
PERCEPTION OF STUDENTS ON ‘SORTING’ IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES

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Abstract

The purpose of the study is to examine ‘sorting’ which is one of the corrupt practices that seem to be threatening the standard of education in Nigerian universities. The paper identified different corrupt practices existing in Nigerian universities. It explained sorting; causes and effects and also alarmed that if educational managers did not act fast to correct the menace, the standards of Nigerian university education will continue to degenerate and substandard graduates produced. Data was collected using questionnaire and was analyzed using descriptive statistic involving percentages, frequencies, mean and standard deviation. Simple random sampling was used to select 200 students from four universities in the South-West Nigeria (50 respondents each). The result revealed that sorting is dangerously gaining grounds in Nigerian universities, that lecturers use it to extort money from students and sexually exploit female ones. It also revealed that the menace is demoralizing hard working students who are compelled to also sort disregarding their personal efforts. The paper recommends urgent need to checkmate this menace if Nigerian graduates will be capable of competing with their counterparts globally. This study also admonished university administrators and managers to stand up to their responsibilities putting in place appropriate policy as well as frequently organize seminars, conferences, jingles and film shows to educate lecturers and students on the consequences of this malaise ruing the university system.

Key words: Perception, sorting, academic standard, corrupt practices, educational managers And administrators,

Nigerian university education has been alleged to be bedeviled by various corrupt practices. In tertiary institutions, corrupt practices appear to have been deep rooted in the system (Admin, 2014). He further observed that in Nigerian universities, non-academic staff, academic staff, senior lecturers and even professors are caught in the web of corruption and that it appears that bribery and corruption have become unofficially legitimate. The Acting Chairman of Independent Corrupt Practice Commission (ICPC) Nta (2012) lamented that corruption has eroded creativity, played down the value of hard work, and enthroned mediocrity in the nation's university system. He added that some university teachers in Nigeria have sunk into the shameful abyss or moral decadence, becoming sex bullies as a result of their unbridled lust for female undergraduates they are paid to teach. He asserted that education is directly responsible for developing strong character, and universities are set up to push forward the frontiers of knowledge, transform people's lives and contribute to health and wealth of our nation through their deep involvement in wider society and the economy. He expressed his dismay when he said that it is sad that the citadel of learning have become havens for sex perverts (Nta, 2012). He warned that we must be vigilant to nip in the bud all corrupt practices in teaching research and community development programmes in order to maintain the required academic standards that will guarantee national development and global competitiveness.

Corrupt Practices

There are various degrees of corrupt practices. For instance Nta (2012) reported that from petitions from students, members of staff, unions and other stakeholders, corrupt practices in the university system include: admission racketeering, examination misconduct, falsification of academic records such as transcripts, sexual harassment and victimization of applicants, victimization of students by officials, lack of commitment to work by lecturers, syndicated plagiarism by students and staff, delay or non-payment of gratuities and pension to pensioners and non-adherence to bidding processes in award of contracts. Others include, illegal accreditation process through deception, running unapproved study centres, affiliating programmes to accredited schools, establishing and operating unapproved and illegal universities (Nta, 2013; Admin, 2014). Hallack and Possion (2007) pointed out that corruption constitutes a serious threat to the successful achievement of educational goals. Okojie (2012) in acknowledgment of the corrupt practices existing in universities, submitted that corruption has taken different dimension ranging from cheating in examination, 'sorting' lecturers to earn undeserved marks and non-processing of students' results among others. Sorting has been noted as one of the corrupt practices that is fast destroying the rubrics of academic standards in the universities. Osunde (2012) observed that 'sorting', a nickname for academic corruption has lately become endemic in our tertiary institutions. This form of academic corruption constitutes threat to the standards and goals of university education. It has been alleged that university managers and administrators are paying lip-service towards stemming the menace. For instance, Osunde (2012) observed that school authorities are not helping matters as they know lecturers who are involved, but nothing is being done. This paper

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therefore, is an attempt to study sorting in Nigerian universities and its effect on academic standards with a view of highlighting the roles expected of educational managers and administrators who appear to be watching this menace destroy the university education in Nigeria.

The Concept of ‘Sorting’

Sorting is a process by which students pay in cash or kind to be awarded unmerited marks by lecturers after examination or test. Osunde (2012) defined sorting as a system through which deficient students engage in gratification of their lecturers with items such as money, expensive gifts and even sex in the case of female students, in order to obtain good grades in examinations. He further observed that some lecturers frustrate students for refusing to cooperate making them to have carry-overs, extensions, missing scores and even poor grades because of failure to sort. Admin (2014) sees sorting as a situation where students liaise with their lecturers and other officials to inflate grades in exchange for money or other form of gratification. Sorting also known as ‘runs’ or ‘blocking’ has become a campus culture in the universities such that a student will never graduate if he or she fails to sort or pay the project supervisor or invigilator. The situation has gone so bad that there is hardly a graduate from Nigerian university who never sorted in one way or the other. Various tactics are adopted by lecturers to arm-twist students: irregular attendance of lecture, teaching very large class without public address system, announcing through the course representative (Course Rep) that anyone who pays certain amount will get extra mark and by setting questions out of course contents. These are some of the ways this act is being perpetrated. This trend has compelled students to keep a good proportion of their up-keep allowance from their parents for that purpose.

It has been observed that course coordinators or Reps act as agent to such lecturers and at times, they persuade their course mates to sort for the courses in order to get good grades (Admin, 2014). It has also been noted that lecturers use this medium to extort money and exploit students. In some instances, even after sorting the student may still fail. Admin (2014) observed that students who intend to sort their courses after examination stay back in school and at times lecturers do disappoint at the end of the day such that after paying the required amount, there is still the probability that the student may fail or get a ridiculous grade. Some lecturers will refuse to collect money from the females but demand for sex. Nta (2013) opined that sexual harassment seems to rank extremely very high among corrupt practices uncovered in the universities. He wondered why universities which should uphold the sterling values of the society is enmeshed with horrible misconduct on campus.

Sequel to the academic corruption in the campuses, students have devised other means to please their lecturers such as keeping close relationship, running errand for lecturers, visitation to their offices daily, speaking the same dialect, buying expensive gifts for lecturers’ birthday or for any member of the family, attending the same fellowship or church among others to influence grades. Causes of sorting have been identified to include university admitting students into courses they know nothing about

(Osunde, 2012) and general moral decadence and high premium place on certificates (Ejiogu, 2001). Others include greed, poverty and over ambitious craze for wealth.

Sorting and Academic Standards

The rate of sorting in Nigerian universities has become worrisome especially when those (university managers and administrators) who are to manage it are involved. Orizu (2014) observed that corruption on the part of administrators, academic staff and non-academic staff, as well as students have resulted in lack of adequate infrastructures, admission racketeering, examination malpractices, sorting of courses, politicization and falsification of academic records such as transcripts, fraudulent allocation of degree results, actual misappropriation of funds, sexual harassment and victimization as well as syndicated plagiarism by students and lecturers in tertiary institutions. There is concern that students are no more committed and dedicated to their academic work due to the belief that even after 'burning the night candle', you will still be compelled to sort. This is a simple way of grooming lazy youths who will not believe in hard work, who will be deficient in knowledge and skills required to develop the economy of Nigerian nation. No wonder if you visit some campuses during examinations you hardly see students reading, preparing for examinations. They are only eager to enter the examination hall, register their names and the rest will be done later. Orizu (2014) discovered that in recent times, students prepare, if at all they do, lackadaisically for examinations. Admin (2014) noted that some students spend hours in the library studying academic materials and burning the mid-night candles, while some students simply sort their ways to the top. Herald (2014) argued that nowadays, it is not through reading that people pass courses, that you will see some students read from morning till night, work very hard but at the end of the day they will not have good grades. He lamented that a lot of lecturers no longer bother to come to class to teach. Students are no more interested in acquiring skills and knowledge for sustainable development.

The role of education in driving economic and social development should not be swept under the carpet or neglected. Education has contributed to fundamental transformations in many countries such as Singapore, Japan, China, India among others, but Nigerian education tend to be producing high tech criminals such as armed robbers, kidnappers, cultists, ritual killers, prostitutes, drug addicts and corrupt-minded graduates who will pilot the affairs of the country tomorrow. At this juncture, one may ask, what then is Nigeria's future like?

Nta (2013) observed that a university signifies a centre of the highest academic endeavour, but in Nigeria, the activities of randy lecturers demanding sex for marks are eroding the quality of scholarship and perverting standards of moral values. No wonder organizations such as the World Bank have argued that universities in Africa in particular were adding too little to economic prosperity and producing too many unemployable graduates with academic skills for which there is little demand (Nta, 2013). He added that, it also explained why our tertiary institutions are lagging behind in the global rankings of universities. Okoduwa (2012) noted that the decay in ethical and academic standard in our institutions of higher learning produces unemployable

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graduates, grave incompetence in the employed ones, morally bankrupt youths and causes disdain for our certificates in the international knowledge market place.

Granted that fighting sorting should be a collective responsibility, the Vice-Chancellors (VCs) must do more to end this morally reprehensible behavior in our ivory towers (Nta, 2013). University education standards will not improve without tighter regulation and stricter enforcement of rules. Okojie (2012) lamented that universities have persistently violated laid down procedures regarding implementation of the provisions of Academic Brief and Master documents. Herald (2014) opined that sorting has been going on for years in the universities and nothing has been done about it as the managers and administrators cannot claim ignorance of this development. Students who ventured to report to the school authorities were victimized and intimidated by some other lecturers. These statements imply that the role of university managers and administrators are strategically imperative in curbing this phenomenon. This could be what prompted Nta (2013) to argue that if VCs are not to be blamed, why is it that disciplinary action is seldom taken against the lecherous lecturers going about campuses demanding sex before awarding grades to students. He maintained that universities stand for good values and a place where innate abilities of students are to be developed, querying how then can youths attain academic excellence when their lecturers are more concerned about defiling and fleecing them?

To curb this menace requires seasoned administrators collaborating with other key stakeholders. Nta (2013) suggested that student unions in the universities must be properly re-constituted, that the unions and university authorities must work in concert to identify victims of sorting and encourage them to speak out so lecturers involved would face disciplinary actions. He admonished Academic Staff Union of Nigerian universities not to be seen to be fighting only for financial benefits of its members but should also be instrumental to identifying the debauchery in their midst. One can also observe that parents have crucial roles to play in ending this corrupt practices by ensuring they monitor their wards and follow up every reported act of sorting or sexual harassment by lecturers on their children with the university authorities as it has caused, and still causing a lot of harm to Nigerian's educational standards. All key stakeholders should indeed join hands to stem this cankerworm.

Effect of Sorting on Academic Standards

Academic corruption has adversely affected the standard of university education in Nigeria. Orizu (2014) identified the following as effects of sorting on academic standards:

1. Lack of credibility of academic certificates acquired in Nigeria by the international community.
2. Declining standard of education in the country.
3. Inability to secure competitive and challenging jobs which require practical test of proficiency and skills.

Other observable effects of sorting also include:

4. Moral bankruptcy among students who are leaders of tomorrow;

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5. Increased carry-over of courses and drop-out;
6. Lack of commitment and dedication to academic work;
7. Lack of belief in hard work;
8. Increase in the rate of malpractices such as sexual harassment or abuse, examination malpractices and intimidation;
9. Encouragement of truancy as students no more settle down to read or relax but go about to looking for money with which to sort lecturers;
10. Encouragement of stealing, robbery and prostitution;
11. Encouragement of laziness on the part of the students and lecturers;

It is therefore pertinent for lecturers and the university authorities to note that while other third world countries delve into technology to improve their economy, Nigerian universities are busy churning our graduates who are skillfully incapacitated but rather trained in all manners of corruption. Nigerian graduates cannot apply knowledge to real work situations, analyze and solve problems nor communicate effectively with colleagues even when these features are crucial elements of skill development that young people need if they are to obtain good jobs in a global economy increasingly driven by technology (UNESCO, 2012). Oche (2012) lamented that the present day universities have become a haven for corrupt practices where corruption becomes the rule rather than the exception.

It is very critical to note that sorting has negated the five cardinal goals of Nigerian education as stated in the National Policy of Education which include:

- a. Development of the individual into a morally sound, patriotic and effective citizen;
- b. Total integration of the individual into the immediate community, the Nigeria society and the world;
- c. Provision of equal access to qualitative educational opportunities for all citizens at all levels of education, within and outside the formal school system;
- d. Inculcation of national consciousness, values and national unity; and development of appropriate skills, mental, physical and social abilities and competencies to empower the individual to live in and contribute positively to the society (FRN, 2013).

The current corrupt-ridden university environment is far-fetched from achieving meaningfully and realistically any of these laudable goals of education. Nta (2013) submitted that a system that encourages admission racketeering produces dull students who are willing to cut corners like bribing lecturers with money or sex and engaging in cult activities to obtain degree.

Objectives

The following objectives guided the study:

1. To find out how endemic sorting as corrupt practices has been in Nigerian universities.
2. To confirm if sorting is a method used by some lecturers to extort money from students.

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3. To ascertain if sorting is a threat to quality and relevance of university education.
4. To discover if students are compelled to sort.
5. To find out if sorting weakens the confidence hard working students have in their academic capabilities.
6. To identify how sorting can be curbed.

Statement of Problem

Sorting is one of the deadly corrupt practices threatening the academic standard of university education in Nigeria. This study is therefore an attempt to find out how endemic sorting has become in our universities and, if so, how this can be tackled.

Hypothesis

There is no perception of students on the effect of sorting on academic standard.

Methodology

The population for the study comprises university students in the South-West geopolitical zone in Nigeria. The study covered four randomly selected universities in the zone. 200 students were randomly selected, 50 from each of the universities. The instrument used for data collection was a 15 item questionnaire designed by the researchers. The instrument was content validated. Chronbach Alpha coefficient of 0.72 obtained confirmed reliability.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics including frequency, percentages, mean and standard deviation was used to analyze the data. A mean of 2.5 to 4.0 was adopted as basis for acceptance of any item while mean below 2.5 as basis for rejection of any item.

Results

Demographic characteristics of respondents are presented.

Table 1: Distribution of students by Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	100	50
Female	100	50
Total	200	100

Table one shows that respondents involved in the study includes male and female students. There is equal representation of male (50%) and female (50%) respectively.

Table 2 presents the distribution of respondents by level of study

Level	Frequency	Percent
100	26	13
200	56	28
300	34	17
400	28	14
500	7	3.5
600	2	1
Others	47	23.5

Table 2 shows that participants in the study spread across all level; 100 (13%), 200 (28%), 300 (17%), 400 (14%), 500 (3.5%), 600 (1%) and others representing postgraduate students (23.5%). Levels 200 and others have the highest respondents, 28% and 23.5%. Very few participants are in 500 (3.5%) and 600 (1%) levels. These students had schedules which made it rather difficult to participate in the study. This may be as a result of the specialized nature of such courses such as Medicine and Engineering.

Hypothesis

There is no perception of students on the effect of sorting on academic standards

Table 3 Effect of Sorting on Academic Standards

S/N	Item	SA	A	D	SD	F	X	STD
1.	Sorting is a process whereby students pay in cash or kind to be given unmerited marks by the lecturer after examination or test.	107	70	10	13	177	3.0	.84
2.	Sorting is one of the corrupt practices that seem to be gaining grounds in Nigerian universities.	90	97	10	3	187	3.4	.90
3.	Sorting is a method used by some lecturers to extort money from students.	96	80	14	10	176	3.0	.82
4.	Concerned lecturers purposely don't attend lectures, set test or examination questions off course content or curriculum to attract mass failure.	80	46	50	24	126	2.5	.54
5.	Sometimes serious minded students are compelled to sort when lecturer's condition to pass his/her course is only by sorting.	91	50	40	19	141	2.6	.65
6.	Sorting impairs the confidence the hard working students have in their academic capabilities.	100	57	30	13	157	2.7	.66
7.	Sorting is one of the causes of students' truancy due to the belief that whether you read or not, if you sort, you will pass.	80	83	20	17	163	2.6	.72
8.	Sorting is a threat to the quality and relevance of university education.	106	60	20	14	166	2.8	.76
9.	Sorting needs to be checked, if Nigerian graduates will be capable of competing with their counterparts globally.	100	80	10	10	180	3.2	.88
10.	Sorting can be effectively checked by managers and administrators (Vice Chancellor, Deans of faculties, Heads of departments and Units and Director of schools) in the university system.	109	70	10	11	179	3.1	.86
11.	Effective and efficient moderation of examination and test questions by comparing questions with contents treated with students in their note will checkmate sorting.	110	68	10	12	178	3.1	.85
12.	Early release of course contents to students will also help in reducing/eradicating sorting.	92	70	30	8	162	2.6	.69
13.	Querying any lecturer with more than 5% failure in a particular course.	80	50	50	19	131	2.5	.56
14.	Instituting disciplinary measures against any erring lecturer involved in sorting.	90	81	10	19	171	2.9	.80
15.	University authorities can curb sorting by organizing seminars, conferences, jingles and film shows to educate lecturers and students on the consequences of sorting on quality of University education in Nigeria	108	80	5	7	188	3.6	.93

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Table 3 shows various statements made towards eliciting if sorting can affect the academic standards of university education and the corresponding response categories (Likert scale): Agree (A), Strongly Agree (SA), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD). The mean and standard deviation of each item was generated and presented using the accepted mean range of 0 to 2.4 as low; 2.5 to 4.0 as high in a four-point scale. The result revealed that all the mean value of items are between 2.5 and 3.6 indicating a consensus among respondents that sorting can affect academic standards. Hypothesis one is rejected. Items two and 15 having the highest mean scores of 3.4 and 3.6 acknowledging the fact that sorting is an endemic corrupt practice gaining grounds in Nigerian universities and that the university authorities can curb it. All standard deviations are positive showing agreement among respondents in the sample and a pointer that there is significant effect of sorting on academic standards.

Discussion

The result of the study revealed that sorting is a process whereby students pay in cash or kind to be given unmerited marks by the lecturer after examination or test and one of the corrupt practices gaining grounds in Nigerian universities which lecturers use to extort money from students. That concerned lecturers purposely don't attend lecture regularly, set tests or examination questions off course contents and sometimes, serious minded students are compelled to sort when lecturer's condition to pass the course is only by sorting. It also revealed that sorting impairs the confidence hardworking students have in their academic capabilities, and it causes truancy among students. The study shows that sorting is a threat to quality and relevance of university education, therefore needs to be checked if Nigerian graduates will be capable of competing with their counterparts globally. It also revealed that it can be checked if university managers and administrators such as the VC, Deans of faculties, Head of Departments and Units including Director of schools by effectively and efficiently moderating examination and test questions ensuring that it tallies with course contents treated with students in their notes; early release of course contents to students and querying lecturers who have mass failure in their courses. It also revealed that university managers and administrators should frequently organize seminars, conferences, jingles and film shows to educate lecturers and students on the consequences of sorting on academic standard of university education in Nigeria.

Conclusion and Recommendation

This paper has x-rayed sorting and discovered that it is one of the endemic academic corruption affecting the standard of university education. Academic and non-academic staff were found to be involved in the menace. They collect cash and sometimes demand sex from the female students. At times, students are compelled to sort whether you are hardworking or not and it was discovered that this development is really affecting students' morale to reading since good grade is no more by merit. As a result, students no more show interest in reading, leave school at will to look for money for sorting and save their up-keep allowance from their parents for sorting. The study

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therefore conclude that sorting has negative effect on academic standard of university education and that Nigerian graduates will not be able to acquire the required knowledge and skills to build reliable and strong nation if sorting is allowed to remain. Based on the findings, it is therefore recommended that university managers and administrators should rise up to their responsibilities; university authorities to monitor lecturers activities with students; it should ensure that lecturers regularly attend lectures; examination questions should be moderated to ensure it is covering areas treated with students and mass failure should be queried; any attempt to request for, accept or compel students to sort should be strictly penalized and university authorities should frequently organize seminars, conferences, film shows and jingles to educate students and lecturers on the consequences of sorting on academic standards.

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