

STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING TRANSPARENCY, ACCOUNTABILITY AND ANTI-CORRUPTION POLICIES AND PRACTICES IN NIGERIA'S EDUCATIONAL SECTOR

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Abstract

Corruption in the educational sector in Nigeria has become so much a part of the fabric of daily life that it tends to be regarded as an inevitable part of educational governance by the perpetrators and by the victims. Even acts that people acknowledge as being corrupt and therefore, harmful to general welfare or morally wrong are tolerated. This paper explains the concept and forms of corruption in the educational sector. Responsiveness to the challenges pose by corruption in the sector were enumerated and discussed. Conclusion and recommendations on the strategies for improving accountability, transparency and anti-corruption policies and practice in the educational sector in Nigeria were offered.

The recognition of the phenomenon of corruption and its costs to the education sector is growing. In the case of Nigeria, corrupt practices are said to cause an inefficient assignation of available resources, to inflate cost and to reduce educational quality. The most common forms of corruption in the educational sector as described by Hallak (2002) include abuse of authority, fraudulent behaviour, bribery, embezzlement, by pass of criteria, manipulating data, transgressing rules/procedures, cheating in examinations, falsification of research results, employment of ghost employee and abuse of public property. Some of the few practices within this frame work according to Hallak and Poison (2007) are the violation of public tendering procedures (for the construction and matainance of schools, the purchasing of textbooks or school meals (etc), the diversion of money intended for the school for the personal benefit of individual (including non public funds: donations from parents etc); the payment of ~~Academic Excellence~~ into educational organizations and also for school entrance, successful graduation, entrance to universities etc and lack of objectivity in the process of recruitment, promotion and transfer of teachers and non teaching staff.

Corruption has sometimes become so much a part of the fabric of daily life that it tends to be regarded as an inevitable part of governance by the perpetrators and by the victims (United Nations, 2003). Even acts that people acknowledge as being corrupt and therefore harmful to general welfare or morally wrong are tolerated. It is also an unfortunate and unpleasant fact that the higher up the corruption, the less likely it tends to be acted upon - the idea of zero tolerance and the prosecutions of high profile cases are not yet on the agenda. Resource allocation often works on a basis of traded favours and that rewards commonly go to those who shout the loudest. Where the level of need is high and there are not enough resources to go round to please everyone, rewarding those who have given something in return is at least one way out of a conundrum. In addition, it was observed that resources tend to be channeled inefficiently through bureaucratic mechanisms resulting in delay and leakage.

Accuracy and availability of information ensures equitable and transparent allocation and use of resources. Unfortunately, information is not always systematically recorded. It can either be inaccurate, or purely and simply missing. Cheques have sometimes been made out to people who are no longer in teaching service. This is usually brought about by delays in feedback to the information system on teacher movement and sometimes are deliberate. Salaries have sometimes been paid out to people who are no longer in the teaching service. Some actors who have interest in manipulating data in order to attract more fund at school level make it difficult to ensure the accuracy of information. The impact of code on teachers behaviors is however, sometimes questionable due to limited access to them; difficulty in understanding them, absence of training for teachers, the dearth of knowledge about procedures for lodging complaints, lack of capacity for its enforcement, pressure exerted by teachers unions etc.

The introduction of formula funding for schools and the delegation of spending decision to them tend to increase the possibility for fraud since many more people have direct access to funds and that school actors lack competent personnel to handle financial matters. Reliance on legal and accounting system alone has become problematic (Transparency international 2003). First, as the government role and services have expanded considerably, it has become apparent that conventional mechanisms such as audit and legislature reviews may be inadequate, collusion, organizational deficiencies abuse and lack of responsiveness to citizens needs in public agencies and units cannot easily be detected and rectified even with the best of supervision. Second, they sometimes exert a lack of independence and efficiency in a legal or audit system, especially at local level where most services are being delivered. Third, legal processes and systems to control public sector management which rely on the existence of a truthful *Strategies for Improving Transparency, and Anti-Corruption...* es to address all types of efficiencies is very costly. Finally, it is unfortunate that in a number of cases no action is taken after the publication of the audit reports.

Responsiveness to the Challenges Posed by Corruption in the Educational Sector

Both recognition of and responsiveness to, corrupt situation in the educational sector represent a positive break from the past. The various strategies to address the issue and find ways to respond to the challenges according to United Nation (2003) are:

- (a) How to promote a sustained leadership;
- (b) How to define adequate regulatory mechanisms;
- (c) How to streamline the channeling of resources to beneficiaries;
- (d) How to ensure that information is accurate and available;
- (e) How to organize independent monitoring systems; and
- (f) How to develop avenues for social participation.

(1) How to Promote a Sustained Leadership in Order to Break the Inertia of Corruption in the Education Sector

A form of political will need to be established and a strong commitment to address corruption problems is required from the top. A clear vision from the leadership needs to be developed on this basis, based on some basic governance principle such as greater participation, enhanced accountability, integrity, better predictability, and demand for greater transparency. This in itself is not enough and some concrete measure have to be taken to translate this vision into real terms as illustrated through the enactment of Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and independent corrupt practices Commission (ICPC) for the prevention of corruption and conferred power on the two commissions to investigate suspected cases of corruption and economic crime.

However, as is often the case, once decisions have been made, the difficulties in applying them are far from insignificant. In government action, there is sometimes an initial wave of good will, but

this eventually gives way to the tendency, as time goes by for officials to become less rigorous in their observance of programme of governments.

Eckstein (2003) suggested that a wide diffusion of the principles of governance should be adopted by top-leadership through a coherent communication strategy, reaching all stakeholders (public, authorities, parent and teachers). The principles of mutual accountability and shared responsibility be promoted with a view to obtaining positive results in programmes carried out in the education sphere. The end product of such a chair of accountability would be that when things go wrong, those responsible are held accountable for inefficiency or mismanagement. Mutual accountability be also improved in relation to other public departments such as Ministry of Finance and Civil society - ~~Academic Excellence~~ ~~results in better sharing of risks and responsibilities. The use of sector wide approach~~ should be evoked by promoting a holistic and forward planning and funding approach, removing overlapping, duplication of effort and uncoordinated interventions and providing common accountability, reporting, monitoring and evaluation frameworks.

(2) **How to Define Adequate Regulating Mechanisms**

Endemic corruption is difficult to eliminate, but mechanisms can be put in place to minimize its effects. The design and enforcement of adequate regulatory (including self regulatory) mechanisms can prove extremely useful in this respect. Such regulatory mechanisms will come from procurement, textbook production and distribution, school feeding and teacher management.

To improve transparency in public procurement according to Hallak & Poisson (2004) government should issue clear guidelines to be strictly adhered to with regards to the procurement of civil works. All school construction projects should be open to public tender and contractors may challenge any award they feel do not comply with the rules. Criteria for the evaluation of contractors in order to ensure that only those with a background of honesty in the industry may be allowed to conduct business. To ensure quality in the delivery of the product, a specific building standard have to be established. The federal government should establish an inspection team that makes sure that the qualitative standard are in no way compromised. Students, parents, employers, and the entire community should be involved as a further step towards strengthening transparency in school-construction system, expecting them to play a role of watchdogs in the future.

In order to foster transparency in teacher management, Nuland and Khandewal (2006) explain that a process of verifying the physical placement and functions of teachers in school should be undertaken which will be compared with the real needs of the schools. Several steps should be undertaken, in particular the setting up of objective criteria in assigning teachers to schools and re-organizing personnel process such as hiring (with the organization of an open competition based on credentials); the design and implementation of a human resource information system; and the public posting of information. The publicity provided for these changes, along with the technological tools supporting them, will bring significant gains in terms of transparency, which will in turn reflect in the educational indicator of Nigeria. Serious effort should be made to develop school feeding programme to improve transparency in the selection of beneficiaries and of contractors and strengthening accountability in keeping records, the control of costs and the checking of the number and characteristics of the meals actually served. One way of doing it is to develop school meal time table for school to determine what types of meals a child should receive, together with a technological tool enabling teacher to measure automatically the exact food rations that needs to be allocated. In addition, in order to improve transparency in the selection of supplies, a linear programming model with binary variable should be designed and implemented to ensure optimal selection of the best bid. This will bring *Strategies for Improving Transparency, and Anti-Corruption...*

The value of self-regulatory mechanisms such as codes of conduct and standards of behaviour (both professional and ethical) in the education sector should be emphasized. (Standard Council of the

teaching profession, 1996). The ideal here is to promote an organizational culture that does not rely on continuous external controls but constitutes a form of self monitoring potentially more cost effective and cost efficient than sanction based enforcement. There should be approaches to building ownership and effectiveness in the use of codes, through the direct involvement of the teaching community itself in the design and enforcement of the codes (Teddie & Reynolds, 2000) then rating the credibility and impact of codes on teachers behaviors will include: simplifying and making them relevant; building ownership by involving the teaching profession in their design and implementation, ensuring their circle dissemination; strengthening mechanisms for dealing with complaints and integrating issues on teachers professional conduct into various pre-service and in-service teacher training courses (National Board for Professional Teaching Standard for Teachers, 1994).

(3) How to streamline the Channeling of Funds

The streamlining of the channeling of funds in shortening the road from the source of funds to the recipients and sometimes also in isolating the funds from the bureaucracy e.g. Education Trust Fund, which insulate bridged resources from political change, red tape and leakages. The merit of formula funding is workable. Formula funding of schools according to Rossard Lava (1999) reduces the like hood of corruption since an essential element of formula funding is public accessibility to information. Transparency puts pressure on people in positions of responsibility to act in conformity with regulations since the chance of detection is much higher and the personal and professional consequences of misappropriation are greater. Thus, the use of grant for schools and pupils. In order to reduce possible drawback in formula funding according to Ye and Canagarajah (2002), a nationally agreed format for the production of financial reports at both school and intermediate authority levels; the training of principals and administrative staff in financial procedures; the setting up of local monitoring systems, and the organization of regular audits must be designed. The existence of comprehensive rules and regulations for the channeling of funds combined with appropriate systems of safeguards are not always sufficient to overcome corruption. Direct transfer of funds, the insistence on dual signatories for cash withdraw, the implication of civil society representative on communities, and financial disclosure will be as safeguards against monopoly control and secrecy.

Comprehensive guidelines should be developed to explain the new financial regulations put in place, reporting requirement should be clearly specified, training and socializing processes organized and regular assessment and audit of school accounts should be set up. Officials have to be motivated to keep the rules through adequate systems of incentives and the ability of the education system to implement proposed changes. It has to be carefully considered in order to minimize opportunities for corruption at local and school levels with regard to parental contribution and private donations which involve civil society, parents should set up non-profit organizations that not only control and report all financial operations involving parental and voluntary contributions but also act as fund-raisers. This can be very effective in increasing transparency in the school and in generating additional resources.

(4) How to Ensure that Information is Accurate and Available

Accuracy and availability of information are key factors for ensuring equitable and transparent allocation and use of resources. This can indeed encourage school actors to become more accountable for government and parental spending on education in schools.

To ensure the availability of consistent and reliable data to facilitate educational planning and management, an education management information system should be established to link up all schools.

The information databases thus created, should be maintained and regularly updated at school level, where it is easier to monitor statistical changes. In addition, in order to check the accuracy of data, the federal Ministry of education should conduct a regular census and make impromptu checks to verify information in the sector data base. Inter- Ministerial task force should be formed to handle specific

assignments, such as, validating teachers on the government payroll and confirming the existence of educational institutions that benefit from government funding.

The merit of some specific methodological tools such as public expenditure tracking survey (PETS) can get a real picture of the situation. PETS is one of the few ways of studying the flow of public funds and other resources at various levels of government and the administrative hierarchy, and to acquire quantitative evidence on leakage (Hallak & Poisson, 2002). Other tool such as quantitative service delivery survey (QSDS) is very useful in obtaining information on other important dimensions, such as the rate of teacher absenteeism and the number of ghost teachers.

However, the setting up of adequate systems of information is not enough in itself to improve transparency and accountability in the management of educational resources.

The problem is to know how to make proper use of information so that it can help improve the way resources are allocated and used. To make information available to the public in order to implicate individual and communities in the process. The diffusion of PETS among the population work decreased the rate of leakage in non-salary expenditure by disseminating information about school expenditure and hence mobilizing the attention of local communities.

The public display of information about the release of fund for educational activities at all levels; including the funds released for school based activities is also pertinent. At the federal government level, *Strategies for Improving Transparency, and Anti-Corruption...*

Local authorities, on the other hand, can be requested to display information at state and local government Headquarters regarding the amounts that have been released for various educational activities. Similarly, the school can be expected to display on their notice board information about funds released from the State and Local Government and how they are to be utilized. The posting of budget allocations in school offices and zonal offices by displaying information at all administrative level is another step. The potential of the right to information laws, which can help communities exert a real social control over the use of educational resources, should be emphasized. Laws aimed at promoting openness, transparency and accountability in administration and ensuring the effective participation of people in the administration should be enacted.

Key features include the obligations of public authorities; the procedure for citizen to obtain information; certain restrictions regarding the disclosure of information; the groups for refusal to provide information; the appeals process for a citizen; the penalties for any competent authority for failure to provide the information sought within the stipulated period.

Increasing awareness of the right to information through public hearing will succeed in bringing the problem of transparency and accountability in public administration and service to the attention of the public and will sanitize citizen on the right to information and to using this right to have their grievances redressed. However, the reluctance of the will of administration to respond to these grievances should led to establishing an independent regulation agency with discretionary power to monitor and enforce the implementation of the right to information.

(5) How to Organize Independent Monitoring

Once clear guidelines and regulations have been elaborated, the problem is knowing how to make sure that departments in Federal and State Ministries of education and Local Education Authorities are made accountable by organizing independent monitoring for effective spending of operational funds and accurate reporting and that departments and schools follow agreed financial guideline and spend on agreed priorities (Poisson, 2007).

This requires strengthening technical and financial planning, management and accounting/reporting procedures within the line Ministries and schools. The establishment of internal and external audit systems is part of this process. This can involve sampling financial monitoring of school accounts, sampling inter audits of accounts by the inspectorate general to ensure compliance with spending guidelines, and improved links between the Ministry of Education internal audit office and the national audit authority. Accounting Audit mechanisms should be set up as a very useful tool to find out whether instructions have been applied or not and whether decisions have been taken to induce corrective or preventive actions.

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There is need to reduce opportunities for fraud in the management process itself and at the same time, introducing a system of incentive not to commit fraud, or disincentives to commit fraud. Hallak & Poison (2004), opined on the existence of primary book-rental scheme, monitored by a school's supply unit (SSU). One of the SSU field offices is to identify book-rental defaulters and to persuade them to make prompt payment into the revolving fund. Some of the SSU officers have been found to collect money from the schools and, instead of depositing it in the SSU account, misappropriate it. To correct this, teachers should be required not to pay the money directly to the officer but rather to deposit it at the nearest bank. Poor teachers who collect the rental fee but fail to remit it to SSU, a system has to be put in place to recover the money by monthly deductions from the teachers' salaries. SSU should intensify school visits to encourage prompt payments of the funds collected. Some of the systematic weakness in the overall education management system of formula funding which should be handled properly is the handling of cash within a school, or the use of credit card payment etc, and then to issue clear rules such as the separation of ordering and payment and the requirement of more than one signature on school cheques or credit notes, the maintenance of equipment disposed of or written off. These practices are to be built into financial procedures to be monitored by audit.

Other options are to combine monitoring and auditing with other strategies like conduct of statutory audits sector-wide audits, financial tracking studies, periodic performance reports, routine monitoring, display of funds released and detecting warning signals. School management should be constantly on watch for signs of corruption or malpractice, including unexplained alterations in financial statements, missioned or out of sequence documents and unnecessary duplication of records. Finally, the empowering of parents is a useful way of ensuring appropriate service delivery in education.

(6) How to Develop Avenues for Social Participation

There are usually few or restricted opportunities for the meaningful participation of civil society in the improvement of transparency and accountability in education. The question of how to make school directors and parents committees more accountable for governmental and parental spending on education in school is a difficult one. The public is often unaware of opportunities for involvement. Yet, according to many, public involvement would be the key to reducing corruption. That is why avenues for community participation in education has to be explored. Exercises in the sharing of information, and efforts towards mainstreaming participation would certainly go a long way towards improving transparency and accountability. (Hallak & Poisson, 2006).

In order to involve communities in education, avenues for social participation can be created by use of the media. Parents should be provided with adequate information to enable them to play the role of well informed consumers. Radio programmes, for instance, can help to warn the public and school about incidents relating, for example to school examinations. More broadly, the existence of web pages, Newspapers, local radio and public hearing along with appropriate budget and national awareness campaigns can all help to make the public aware of opportunities of involvement. They can even contribute to promote interaction between citizen and public officials campaigns to raise public awareness; can be organized by governmental authorities. Information campaigns should be arranged by EFCC with the objective of informing people about what their entitlements and reflections are so that they

can detect when the standard of service provided falls short of those entitlement and make a complaint accordingly. Public hearings, where rural people will be actively involved should be conducted by local authorities and donors. Information campaigns should also be led by coalitions of NGOs. Not only do these coalitions conduct public awareness campaigns, but they also organize round-table discussion and press conferences, implement public opinion surveys to raise awareness about the negative impact of corruption and provide telephone hotlines where any person can receive legal advice free of charge and hold public hearings.

These processes of campaigns should be strengthened through the enforcement of the right to information. It will now provide sufficient evidence to suggest that the right of information can constitute a very valuable tool in improving transparency and accountability in governance and in empowering people within the educational process.

Another indispensable step forward is that the school be made accountable to the community and explain to the community outcomes achieved. Such supervision by society brings into play a certain sense of competition between schools and provides the foundation for a change of attitude in the way public services are given to the users. A programme should be developed for social and community involvement. The programme of work should be designed in consultation with the community and explain to the community the outcomes achieved. Particular attention should be paid to the link between building accountabilities and transparency and promoting ownership - all of which are crucial factors for its successful implementation.

Finally, one key aspect for promoting public awareness and empowerment in the long run should rely on the development of ethical officials, schools actors, parents and the children themselves. EFCC should produce several sets of training materials to promote its core value among different types of audiences. The development of teacher codes of ethics and university codes of ethics should be promoted (Marrin, Grant, Graig & Sequire, 1999).

The education of children on the dangers of corruption should start from early age. Citizenship education at elementary level will be used to stimulate the adoption of values, the exercise of right, the fulfilment of obligations, as well as the development of a culture of legality. Anti-corruption issues are to be integrated into the formal curriculum at all levels of education and new methodologies should be developed to encourage the active involvement of students through interactive drawing performances.

Conclusion and Recommendations

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The various strategies for improving transparency, accountability and anti-corruption policies and practices in the management of the education sector in Nigeria should be grouped under three strategies. The creation and maintenance of regulatory systems, the strengthening of management capacities, and the encouragement of enhanced ownership. More specifically:

- The creation and maintenance of regulatory systems: this involves adapting existing legal frameworks so that they focus more on corruption concerns (rewards/penalties); designing some basic norms and objective criteria for procedure (for instance, with regard to fund allocation or procurement); developing professional and ethical codes of practice for the education profession; and defining well-targeted measures, particularly for fund allocation.
- Strengthening management capacities to ensure the enforcement of these regulatory system: this involves increasing institutional capacities in various areas, particularly information system; developing computerized/ automated processes; setting up effective control mechanisms against fraud; promoting ethical behaviour; sensitizing and training staff; and creating peer control mechanisms.
- The encouragement of enhanced ownership of the management process: This involves developing

decentralized and participatory mechanisms: involving the profession in the design and enforcement of rules; increasing public access to information (particularly by the use of new technologies); and empowering communities to help them exert stronger "social control".

These components should not be considered separately, but as part of a broader integrated strategy aimed at fighting corruption in Nigeria's educational sector. The success of this strategy is long term and independent on a number of factors, such as:

- (a) Strong political will
- (b) The strengthening of professionals (by improving their status, salaries)
- (c) The support of a free press to publicize wrong doing; and
- (d) A wide diffusion of ethical values, etc.

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