace be eradicated from the university campuses?

Research questions

Three research questions were posed to guide the study:

1. Why do university students bribe for scores?
2. In what ways do university students bribe for scores?
3. What is the perception of university students about the relationship between bribing for scores and academic integrity?

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey design; the study area was Cross River State. The population of the study consisted of undergraduate students from the two public Universities in Cross River State. These included University of Calabar and Cross River State University of Technology. Sample for this study was selected using the stratified random sampling. A total of two hundred students were selected, one hundred students from each university.

The instrument used for data collection was a twenty five item questionnaire tagged Bribing for Scores and Academic Integrity Questionnaire (BFSAIQ). The questionnaire consisted of two parts A and B. Part A required respondents' biodata while part B had statements that required respondents' candid opinion about grade buying. Responses were placed on a Likert scale of Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2) and Strongly Disagree (1). Items of the instrument were validated through scrutiny by experts in Psychology, Test and Measurement. A pilot test was conducted on forty undergraduates who were not part of the sample for the study. The Cronbach alpha reliability co-efficient was used to establish the reliability of the instrument. A reliability index of 0.69 to 0.75 was obtained. The questionnaire was distributed to the respondents in their various schools and campuses by the researchers and was returned on the spot. Data collected were analyzed using mean scores and standard deviations.

Presentation of results

Research Question 1: Why do University students bribe for scores?

Table 1: Mean scores and standard deviation of responses on why university students bribe for scores

S/N	Statement	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Students bribe for scores because they are lazy and do not want to work.	3.38	.876	A
2.	Students bribe for scores because they are compelled to do so.	3.58	5.38	A
3.	Students bribe for scores because lecturers victimize those who refuse to do so.	3.35	567	A
4.	Students bribe for score s because it has become a university culture.	3.36	.589	A
5.	Students bribe for scores because they want the certificate at all cost.	3.70	.603	A
6.	Lecturers do not attend lectures so that students will fail and consequently bribe for scores.	2.93	1.33	A
7.	Lecturers set examination off the course content to attract mass failure	3.50	.541	A

8.	Lecturers make their courses appear difficult so students can bribe for scores.	3.46	.603	A
9.	Hard working students are compelled to bribe because some lecturers make it a condition for passing the course.	3.50	.479	A
10.	Bribing for scores is used by lecturers to extort money from students	3.36	.589	A

Table 1 shows the mean scores and standard deviation of responses on why university students bribe for scores. The mean and the standard deviation of each item was generated and presented using accepted mean range of 1 to 2.4 as low and 2.5 to 4.0 as high on a four points Likert scale. The result revealed that all the mean values of items are between 2.93 and 3.70 indicating a consensus among the respondents on the reason why students bribe for scores.

Research question 2: What are the ways students bribe for grades?

Table 2: Mean scores and standard deviation of responses on the ways university students bribe for grades

S/N	Statement	Mean	SD	D
1.	Students pay money for correction of failed grades	3.51	.493	A
2.	Students are forced to buy lecturers' textbooks before they can be assessed.	3.49	.585	A
3.	Students are compelled to submit assignments and other assessments with money inside an envelope	3.49	.605	A
4.	Female students are compelled to trade sex with their male lecturer in their offices or hotels	3.49	.636	A
5.	Students buy expensive gift items for their lecturers to influence their grades	3.36	.589	A

Table 2 revealed the responses of University students on the ways in which students bribe for scores. All items revealed mean scores from 3.36 to 3.52. Therefore all items were accepted as ways in which students bribe for scores.

Research Question 3: What is the perception of University students about the relationship between bribing for scores and academic integrity?

Table 3: Mean scores and Standard deviation of responses on university students' perception of the relationship between bribing for scores and academic integrity.

S/N	Statement	Mean	SD	Decision
1.	Bribing for scores is a process whereby students pay in kind or cash to be given underserved grades by lecturers after examination or test.	3.30	.876	A
2.	Bribing for scores is one of the corrupt practices in the University system.	3.42	.646	A
3.	Bribing for scores makes students earn grades/certificates they cannot defend.	3.50	.541	A
4.	Lecturers engage in bribe for scores because they are corrupt/greedy	3.41	.615	A
5.	Bribing for scores makes students become unserious with their studies	2.64	.509	A
6.	Bribing for scores churns out half -baked graduates from the Universities	2.73	.910	A
7.	Bribing for scores churns out unemployable graduate from the Universities	3.53	.693	A
8.	Bribing for scores threatens academic integrity in our Universities.	3.49	.541	A
9.	There is nothing wrong with bribing for scores.	1.53	.692	D
10.	Bribing for scores impairs the confidence of hard working students in academic	3.46	.603	A

Table 3 shows the means score and standard deviation of responses on students' perception about the relationship between bribing for scores and academic integrity. The mean scores ranged from 1.53 and 3.53.

Discussion of the Findings

The findings of this study on the relationship between bribing for scores and academic integrity indicated that bribing for scores plays a major negative role in the eroding of academic integrity in the Universities. The study further revealed reasons why students bribe and the mode in which bribery takes place in the universities, thereby acknowledging the fact that bribery is an endemic academic corrupt practice that is fast becoming a culture in Nigerian universities. Also it was discovered that students bribe through various channels such as giving of money to lecturers to award scores or undeserved grades. Students also, in submitting assignment or examinations scripts, enclose monies in brown envelope. Others purchase expensive gifts and the female students trade sex for grades. In addition, the study unfolded the fact that most students bribe not out of their will but are compelled to do so by the lecturers, who make it the

only condition for passing their examinations. These findings are in agreement with Admin (2014), Osunde (2012) and Uche (2014) who reported the sorry state of academic integrity in Nigeria universities. They observed that students bribe for grades through various means to get undeserved scores from their lecturers.

It was also discovered from this study that bribing for scores has very negative effects on the students' attitude to their studies and the entire product of the University. Students' perceptions on the effect of bribing for scores on academic integrity include among others that bribery makes students becomes unserious with their studies. Bribing for scores threatens academic integrity, churns out half-baked graduates from the Universities and makes them unemployable. This is in consonance with the findings of Chukwu and Lato (2016), Uche (2012), UNESCO (2012) and Orizu (2014). They also observed that among other effects of bribing for scores were lack of credibility of academic certificates, declining standard of education in the country and moral bankruptcy among students who are leaders of tomorrow. There is also a lack of belief in hardwork and encouraging laziness and truancy among students and the production of unemployable graduates.

Conclusion

The study has examined the menace of bribing for scores which is almost becoming a culture in the Nigerian university community and a recurring societal problem. Concern about integrity within the academia is prominent; fostering a culture of academic integrity reduces the negative and uncomfortable situation like unemployability, due to poor skills and other adverse consequences for staff and students. Promoting academic integrity through pedagogical processes can support the development of scholarship and promote ethical responsibility.

Recommendations

- 1) Combating the plague of bribing for scores in Nigerian universities requires a synergy of efforts from all stakeholders in the business of education. They include the federal government of Nigeria, University authorities, National Universities Commission (NUC), parents, student, lecturers, Heads of Departments, Deans and other relevant quality assurance agencies within the system. Laws forbidding bribery of all kinds in universities must be enforced through appropriate empowerment of monitoring and surveillance agencies in the system.
- 2) The secret installation of close circuit television at strategic locations and offices within the campuses provide sensitivity, consciousness and caution to all.
- 3) Billboards, posters at strategic locations in the university campuses are veritable tools for sensitization of students on the dangers of bribing for scores.
- 4) Erring members of staff should be penalized in line with the appropriate anti-corruption law of the union.

5) Regular counselling programme to include orientation, seminars and workshops should be organized. Career talks should be more frequent with a campaign against bribery mainstreamed into these programmes for both staff and students.

6) Counsellors must collaborate with the university management, academic unions in the universities, the Students Union Government (SUG), the governing councils and other relevant agencies within the system to develop modalities for exterminating bribery in the academia.

7) The role of parents cannot be overstressed in this subject. Parents should give their children good moral training inculcating in them the value of a good name, hardwork, discipline, honesty and integrity.

8) On examinations, central marking system should be encouraged to avoid undue delay in the marking and submission of results. Results should be submitted within two weeks after examinations.

9) Universities should organize aggressive and regular awareness and value reorientation campaigns on academic integrity.

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