

UNDERGRADUATES' PERCEPTION OF UNETHICAL PRACTICES AMONG LECTURERS IN HIGHER INSTITUTIONS IN DELTA STATE

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Abstract

The issue of unethical practices is now the bane of some higher institutions in Nigeria. This study therefore ascertained undergraduates' perceptions on unethical practices among lecturers in higher institutions in Delta State. Three research questions were raised and answered. Two hypotheses were formulated and tested. The study used a descriptive survey design. The students of Federal College of Education (Technical), Asaba, and Delta State University Abraka, comprised the population of the study. 247 students (112 males and 135 females) were selected across the institutions using convenience sampling technique. The instrument used for data collection was a questionnaire entitled 'Undergraduates' Perception of Unethical Practices Questionnaire (UPUPQ)'. The face and content validity of UPUPQ was established by two experts in Measurement and Evaluation. The reliability coefficient of the instrument using Cronbach Alpha method was 0.76. The data collected were analyzed using mean statistics to address the research questions while the hypotheses were tested at .05 level of significance using t-test analysis. The findings revealed that some lecturers in higher institutions engage in unethical practices. Furthermore, factors such as that desperation for promotion, greed for money and many others are causes of unethical practices among lecturers in higher institutions. Also, the difference in the mean perception scores of male and female students on unethical practices among lecturers in higher institutions is not significant. Finally, the difference in the mean perception scores of male and female undergraduates on perceived causes of unethical practices among lecturers in higher institutions is not significant. Based on the findings, the study recommended among others that various higher institutions authority should organize seminar on ethical re-orientation for academic staff in order to combat unethical practices in schools.

Keywords: Undergraduates, Perception, Lecturers, Unethical Practices, Higher Institutions

Introduction

Educational institution is the fulcrum upon which other developmental facets are hinged upon in any given society. Institutions of higher learning were created to produce sound graduates as well as scholars in the society. This is the reason why critical role of higher educational

institutions in Nigeria is succinctly summarized in the National Policy on Education (2004) as: to contribute to the national development through relevant high-level manpower training, to develop and inculcate proper values for the survival of society and to promote scholarship, community service, national unity and international understanding. These goals cannot be realized without strictly compliance to the ethics governing the conducts of students and lecturers in the tertiary institutions.

Ethics has been described as a principle of right and wrong that are accepted by an individual or a social group as a moral, value system or value orientation. It is also a system of moral principles or rules of conduct (Hornby in Abanobi & Abanobi, 2016). Ethics has to do with what is good or not good, what is morally right or wrong. What is acceptable in a given environment or not, what is expected or not of an individual. On the other hand, unethical behaviors occur when decisions enable an individual or organization to gain at the expense of the larger society (Ogunleye, 2000). This therefore implies that, practices contrary to the ethics of a given society or organizations are not acceptable.

Overtime, unethical practices have affected the fortunes of educational system in Nigeria, which is perhaps on its lowest ebb now. The institutions of higher learning which are supposed to be a citadel of learning and centre of academic excellence are gradually losing its standards as a result unethical practices observed in the system (Nnodum, 2008). Observations from various higher institutions have revealed an entire gamut of unwholesome and unethical practices bedeviling every part of the system. In the same vein, Bello (2011) asserts that there is no disputing fact that the institutions of higher learning in Nigeria are faced with the threat of unethical practices. Meier and Griffin (2005) contend that unethical practices occur at the institutions of higher learning where its consequences are particularly damaging since future economic and political leaders are trained there. Shelley (2003) observes that corruption in academic institutions has the tendency to reduce the ethical values of both lecturers and students. When students realize that personal success depends not on performance but on bribery, favouritism and nepotism, then they would develop unethical behaviour, which can be passed on to the next generation. In support of this, Rumyantseva (2005) states that if students realize that unethical behaviour is acceptable as a way of life, they may be more inclined to carry this behaviour to all aspects of life.

Hallack and Poison (2007) in their view assert that corrupt practices pose a threat to the successful achievement of national educational goals. Corrupt practices has the tendency to dwindle the resources available to educational institutions, limit access to education and reduce quality of services offered by the institutions. Perceived unethical practices are observed to have become intractable in educational institutions. The practice has the tendency to make universities fail to achieve their goal of developing competent and morally upright people for socioeconomic and political development of nations. The moral upbringing of students of tertiary educational institutions is paramount to the sustainability and development of the societies they are being trained for. Studies have been conducted to ascertain the prevalent of unethical practices among academics in some countries. Alutu and Alutu (2006) explored unethical practices in the faculties of the University of Benin, Nigeria. The study revealed that unethical practices are generally prevalent in all the faculties. It also emerged from the study that the views of the male respondents did not differ significantly from those of their female counterparts on unethical practices of academic staff of the university. A similar study was conducted in the Imo State University in Nigeria on various corrupt practices alleged to be engaged in by academic staff. The study also revealed that students perceived the academic staff to engage in corrupt practices such as money for selfish purposes, overuse of power, sexual harassment, examination malpractices, nepotism and favouritism, and certificate forgery. The study also found that the male and female respondents did not differ in their perceptions of corrupt practices of the academic staff (Nnodum, 2008).

An international organisation, Transparency International, has also conducted several studies into corrupt practices in academic institutions of different countries. For instance, Transparency International Bosnia and Herzegovina conducted an opinion poll among university students at the Bosnia's two main universities. The following were found to be the most common forms of corruption perceived by the students: bribes for passing examination, compulsory purchase of textbooks written by lecturers and buying and selling of diplomas. Transparency International Georgia also discovered that higher education institutions in Georgia were plagued with corruption acts such as students buying their admissions, grades and diplomas (Meier & Griffin, 2005). Heyneman (2010) reported, that Transparency International monitoring of corruption in education shows that 70% of the respondents in Middle East described educational systems as

being either “corrupt” or “extremely corrupt”. The findings further elaborate that the corruption perception in the region was deemed to be very high.

The foregoing studies present various aspects of the perceived unethical practices endemic in higher institutions. It is obvious that perception of various stakeholders in education on the same issue has not been explored. Hence, the need for this study, to, ascertain undergraduates’ perception of unethical practices among lecturers in higher institutions. Specifically, the study sought to determine;

1. unethical practices prevalent among lecturers in higher institutions
2. causes of unethical practices among lecturers in higher institutions
3. strategies to reduce unethical practices among lecturers in higher institutions

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study;

1. What are the perceived unethical practices among lecturers in higher institutions?
2. What are the perceived causes of unethical practices among lecturers in higher institutions?
3. What are the strategies to reduce unethical practices among lecturers in higher institutions?

Hypothesis

The following null hypotheses will be tested at 0.05 level of significance;

1. The difference in the mean rating of male and female undergraduates’ perceptions of unethical practices among lecturers in higher institutions is not significant.
2. The difference between male and female undergraduates on perceived causes of unethical practices among lecturers in higher institutions is not significant

Method

The design used for this study was descriptive survey research design. The students of Federal College of Education (Technical), Asaba, and Delta State University Abraka, comprised the population of the study. 247 students (112 males and 135 females) were selected across the institutions using convenience sampling technique. The instrument used for study was a questionnaire entitled 'Undergraduates' Perception of Unethical Practices Questionnaire (UPUPQ)'. The face and content validity of UPUPQ was established by two experts in Measurement and Evaluation. The instrument was trial-tested with a sample of 30 students from different tertiary institutions. The reliability coefficient of the instrument using Cronbach Alpha method was 0.76 and therefore, the instruments was considered reliable. The data collected were analyzed using mean statistics while the hypotheses were tested at .05 level of significance using t-test analysis.

Results

Research Question 1: What are the perceived unethical practices among lecturers in higher institutions?

Table 1: Mean Scores of Perceived Unethical Practices among Lecturers in Higher Institutions

S/N	ITEMS	\bar{x}	REMARK
1	Forcing students to buy textbooks with assignments attached	3.24	Agree
2	Forceful/compulsory sale of substandard text to students	2.43	Disagree
3	Collection of money to change grades for students	3.04	Agree
4	Exchange of grades for sex	2.42	Disagree
5	Extortion of money as typing fee	2.30	Disagree
6	Writing project and seminar papers for students for money	2.99	Agree
7	Leakage of examination question	2.54	Agree
8	Absenteeism from work	2.83	Agree
9	Giving students exam without teaching	2.89	Agree
10	Allowing students to cheat in examinational through poor supervision	2.80	Agree

11	Covering up exam malpractice cases	2.83	Agree
12	Awarding undeserved scores to students/arbitrary award of continuous assessment scores	2.85	Agree
13	Falsification of exam record	2.79	Agree
14	Allowing students to mark students scripts	3.00	Agree
15	Victimization of students who do not “cooperate”	2.72	Agree
16	Delay in preparing students results	3.29	Agree
Grand Mean		2.81	Agree

Analysis on Table 1 shows that the respondents rated all items above a mean score of 2.50 except items 2, 4, and 5 with mean scores below 2.50 respectively. This implies that the undergraduates perceived some lecturers in higher institutions engage in unethical practices. The evidence of this is also shown in a grand mean score of 2.81.

Research Question 2: What are the perceived causes of unethical practices among lecturers in higher institutions?

Table 2: Mean Scores of Perceived Causes of Unethical Practices among Lecturers in Higher Institutions

S/N	ITEMS	\bar{x}	REMARK
17	Stagnation in career	2.68	Agree
18	Desperation for promotion	2.99	Agree
19	Emphasis in publication as basis for promotion	2.71	Agree
20	Lack of research skill	2.75	Agree
21	Lack of commitment to the profession(teaching)	2.80	Agree
22	Greed for money	2.81	Agree
23	Lack of discipline/poor moral/integrity	2.82	Agree
24	Living above means (income)	2.85	Agree
25	Pressure from students and their parents/guardians	3.12	Agree
26	Wanting to be popular among students	3.30	Agree
27	Fear of student “cult” attack/intimidation	3.54	Agree
28	Enticement by students through offering money/sex	3.42	Agree
29	Get rich quick mentality/corruption in the society	3.47	Agree
30	Poor supervision of academic staff	3.44	Agree
31	Lack of feedback from students	3.30	Agree
32	Laxity in punishing “culprit” lecturers	3.34	Agree
33	Nature of staff employment-adjunct/part time	3.26	Agree
34	Employment of incompetent lecturers	2.89	Agree
35	Excess workload on academic staff	3.74	Agree
Grand Mean		3.10	Agree

Data on Table 2 reveals that the respondents rated all items above a mean score of 2.50. This indicates that the respondents perceived factors such as desperation for promotion, greed for money, lack of commitment to the profession and many others are causes of unethical practices among lecturers in higher institutions.

Research Question 3: What are the solutions to the perceived unethical practices among lecturers in higher institutions?

Table 3: Mean Scores of Solutions to Perceived Unethical Practices Among Lecturers in Higher Institutions

S/N	ITEMS	\bar{x}	REMARK
36	Ethical re-orientation seminars for academic staff	3.39	Agree
37	Orientation of staff on employment	3.44	Agree
38	Mandatory mentoring of younger lecturer by senior ones	3.59	Agree
39	Enhancing the teaching-learning facilities	3.45	Agree
40	Appropriate sanctioning of guilty lecturers	3.51	Agree
41	Following the proper procedure for staff recruitment	3.46	Agree
42	Proper supervision of academic staff by heads of departments	3.42	Agree
43	Ensuring recruitment of qualified academic staff	3.01	Agree
44	Training and re-training of academics	3.48	Agree
45	Set up lecture monitoring team in each faculty	3.40	Agree
46	Review of promotion criteria to be more comprehensive	3.28	Agree
47	Feedback mechanism should be put in place to enable students report erring lecturers	3.28	Agree
48	Employment of more qualified lecturers so as to reduce workload	3.56	Agree
49	Sanction students involved in meeting a lecturer for payment of grade	3.44	Agree
50	Organization of seminars/workshops for lecturers as well as students on unethical practices in school	3.10	Agree
Grand Mean		3.39	Agree

Table 3 shows that the respondents rated all items above a mean score of 2.50 and it implies agreement by the respondents that factors such as ethical re-orientation for academic staff, appropriate sanctioning of guilty lecturers and many others are perceived by undergraduates' as solutions to unethical practices among lecturers. Furthermore, a grand mean score of 3.39 is the evident of agreement by the respondents.

Hypothesis 1:

The difference between mean perception scores of male and female undergraduates on unethical practices among lecturers in higher institutions is not significant

Table 4: Test of Difference between Mean Perception Scores of Male and Female Undergraduates on Unethical Practices among Lecturers in Higher institutions

Undergraduates	\bar{X}	SD	N	D.F	T-Calculated	T-Critical	Decision
Male	19.7	4.3	112	245	-9.1	1.960	Accept Ho
Female	24.1	3.1	135				

Information presented on Table 4 shows that the value of t-calculated is less than the value of t-critical at .05 alpha level. Thus, the null hypothesis was not rejected. This indicates that the difference in mean perception scores of male and female undergraduates on unethical practices among lecturers in higher institutions is not significant

Hypothesis 2:

The difference between mean perception scores of male and female undergraduates on causes of unethical practices among lecturers in higher institutions is not significant

Table 5: Test of Difference between Mean Perception Scores of Male and Female Undergraduates on Causes of Unethical Practices among Lecturers in Higher institutions

Undergraduates	\bar{X}	SD	N	D.F	T-Calculated	T-Critical	Decision
Male	17.3	4.8	112	245	-11.6	1.960	Accept Ho
Female	23.5	3.3	135				

Analysis on Table 5 reveals that the value of t-calculated is less than the value of t-critical at .05 alpha level. Thus, the null hypothesis was not rejected. This implies that the difference between mean perception scores of male and female undergraduates on causes of unethical practices among lecturers in higher institutions is not significant

Summary of Findings

The following findings emerged from the study;

1. some lecturers in higher institutions engage in unethical practices and the difference between mean perception scores of male and female students' on unethical practices among lecturers in higher institutions is not significant
2. factors such as desperation for promotion, greed for money and many others are causes of unethical practices among lecturers in higher institutions. Also, the difference between mean perception scores of male and female undergraduates on causes of unethical practices among lecturers in higher institutions is not significant
3. factors such as ethical re-orientation for academic staff, appropriate sanctioning of guilty lecturers and many others are perceived by undergraduates as solutions to unethical practices among lecturers.

Discussion

One of the findings of the study revealed that undergraduates perceived some lecturers in higher institutions engage in unethical practices. Also, the difference between mean perception scores of male and female undergraduates on unethical practices among lecturers in higher institutions is not significant. This shows that both male and female undergraduates have similar perception on unethical practices among lecturers in higher institutions. This is in line with the findings of Nnodum (2008) in a study on Imo State University in Nigeria on various corrupt practices alleged to be engaged in by academic staff. The study disclosed that students perceived the academic staff to engage in corrupt practices such as money for selfish purposes, overuse of power, sexual harassment, examination malpractices, nepotism and favouritism, and certificate forgery. The study also found that the male and female respondents did not differ in their perceptions of corrupt practices of the academic staff.

Furthermore, the finding of this study revealed that the respondents perceived factors such as desperation for promotion, greed for money, lack of commitment to the profession and many others as causes of unethical practices among lecturers in higher institutions. Also, the difference between mean perception scores of male and female undergraduates on causes of unethical practices among lecturers in higher institutions is not significant. This is in consonance with the findings of Archibong (2012) in a study on forms of dishonesty amongst academic staff and the

way forward. The findings revealed that desperation for promotion, stagnation in career and many others causes unethical practices amongst lecturers in higher institutions.

Finally, the finding revealed that factors such as ethical re-orientation for academic staff, appropriate sanctioning of guilty lecturers and many others are perceived by undergraduates' as solutions to unethical practices among lecturers. This also is in agreement with the findings of Archibong (2012) in a study on forms of dishonesty amongst academic staff and the way forward. The findings revealed that re-orientation, employment of qualified lecturers and many others are strategies to curb unethical practices amongst lecturers.

Conclusion

The study concludes that some lecturers in higher institutions engage in unethical practices. Also, factors such as desperation for promotion, greed for money, lack of commitment to the profession and many others are causes of unethical practices among lecturers in higher institutions. Finally, factors such as ethical re-orientation for academic staff, appropriate sanctioning of guilty lecturers and many others are could be used as solutions to unethical practices among lecturers.

Implication of the Study

This implies that if unethical practices in higher institutions remain unchecked, the standard of education in Nigeria will continue to decline with an alarming crescendo.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study made the following recommendations;

1. various higher institutions authority should organize seminar on ethical re-orientation for academic staff to combat unethical practices in school
2. the school authorities should sanction lecturers found guilty of unethical practices
3. students involved in meeting a lecturer for payment of grade or sorting should be severely punished by the school authorities
4. the higher institutions should organize seminars/workshops for lecturers as well as students on unethical practices in school
5. there should be proper supervision of academic staff by various heads of department.

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