

CORRUPT PRACTICES AND SERVICE DELIVERY OF STAFF IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES

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ABSTRACT

The persistent rise in cases of corrupt practices has given meaningful Nigerians a cause for deep concern in recent times. This presents itself among several factors that pose as challenges to service delivery of staff in education system including the Nigerian universities. This study examines how corrupt practices including financial mismanagement, nepotism, academic fraud and weak leadership undermine efficiency. The study highlights the mechanisms through which corrupt practices manifest and its impacts on service delivery. The study particularly discussed the nature of corrupt practices, causes of corrupt practices in Nigerian universities, impacts of corrupt practices and ways of eradicating corrupt practices in Nigerian universities. The findings of the study reveals that corrupt practices impede greatly on academic quality, institutional credibility and service delivery of staff in Nigerian universities. It therefore concluded that corrupt practices can be eradicated by strengthening oversight including regular audit system to ensure transparency and accountability, introduction of ICT platforms, ensuring equitable and fair recruitment and promotion of staff, ensuring ethical value education, enactment and strengthening of anti-corruption laws and enforcement of the justice system among others.

Key words: Corrupt practices, Service delivery, Staff, Nigerian Universities

Introduction

Globally, higher education plays a strategic role in national development of a country. It produces skilled manpower, advances research and enhances social transformation. However, in Nigeria, efficiency seems to be compromised very often by systemic issues including corrupt practices in administration, financing, staffing and academic functions of universities with serious implications for service delivery, affecting staff, students, the university community and the larger society. Therefore, it may not be strange to classify Nigerian universities among corrupt universities in the world, this is because members of staff seem to take sharp practices as part of daily lifestyles but this may hamper quality service delivery. According to Ayeni & Andeshi, (2023), corrupt practices include administrative and financial mismanagement, misapplication of available funds, inflated administrative costs and procurement irregularities. They also manifest in form of misallocation of funds, nepotistic recruitment or promotion, manipulation of results and academic fraud.

Nowadays, contracts for the provision of educational infrastructures including; building of classrooms, hostels, workshops, provision of furniture, textbooks, laboratory equipment amongst others are usually delivered in wrong proportions, members of staff tend to selfishly enrich themselves by selling admission slots, hostel accommodations, diversion of funds, sale of marks/grades among others, these practices tend to have negative impact on their service delivery, cause infrastructural decay, low academic standards, faculty shortages, loss of public trust and lack of achievement of educational goals in Nigerian universities.

In a study conducted by Ayeni & Andeshi, (2023), on Corruption and University Education in Nigeria, 2004-2022: “The Underdevelopment of Nigerian University Educational System” using secondary data across universities in Nigeria, it was concluded that corruption in university administration undermines service delivery, increases administrative costs, mismanagement of funds, infrastructural deficits, shortage of qualified academic staff and poor quality of education. They called on non-governmental integrity based organizations to monitor public universities in Nigeria and audit procurement, staffing and academic practices. Similarly, Eze (2024) conducted a study on Corruption, Academic Staff and Infrastructure Facilities in Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria using secondary data across Nigerian tertiary institutions. It was concluded that corruption is significantly associated with shortage of academic staff and inadequate infrastructural facilities, both critical for the proper functioning of universities. He recommended stronger institutional integrity culture to limit corruption. In another study conducted by Edet, (2025) on Deployment of Information Communication Technology in Addressing Corruption in Education in Nigeria, it was recommended that adopting ICT-Based systems for budgeting, procurement, personnel records and transparency can reduce opportunities for corruption within university administration.

The Institutional Decay Theory can be used to explain how organizations and systems lose their effectiveness to achieve goals and values. It occurs through internal mechanisms like the erosion of legitimacy, loss of member, motivation and strengthening of competing goals. The causes include:

1. Reduced Legitimacy; The goals may lose legitimacy in the eyes of its members and the public, perhaps due to perceived hypocrisy or if the institution’s actions are seen as ineffective or unfair.
2. Erosion of Motivation: People may become less committed to institutional goals and motivation and cooperation may decline, due to lack of fairness, well-being or sense of internal justice.

3. Strengthening alternative goals: Other goals and values can become more prominent and crowd out original purpose of the institution.
4. Incongruence: There may be mismatch between formal rules and informal norms leading to decay. Public trust and commitment are eroded when informal practices conflict with formal rules.
5. Ineffectiveness: There may be institutional decay by being ineffective and failing to fill gaps through other means.

Implications of Decay;

1. Loss of social stability: There may be increased conflict and breakdown of law and order.
2. Political Instability: Institutional decay can occur in politics as a breakdown within the constitutional framework, leading to erosion of faith in formal institutions.
3. Failure to achieve goals: There can be inability of organizations to function as intended, solve collective action problems or realize its stated values (Edet, 2025).

This study aims at analyzing how corrupt practices have become entrenched in Nigerian universities from administrative funding and procurement to staffing, infrastructure and academic quality. It documents the nature and causes of corrupt practices, factors, impacts of corrupt practices on service delivery and ways of limiting corrupt practices in Nigerian universities. The study relied on secondary data and content analysis to identify key patterns and drivers and make conclusion and recommendations.

Corrupt Practices:

Corrupt practice is a fraudulent conduct by any person in power of authority, typically involving bribery. It is a criminal offence undertaken by a person or an organization that is entrusted with position of authority. These practices are considered to be anti-social attitudes awarding improper privileges contrary to legal and moral norms and which impair the authorities' capacity to secure the welfare of citizens. According to the Independent Corrupt Practices and other Related Offences Commission (2007), Corruption is any dubious act that takes place when people try to get what they do not deserve by using money, tribal connection, religion, family name, threats, harassment and other negative influences. Corrupt practices in education therefore can be referred to as any illegal, fraudulent and anti-social behaviour awarding improper privileges contrary to legal and moral norms and educational ethics which impairs the educational institutions' capacity to deliver. While the original goal of education is to provide knowledge and develop the individual to realize him/herself and become a contributing member to the development of the society, corrupt practices tend to impede on the processes of attaining these goals in the Nigerian education system. The Nigerian education system will deliver more efficiently and effectively, if the education sector corridor is made to be free of people with high corrupt tendencies.

Service Delivery:

This refer to the degree and quality of service delivered by the personnel of an organization. It bears on the ability to satisfy stated needs (Federal Republic of Nigeria FRN 2014). To improve quality service delivery, management must observe criterial success indicators such as: setting the right tone for enhanced service delivery by placing emphasis on quality of academic programmes, providing strategic and operational leadership quality, mission and vision and effectiveness, efficiency and competence in developing strategies, providing internal mechanism for capacity building and professional development to strengthen, the power or ability to use human resources like attitudes, skills and knowledge to achieve goals, checkmating corrupt practices through numerous other specific areas requiring quality measures in education service

delivery including: students' admission, students' motivation; (economic or academic), curriculum configuration in terms of the relevance, scope and depth of knowledge acquired, staffing etc.

Staff:

Members of staff constitute the entirety of the university workforce. It refers to the personnel or number of workers in diverse fields who are statutorily employed to render services of carrying out the daily activities and programmes of the universities. They are responsible for planning, directing and undertaking academic activities in the schools (Akeke, 2016).

Universities:

Universities are higher institutions of learning established with a view of fostering effective teaching and learning for the production of high manpower in Nigeria. The Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN) (2014) sees universities as higher institutions after post-primary schools, offering correspondence courses for the award of bachelor's degrees, postgraduate diploma certificates, master degrees, doctorate and post-doctorate degrees.

Nature of Corrupt practices in Nigerian Educational Institutions including Universities

Corrupt practices take different forms; administrative, financial, academic fraud and leadership sharp practices. In line with the assertion of Ayeni & Andeshi, (2023), These include;

1. Over Inflation of Contract Sums and Costs; This is a financial corrupt practice involving over inflation of the cost of educational infrastructures and facilities for the purpose of serving personal gains of various officers at different levels including kickbacks from the contractor as well as his proportion. This impacts on the quality of service delivery in Nigerian universities.

2. Delivery of Sub-Standard Projects: This is a financial form of corrupt practice. It is the delivery of low standard infrastructural facilities. This happens when contractors attempt to over maximize profits. They use cheap materials for the projects. Sometimes, the supervisors take bribe and allow sub-standard jobs.

3. Admission Racketeering: This is an administrative corrupt practice. It has become like a norm today, that school management teams and other highly placed individuals in higher authorities, reserve special places on the admission list for preferred applicants. Some members of staff sell these admission slots to make extra money for themselves, thereby abandoning merit.

4. Hostel Accommodation Racketeering: This is an administrative form of corrupt practices. Some staff seize the slots for students' hostel accommodation and reserve for only their loved ones and or sell them out to higher bidders in order to make more money and to greedily enrich themselves. In this case, students who genuinely seek accommodation in school hostels but not connected or do not have the resources to bribe, are likely to miss their chances of getting it.

5. Irregular Employment of Staff; This a form of administrative corrupt practice, where only those who are on the favour list of highly placed political office holders and or managers of same institution, gain employment in such institutions without merit. Professionally qualified and proficient candidates lose employment while less competent persons use connections to gain employment into the system. This makes caricature of the entire system and service delivery.

6. Bribery, Extortion/Kick Back; Bribery takes the form of enticing and making illegal payments by individuals to gain favour from staff. Extortion involves coercive collection of illegal fees and kick back, gratification or paying money to the people in authority to facilitate the process of service delivery in a public place.

7. Non Performance, Abandonment, Non Delivery of Contracts; This form of financial corrupt practice occurs where jobs are given out and paid for but are not executed on ground. Contractors sometimes forge papers to show as if such jobs have been executed.

8. Politicization of Education and Diversion of Subventions; The Nigerian Education Sector has today become a sector highly affected by political campaigns in attempt to win sympathies of electorates. After electioneering periods, the politicians cause deliberate under funding of education. This results to disparity between budget and actual expenditures thereby putting pressures on sound management of finances of public education and service delivery.

9. Illegal Sale of Books and Educational Materials; There are cases of illegal sale of books, lecture materials and educational materials to students, at times, books and other learning materials supplied by Government and Donors are also carted away by staff and sold for personal gains.

10. Proliferation of Satellite Campuses/Special Examination and Miracle Centers/Mass Cheating and Exam Malpractices; These are academic frauds. They involve cases of creation of special satellite campuses and study centers where mass cheating and examination fraud take place during the conduct of examinations. This corrupt practice impedes on quality service delivery.

11. Gratification for Marks; This is also an academic fraud. It occurs when marks are awarded based on gratification or in exchange for money, gifts or sexual pleasures. This practice that has become pronounced in Nigerian universities. This limits service delivery.

12. Diversion/Looting of Store and School Equipment; This refers to cases where store materials are diverted by members of staff for personal use or sold for personal gains, it is also another form of corrupt practices limiting quality service delivery in Nigerian universities.

13. Diversion or Looting of Government Subventions; This is a financial form of corrupt practice involving the illegal use of part of the regular amount of money released at intervals by the Government for the running of universities. Illegal diversion of subventions limit efficiency.

14. Embezzlement of Proceeds of Consultancy Services, Enterprise/Business Activities; This is also a financial form of corrupt practices involving taking away without approval, the proceeds accruing to business ventures carried out by university consultancy services and other business enterprises including; sale of groceries, books, stationeries, renting of premises for business centers, restaurants, part time programmes, school crop/animal farming for revenue.

15. Embezzlement of Subscription Fees/Charges; This is a form of financial corrupt practice which has to do with the act of diverting the proceeds of specific rates charged by universities which students must pay as tuition, accommodation, sports and for other important educational programmes of the school on sessional or semester basis.

16. Embezzlement of External Aids/Grants; This financial corruption involves diversion of earnings from outside the system such as governments, including; Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TetFund), International Organizations including; United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

17. Embezzlement of Funds of Unions, Cooperative Societies, Associations and other Related Bodies; Unions, Associations and other related bodies also generate income for financing activities, programmes and projects too. The Associations generate their funds through membership registrations fees, dues/levies and fund raisers which are sometimes misused.

Underlying Factors/Causes of Corrupt Practices in Nigerian Universities:

The Independent Corrupt Practices and other Related Offences Commission, (2007), see the following as underlying structural and contextual drivers for corrupt practices in Nigeria;

1. Personal Greed; Greed leads to unfettered desire for money and power, with no regards whatsoever to moral boundaries. The underlying anthropological cause is the innate human impulse to own external goods, when it is not subject to personal integrity. This is common among leaders, it is a signal for increased fraudulent activities and poor service delivery in universities.

- 2. Decline of Personal, Ethical Sensibility;** This is usually due to poor education or negative learning experiences, developed by downplaying perverse conduct in the past. It is a common trend in our university system today where people seem to have thrown ethical values to the dust bin.
- 3. Lack of Sense of Service;** This is seen in members of staff who use politics for their selfish interests instead of serving the common good through the power. Today, there is a serious loss of sense of responsibility and commitment to service among the staff of Nigerian universities.
- 4. Low press freedom/Lack of Courage to Denounce Corrupt Behaviours and Situations Conducive to Corrupt Practices:** In a system where the press is gagged and intimidated, exposing corrupt practices becomes a task that cannot be easily achieved. Some individuals are aware but keep mute over corrupt practices or even cover for corrupt individuals in the system, perhaps, because it is not their problems or out of cowardice so as not to make their lives more complicated.
- 5. Cultural Environments that Condone Corruption:** Some institutional environments defend and even admire crooks “you have to be pretty smart to evade taxes” or “rationalizing false arguments with moral basis”. For example; “take advantage while you can”, “everyone does it, I cannot be an exception”, “Life is short, it’s time to act”. All these, affect service delivery.
- 6. Lack of Transparency Especially at Institutional Level:** Most university leaders lack transparency. Knowing that what they do is seen by everyone, they prefer to keep their decisions and actions in the secret.
- 7. Inefficient Regulations and Controls;** People see increased regulations and controls as though they are costly and tend to stifle initiatives and administrative dynamics in the system. Weak enforcement of disciplinary measures and low probability of penalization, foster corruption.
- 8. Judiciary/Slow Judicial and or Unreliable Process;** The nature of the judicial system goes a long way to deter or encourage corrupt practices. Where the judicial system is weak and trial of corrupt persons linger too long, corrupt practices tend to thrive. Swift judicial process has exemplifying effects than slow processes. Justice requires appealing processes and warranties.
- 9. Absence of Moral Criteria in Recruitments and Promotions;** lack of moral criteria for proven integrity and responsibilities in recruitments and promotions, makes corrupt practices to be prevalent. Today, loyalty pays more than integrity and ethical assessment. If ethical assessments are adopted as criteria, staff would improve in their ethical behavior, reducing corrupt tendencies.
- 10. Institutional Quality/Downplay on Corruption Charges;** The quality of institutions that are established and operated matters. Our society today tend to act mildly or downplays on corruption charges, there is little power of decision within the organization to penalize acts of corrupt practices to set examples. This create an environment conducive to perpetuate corruption.
- 11. Remuneration and Staff Motivation/Socio-Economic and Cultural Pressures:** The size of salaries of workers matters. Poor salaries and allowances, tend to encourage workers to engage in corrupt practices, adequate incomes improve job satisfaction and discourage such. Economic hardship and societal normalization of corrupt practices incentivize engagement in corrupt acts.
- 12. Leadership Failures and Unethical Administration/ Bureaucratic System:** Inefficient administrative structures, leadership deficits, (favoritism, nepotism, political interference) degrade institutional integrity and incentivize corrupt acts. Higher levels of bureaucracy breed corruption.
- 13. Political System/Weak Civil Participation/Political Monopolization:** The nature of democracy and political system in practice, weak democratic structures, inactive civil actions and lack of transparency as well as higher levels of market and political monopolization tend to make corrupt practices to thrive in Nigerian universities.

Impacts of Corrupt Practices on Service Delivery in Nigerian Universities:

The ICPC posits that corrupt practices hurt everyone and the society in the following ways:

- 1. Retardation of the Growth of the University System and Education Sector at large;** Corrupt practices retard the growth and development of universities and the education sector in entirety. This is because, resources meant to be utilized for the provision of infrastructural facilities are looted by corrupt leaders who find themselves at the helm of affairs in the system.
- 2. Threatening of Sustainable Economic Growth and Development of Universities and the Sector;** Corrupt practices cause economic instabilities, the policy developments and actions of corrupt regimes affect the stability of the sector and even the entire economy. Massive diversion and looting of funds meant for financing education programmes in budgets, impede on the economic growth and development of universities, the sector and the nation itself.
- 3. Promotion of Bad Governance;** Corrupt practices propel the wheels of bad governance. It encourage wrong, selfish formation and implementation of educational policies and programmes in universities and affect the performance of regimes while portraying same in a bad light.
- 4. Erosion of Institutional Reputation/Credibility and Trust of the Populace;** Corrupt practices erode the trust and believe on the management of Nigerian universities, supervisory and regulatory institutions and even the leadership in government by the citizenry, it makes the people conclude that nothing good can come out of the plans of the authorities.
- 5. Inefficient and ineffective Service Delivery;** Corrupt practices tend to inflate administrative costs through inflated overhead costs, misallocation and waste of proceeds of fees, taxes, rates and other revenues meant for important public projects. This results in inefficient and ineffective service delivery or infrastructures in universities.
- 6. Loss of Ethical Values and Justice;** Corrupt practices tend to wipe away ethical values in university leadership and the players of the sector as well as the nation at large. It also affects the principles of administration of justice and equality.
- 7. Impediment to investment/Infrastructure;** Corrupt practices in the university system tend to discourage investment in the sector and results in inadequate infrastructure. This is because, investors seem to stay away from areas where there seem to be low return on investments.
- 8. Inequality Amongst Players in the Industry and the Economy;** Corrupt practices generate inequality amongst the people in the affected sector. This is evidenced in the illegally acquired wealth or position which grants more power of influence to the corrupt persons and tend to place them with higher recognition.
- 9. Hardship and Rising Frustration;** When corrupt practices trend and seem to become like a norm in universities and the education sector of the economy, it makes the people to become frustrated and lose trust in their leaders, this diminishes active participation in service delivery.
- 10. Impediment on Accountability and Political Responsiveness;** Corrupt practices in Nigerian universities undermine the power of politics, state capacity and causes inability to address social problems whose resolution would threaten vested interests.
- 11. Polarization and Unrest;** Corrupt practices can increasingly pitch players in Nigerian universities and the education sector, against themselves. Those who benefit from the handouts may be against those who challenge the trend.
- 12. Human Rights Violations;** Corrupt leaders in Nigerian universities view civil liberties as obstacles to the consolidation of power, they can do anything including assassination of the crusaders. This act impedes on human rights and service delivery of staff of universities.
- 13. Reduction of Capacity;** Corrupt practices tend to decrease the capacity of the university authorities and government to address violations of civil rights, socio-economic rights and political rights which ought to make the necessary provisions to guarantee such rights.

14. Institutional Decay/Erosion of Academic Quality: Corrupt practices in universities compromise academic quality and standards, encourage brain drain, shortage of academic staff and poorly trained graduates and limits the core mandates of universities.

Strategies for Eradicating Corrupt Practices in Nigerian Universities:

The following suggest ways by which corrupt practices in Nigerian universities can be eradicated:

1. Regular and Effective Audit System; Embarking on regular and thorough auditing or examination of all funds released to universities and other related educational institutions as well as how they are expended will eliminate over inflation of contract sums and the funds will be properly monitored and used to deliver quality projects and service delivery.

2. Motivation and Attachment of Value to Personal Integrity; Promoting cultural, moral and ethical values by leaders and other key players in the sector as well as protecting their personal and institutional integrities, help to reduce corrupt thinking and practices in universities.

3. Review, Promotion of Ethical Education; Review and promotion of ethical education and personal assessment with every sense of sincerity and repentance to learn more about its influence in promoting positive learning and service delivery facilitates reduction in corruption.

4. Promotion of Leaders with True Service Oriented Spirit; Promoting true service oriented spirit in Leaders through adequate recognition and encouragement, boosts service delivery and discourage others who lack proven integrity from further engaging in corruption.

5. Promotion of the Right Environments; Promoting cultural environments that abhor and denounce corruption in its entirety by players in the Nigerian education sector curbs corruption.

6. Upholding the Spirit of Transparency and Accountability; Upholding and promoting the culture of honesty, transparency and accountability in the public space by all stakeholders in the sector will prevent corruption and improve service delivery of staff of Nigerian universities.

7. Anti-Corruption Laws/Improving the Legal Justice System; Enacting and enforcing better regulations and more effective control by relevant authorities in areas prone to corruption, will prevent corrupt practices. The law should stop dishonest people from holding positions of public trust. When there is improved administration of criminal justice system, it deters corruption.

8. Ethical Standard for Personnel Recruitments and Promotions; The authorities of Nigerian universities should up-their games in upholding ethical assessments and encouraging moral criteria in recruitment and promotion of staff. This will improve service delivery.

9. Exposure of Corrupt Practices; Regular exposure and reporting of corrupt activities and risks by players in the education system makes people with corrupt tendencies to be more careful in engaging in further corrupt activities. In turn, service delivery of staff will improve.

10. Punitive Actions; Adequate investigations, holding accountable for their actions, all persons who are perceived to be corrupt, will serve as deterrent to others and reduce corruption.

11. Using Information and Communication Technology ICT to Keep Financial and Store Records; The use of Information and Communication Technology ICT to keep all key registers and account records of financial transactions; cash books, financial ledger, payment voucher, stores ledger, Stores Receipt Vouchers (SRV) and Stores Issues Vouchers (SIV), will enthrone transparency and accountability and deter corrupt practices.

12. Maintenance of Bank Account: The maintenance of accounts with reputable banks by all universities, for the purpose of ease of tracking of incomes and expenditures and using cheque-books as the only document allowed for making withdrawals from the account and in line with the rules of; Treasury Single Accounts (TSA) System will eliminate corrupt practices.

Conclusion

From the findings of the study, it is established that corrupt practices in Nigerian universities manifest in many forms including academic fraud such as trading in marks, administrative malfeasance such as imbalanced recruitment and promotion, financial mal-practices such as diversion and misappropriation of funds which align with the findings of Ayeni and Andeshi, (2023), inflation of contracts/procurement rates, leadership deficits as nepotism, admission, accommodation racketeering among others, all impair service delivery. This aligns with the findings of Eze, (2024). The study concluded that corrupt practices, impede on service delivery of staff in Nigerian universities. The study recommended among others that corrupt practices can be eradicated by; introducing quarterly external audit exercise and publishing same, using the instruments of Information and Communications Technology ICT for managing all financial transactions and record system to ease transparency and accountability, strengthening anti-corruption laws and ensuring punitive measures, ensuring equity in recruitment and promotion of staff, motivating staff with enhanced remuneration and providing conducive work environment capable of discouraging corrupt practices.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the paper recommends the followings to eradicate corrupt practices and restore effective service delivery in Nigerian Universities:

1. Government should strengthen relevant anti-corruption laws, administration of criminal justice system, investigate and hold accountable all corrupt persons for their actions. The law should enforce strict and consistent sanctions, stop dishonest people from holding positions of public trust. By so doing, there will be improved service delivery.
2. Government should strengthen institutional oversight, transparency, accountability, effective and efficient quarterly audit system of Nigerian universities, to ensure proper use of funds and powers to deliver quality projects and service delivery. Universities should equally adopt robust internal control mechanisms, transparent procurement, staffing and promotion rules.
3. Stakeholders should promote ethical leadership and meritocracy, ensure strict adherence to merit-based criteria for recruitment, promotion and academic valuation among staff with transparent procedures and documentation, promote personal and institutional integrities, promote environments that abhor and denounce corruption in its entirety.
4. Government should encourage leaders who have true service oriented spirit, improve remuneration and working conditions of university staff, to encourage proven integrity, promote the culture of transparency and accountability in the public space.
5. Government should adopt the use of Information and Communication Technology ICT based administration as an instrument to digitalize all financial transactions, admissions, staff records and other records. This will curtail corruption and improve efficiency in universities.

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