

ASSESSING CORRUPTION IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP: IMPLICATIONS FOR SUSTAINABILITY OF UNIVERSITY SYSTEM

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ABSTRACT: The paper presents an assessment of corruption in educational leadership with implications for sustainability of public university system in Cross River State, Nigeria. Four research questions were raised for the study. Data for the study were gathered through a 32-item questionnaire administered on six hundred and seventy (670) respondents drawn from two universities in Cross River State. Data collected were analyzed using mean and standard deviation. The result of the analysis revealed among others that, admission racketeering, paying money to secure employment, embezzlement of funds, and illegal charges were some of the corrupt practices among educational leadership. Also, greed non-implementation of sanction on the culprit based on the dimension of corrupt practices, external pressure from members of the society, desire to get rich quick were the causes of corruption in educational leadership. Consequences of corruption in educational leadership from the findings were threat to equal access to education, production of ill- equipped university graduates, infrastructural deficit and reduction in ethical values. The way forward to combat corruption in educational leadership included effective implementation of sanctions, participatory financial management and whistle blowing. From the results of the analysis, it was recommended among others that, necessary mechanisms such as participatory leadership for checks and balances should be improved upon in the university system so as to forestall corruption in educational leadership for sustainable development to prevail. Again, the federal government and the university councils and management should improve upon welfare packages so as to minimize the level of corrupt practices among educational leadership.

Keywords: Corruption, Education, Leadership, Sustainability, University system.

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INTRODUCTION

Leadership should be exemplary in every organization, be it in educational or non-educational systems. However, this is not always the case in every organization as bad leaders often exhibit opaque qualities so as to avoid accountability. It is common knowledge that what is going on in educational institutions with regards to inefficiency in the system may partly be attributed to bad leadership (Asuquo & Ekpoh, 2020, 2021). Educational leadership entails influencing the

followers by leading and controlling them as well as managing and administering the school system effectively and efficiently to achieve specific stated goals. Effective leadership in every educational organization is inevitable if educational organizational goals and objectives are to be accomplished, within available human, material and financial resources (Okon, & Asuquo, 2017; Asuquo & Ekpoh, 2018).

One teething problem that has affected the attainment of educational goals is the issue of corruption. The concept of corruption is a global problem that has manifested in diverse forms. The 2030 agenda for sustainable development recognizes corruption as an obstacle for sustainable development and as such, reduction of corruption is considered one of the most important steps to pave the way for sustainable development and to promote inclusive societies by building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels (Mugellini & Villeneuve, 2019).

The focus of this study is on corruption in educational leadership. Seniwoliba and Boahene (2015) saw corruption in educational leadership as dishonest and illegal behaviour exhibited especially by people in authority for their personal gains. Corruption in educational leadership involves the use of public office by those in position of authority for selfish personal gains, which impacts negatively on the actualization of educational goals. Such persons in positions of authority include the Vice Chancellors, the Deans, Directors, Heads of Departments and to some extent the examination officers. Corruption in educational leadership takes the form of favouritism, nepotism, brown envelop, man-know-man, godfatherism, embezzlement of funds, bribery and sorting, falsifying of records. Other common corrupt practices in educational leadership have been observed in such areas as the appointment of Vice Chancellors, corruption in the accreditation programmes, corruption in students' admission, corruption in staff employment and promotion, sales of fake degrees, and so on (Ekpoh, 2022; Ekpoh, Okpa & Swem, 2024).

Corrupt practices are illegal, unethical and fraudulent acts by the perpetrators. It has been observed that, there can be no sustainable development in the educational sector in the midst of corrupt practices (Nwachukwu, 2021). Corruption in the educational sector, particularly in the university system, has the potential of undermining the advancement and sustainable development of the institutions and as such, urgent attention is required to purge the university system of the psycho-social beast that is killing the sector (Nwachukwu, 2021).

No doubt, corruption has been regarded as a major factor hindering sustainable development (Murshed & Mredula, 2018), particularly, in the university system. The university system all over the world is regarded as the highest level of education. As such, university system is expected to make efforts directed toward sustaining their operations and programmes through efficient management of resources in order to attain academic excellence and stay relevant in a globalized world (Ekpoh & Asuquo, 2020). Just like other levels of education, such as primary and secondary levels, the university system in Nigeria was established to accomplish objectives such as; contributing to national development through high level manpower development, provision of high quality knowledge and skills for self-reliance, encouraging scholarship, entrepreneurship and community service, among others. In accomplishing all these objectives, countries all over the world have established and are still intending to establish university education by investing huge amounts of resources in this direction, so as to maximize their economic growth and development aspirations. The efforts made by governments (State and Federal) and other agencies and organizations in a bid to accomplish and sustain the goals of

university education, seems to generate negative outcomes due to corrupt practices that are prevalent in the system.

In Nigeria, for instance, more than 170 universities, consisting of federal, state and private universities have been established and others are in the waiting list of National Universities Commission for approval. The aim of these efforts is to facilitate national development for global competition in all sectors of the global economy. Irrespective of the fact that, the governments, private individuals and religious organizations have made efforts in the provision of education services at the university level for high level manpower development, economic growth and development, the incident of inability of many educational leaders to effectively support, uphold and enhance sustainable development vis-à-vis expected standard in many Nigeria's universities still remain a recurring phenomenon.

Sustainability development as a global concept has since received much attention in educational system. Brundtland as cited in Mota et al. (2015) defined sustainability as the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Globally, sustainable development covers environmental, social and economic dimensions (Mota et al., 2015; Strezov et al., 2017; Purvis et al., 2019; Maynard et al., 2020). In the university system and particularly, in the context of this study, the economic dimension of sustainable development is to ensure the preservation of the university system by way of protecting old and creating of new academic programmes, as well as promoting and sustaining sources of internally generated revenue for the system. With respect to social sustainability, it entails reduction in disparities and promotion of access to quality university education and healthcare services to all stakeholders. Social sustainability stresses on equitable and a just academic community. The environmental aspect of sustainable development in the university system stresses on and encourages preservation and conservation of academic environment for effective teaching and learning to thrive at all times both for the benefit of the present and future generations of staff members and students.

Empirical evidence in relation to corruption and sustainable development in the educational system have been conducted by previous researchers. For example, a study that was carried out by Fhima et al. (2023), to investigate the impact of corruption on sustainable development discovered that, the impact of corruption on sustainable development is regime-specific and dependent on the quality of governance. By implication, when the governance and management of the university system is highly corrupt, it may manifest in a situation where actualization of sustainable development becomes a mirage. Also, a study carried out by Murshed and Mredula (2018) to evaluate the impact of corruption on sustainable development, using simultaneous equations model estimation approach found that corruption had a negative relationship with socioeconomic development. It was also discovered that, corruption negatively affected environmental development, and there was a short-run bi-directional causality between corruption and socioeconomic development all in the context of the Asian and African sub-panels.

In a similar study, Vela-Miranda et al. (2024) investigated the relationship between corruption and political attitudes regarding sustainable development from the perspective of Peruvian students. It was found that, institutional corruption had a highly significant and direct relationship with political attitudes from the perspective of university students. Vela-Miranda et al (2024) study is related to this study because it recommended that, it is necessary to implement strategies for political participation without corruption and also emphasized strategies to improve the education that sustains the future governance of the country. Although the study by Vela-

Miranda et al. (2024) is related to this study, the emphasis was on students' perspective as oppose to academic staff members' perception, hence, the need for the current study to fill the research gap.

Statement of the Problem

Globally the university system is expected to uphold ethical standards in all ramifications of its operations because it is a highly respected and revered institution. However, these ethical standards in the university system have recently been observed to be relegated to the background, thereby constituting a serious threat to the system. This is evident in the prevalence of such corrupt practices as; improper accreditation of academic programmes, students' admission, staff employment, staff promotion, falsification of research data, embezzlement of funds, dishonesty among university administrators and academic staff members, man-know-man syndrome, among others. For instance, during accreditation of academic programmes in many universities, a lot of sharp practices like borrowing of books, laboratory equipment and other facilities are common fraudulent acts by the affected departments, just to ensure that their academic programmes secure accreditation by the National University Commission (NUC). After such exercise, the borrowed items are returned to the owners.

Similarly, admission racketeering in the university system has become quite worrisome in recent times. In this case, many parents and candidates who never merited admission are made to pay a certain amount of money to secure admissions to pursue programmes of their choice. This practice of commercializing university admission makes it almost impossible to determine intelligent students who should be admitted to guarantee equity and fair play in the system. Employment is not spared as majority of academic staff and non-teaching staff members have been observed to be recruited on the basis of man-know-man or in favour of those who are able and willing to pay for the positions.

More often than not, observations show that promotion of staff members from one rank to another do not follow due process but the product of influences by many individuals' connection to the leadership within the university system. These unethical practices within the university system are cankerworms that have become alarming, and they constitute serious threats to the development and the progress of university system in Nigeria. As such, this study intends to assess corruption in educational leadership with implications for sustainability of university system in Cross River State, Nigeria from the perspective of academic staff.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to assess corruption in educational leadership with implications for sustainability of university system in Cross River State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to find out:

- Academic staff perspectives of corruption in educational leadership in universities in Cross River State, Nigeria.
- Academic staff perspectives of causes of corruption in educational leadership in universities in Cross River State, Nigeria.
- Academic staff perspectives of consequences of corruption in educational leadership in universities in Cross River State, Nigeria.

- Academic Staff perspectives of way forward to combat corruption in educational leadership in universities in Cross River State, Nigeria

Research Questions

The study is guided by four research questions:

- What are the academic staff perspectives of corruption in educational leadership in universities in Cross River State, Nigeria?
- What are the academic staff perspectives of causes of corruption in educational leadership in universities in Cross River State, Nigeria?
- What are the academic staff perspectives of consequences of corruption in educational leadership in universities in Cross River State, Nigeria?
- What are the academic staff perspectives of way forward to combat corruption in educational leadership in universities in Cross River State, Nigeria?

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted descriptive survey research design. The study was conducted in Cross River State, Nigeria. Two public universities, University of Calabar (UNICAL) and University of Cross River State (UNICROSS) in Cross River State, Nigeria were used in the study. A sample of six hundred and seventy (670) academic staff were randomly selected from the two universities to respond to the questionnaire used for data collection. Lecturers were used as respondents in this study because being part of the university system; the researchers believed that they were in a better position to give a correct perspective on corruption in educational leadership.

The instrument for data collection was the researchers' self-designed questionnaire titled "Corruption in Educational Leadership in Universities Questionnaire" (CELUQ). The questionnaire had five sections A, B, C, D and E. Section 'A' obtained data with respect to the name and the type (federal or state) of university. Section 'B' was designed to collected data with regard to corruption in educational leadership in public universities in Cross River State, Nigeria, Section 'C' was specifically meant to collect data regarding causes of corruption in educational leadership in public universities in Cross River State, Nigeria, while Section 'D' was designed to collect data on the consequences of corruption in educational leadership. Section 'E' was on suggestions to combat corruption in educational leadership in public universities in Cross River State, Nigeria. Sections B, C, D and E of the instrument were designed with such response options as: Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD).

The instrument was validated by three lecturers in the Department of Educational Management and another three lecturers in Test and Measurement of the Department of Educational Foundations, University of Calabar. To establish the reliability of the instrument, a pilot test was carried out on 50 academic staff members who were not involved in the study. Using Cronbach Alpha method, the reliability index was .88, this was regarded as high enough to justify the use of the instrument for data collection. The instrument was administered by the researchers and trained research assistants to the respondents in their various universities, after consenting to participate in the study. Data gathered were analyzed using mean and standard deviation. The decision regarding the result of the analysis was that, all the items with mean

scores of 2.50 and above were regarded as strongly agree and agree response based on academic staff perspectives. However, all the items with mean scores of below 2.50 (cut-off point) were to be regarded as disagree and strongly disagree response based on academic staff perspectives.

RESULTS

Research Question One: Academic staff perspectives of corruption in educational leadership in universities in Cross River State, Nigeria.

Table 1: Mean rating and standard deviation of academic staff perspectives of corruption in educational leadership in universities in Cross River State, Nigeria

S/N	Items	Mean	SD.	Decision
1.	Admission racketeering is taking place in my university	2.87	1.06	Agree
2.	Most people pay money to secure employment opportunity in my institution	2.76	1.11	Agree
3.	In most cases, promotion of certain academic staff members is done based on personal connection rather than on merits	2.80	1.10	Agree
4.	Issues of embezzlement of funds abound in my institution	2.83	1.03	Agree
5.	Aiding and abetting examination malpractices sometimes happen in my institution	2.71	1.21	Agree
6.	Accreditation of many academic programmes in my university does not follow due process	2.87	1.10	Agree
7.	Collection of illegal charges from old students to process their transcripts is rampant	2.69	1.07	Agree
8.	Falsification of records	2.83	1.05	Agree
Average Mean		2.79		Agree

Table 1 shows that none of the eight items including the average mean has a mean score that is below 2.50. As such, the respondents have agreed that all the eight items as indicated on Table 1 are the unethical corruption vices in educational leadership in the universities in Cross River State.

Research Question Two: What are the academic staff perspectives of causes of corruption in educational leadership in universities in Cross River State, Nigeria?

Table 2: Mean rating and standard deviation of academic staff perspectives of causes of corruption in educational leadership in universities in Cross River State, Nigeria.

S/N	Items	Mean	SD.	Decision
9.	Greed	2.83	1.16	Agree
10.	Poor salary	2.66	1.11	Agree
11.	Lack of ethical norms and integrity	2.80	1.08	Agree
12.	External pressure from members of the society	2.74	1.13	Agree
13.	Desire to get rich quickly	2.81	1.14	Agree
14.	Non-implementation of appropriate punishment of offenders by the university management	2.65	1.14	Agree
15.	Stringent measure as the basis for promotion	2.78	1.17	Agree
16.	Poor quality assurance measures	2.80	1.41	Agree
Average Mean		2.76		Agree

Analysis in Table 2 shows that none of the 8 items including the average mean has a mean score that is below 2.50. Based on this result, the respondents have agreed that all the 8 items in Table 2 are the causes of corruption in educational leadership in the universities.

Research Question Three: What are the academic staff perspectives of the consequences of corruption in educational leadership in universities in Cross River State, Nigeria?

Table 3: Mean rating and standard deviation of academic staff perspectives of the consequences of corruption in educational leadership in universities in Cross River State, Nigeria

S/N	Items	Mean	SD	Decision
17.	Threat to equal access to quality education	2.81	1.11	Agree
18.	Production of many ill-equipped university graduates	2.76	1.15	Agree
19.	Infrastructural deficits	2.70	1.01	Agree
20.	Poor maintenance culture as evidences in general dearth of facilities	2.74	1.12	Agree
21.	Reduction in ethical values among staff and students	2.85	1.16	Agree
22.	Poor access to quality teaching and learning facilities	2.72	1.17	Agree
23.	Denial of admission to deserving students from low socio-economic background	2.88	1.12	Agree
24.	Erosion of institutional reputation as evidence in poor ranking	2.71	1.01	Agree
Average Mean		2.77		Agree

The result of the analysis in Table 3 shows that none of the 8 items including the average mean has a mean score that is below 2.50. Based on this result, the respondents have agreed that all the 8 items in Table 3 are the consequences of corruption in educational leadership in the universities.

Research Question Four: What are the academic staff perspectives of way forward to combat corruption in educational leadership in universities in Cross River State, Nigeria?

Table 4: Mean rating and standard deviation of the academic staff perspectives of way forward to combat corruption in educational leadership in universities in Cross River State, Nigeria.

S/N	Items	Mean	SD.	Decision
25.	Effective implementation of sanction on the culprit based on the dimension of corrupt practices	2.83	1.10	Agree
26.	Appropriate feedback mechanism to report incidents of corruption to the university council.	2.76	1.20	Agree
27.	Employment of academic staff should follow due processes.	2.81	1.11	Agree
28.	Promotion of transparency in the allocation and use of university funds	2.69	1.42	Agree
29.	Encouraging whistle blowing whereby those who report corrupt practices are protected	2.75	1.06	Agree
30.	Workshop and training programmes for educational leaders on ethical practices and integrity.	2.90	1.27	Agree
31.	Implementation of participatory financial management system	2.77	1.02	Agree
32.	The use of online platform for university admission processes	2.74	1.21	Agree
Average Mean		2.78		Average

As indicated in Table 4, the analysis shows that none of the 8 items including the average mean has a mean score that is below 2.50. Based on this result, the respondents have agreed that all the 8 items in Table 4 are way forward to combat corruption in educational leadership in the universities.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The results arising from research question one show that, admission racketeering, paying of money to secure employment opportunity in the university, promotion based on personal connection rather than on merit, embezzlement of funds, aiding and abetting examination malpractices, collection of illegal charges from old students to process their transcripts, not following due process during accreditation and extortion of money from students for good grades were perceived as corruption in educational leadership. This result is in line with other scholars who documented that, favouritism, nepotism, “brown envelop”, “man-know-man”, godfatherism, embezzlement, bribery, sorting, corruption in the accreditation programmes, corruption in students’ admission, corruption in staff employment and promotion, falsification of research data, sales of fake degrees, embezzlement of funds, sexual harassment, dishonesty among academic staff members were various forms of corruption in education leadership (Ekpoh, 2022). Similarly, the result is also in consonance with the work done by Glendinning et al. (2019) and Arinze and Okafor (2022) who documented that corruption in educational leadership was also found in the teaching role, admissions and recruitment, student assessment, credentials and qualifications as well as research and academic publishing.

Arising from the result of research question 2 as indicated in Table 2, the result shows that, causes of corruption in educational leadership in the university system include; greed, poor salary, poor attitude towards teaching and learning, external pressure from members of the society, desire to get rich quickly, non-implementation of appropriate sanctions on the offenders by the university management, stringent measures as the basis for promotion, poor quality assurance measures. This result is in tandem with the position of Awulor-Hephzibah (2022) and Ekpoh (2022) who observed and greed that get rich quick syndrome, poor supervision of academic staff, poor salaries, pressure from colleagues and poor management were among the causes of corruption in the Nigerian universities.

The result of the analysis from research question 3 as shown in Table 3 indicates that consequences of corruption in educational leadership in the university system as perceived by academic staff include; threat to equal access to quality education, production of many ill equipped university graduates, infrastructural deficits, poor maintenance culture as evidence in general dearth of facilities, reduction in ethical values among students, poor access to quality teaching and learning facilities, denial of admission to deserving students from low socio-economic background and erosion of institutional reputation as evidence in poor ranking. By implication, these consequences may to a large extent be detrimental to sustainable development in the university system if corruption is not nipped in the bud.

As indicated in Table 4, the result of the analysis arising from research question 4 indicates the way forward to combat corruption in educational leadership in the university system based on academic staff perspectives to include the following; effective implementation of sanction on the culprits based on the dimension of corrupt practices, appropriate feedback mechanism to report incidents of corruption to the university management, employment of academic staff should follow due process, promotion of transparency in the allocation and use of

university funds, use of whistle blowing, workshop and training programmes for educational leaders on ethical practices and integrity, use of online platform for university admission processes, implementation of participatory financial management system and improvement in the quality assurance measures. This result is in support of Ekpoh (2022) who noted that, to combat corruption in the universities, there should be effective implementation of sanction on the culprits based on the dimension of corrupt practices.

Implications for Sustainability of University System

There is no doubt that, effective leadership is the hallmark for university system sustainability, while the reverse is the reason for corrupt practices. In this connection, sustainability in the university system entails effective teaching and learning, research, community development, proper conduct of examinations, staff commitment to duties, discipline among staff and students, effective curriculum implementation, assigning of courses to academic staff based on areas of specialization, staff motivation, effectiveness in record keeping, effective staff and student personnel management, to mention a few. In a situation where there is compromise in leadership (corrupt practice) in the conduct of the above activities and programmes in the university system, sustainable development may be halted and as such, the pre-determined goals and objectives may not be effectively attained in the university system.

CONCLUSION

Corruption in educational leadership has been observed to be a serious factors that have undermined advancement and sustainable development of the university system. Corrupt practices in the university system manifest in various forms such as admission racketeering, paying of money to secure employment opportunity in the university, promotion based on personal connection rather than on merit, embezzlement of funds, aiding and abetting examination malpractices, collection of illegal charges from students to process their transcripts, undue process during accreditation and falsification of records. The causes of these unethical practices in the university system have been attributed to such factors as greed, poor salary, lack of ethical norms and integrity, external pressure from members of the society, desire to get rich quickly, non-implementation of appropriate punishment on the offenders by the university management, stringent measure as the basis for promotion, poor quality assurance measures, among others.

The consequences of corruption in educational leadership in the university system include; threat to equal access to quality education, production of many ill equipped university graduates, infrastructural deficits, poor maintenance culture as evidence in general dearth of facilities, reduction in ethical values among students, poor access to quality teaching and learning facilities, denial of admission to deserving students from low socio-economic background, erosion of institutional reputation as evidence in poor ranking. The study therefore concludes that corruption in educational leadership in the university system in Nigeria is endemic and real. Every effort should be made to stamp it out.

Recommendations

The necessary mechanisms such as participatory leadership for checks and balances should be improved upon in the university system so as to forestall corruption in educational leadership for sustainable development to prevail:

- The federal and state governments and in conjunction with the university councils and management should improve upon welfare packages for staff, so as to minimize the level of corrupt practices among staff members.
- Stringent punishment measures should be implemented on offenders.

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