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The Cancer of Corruption: An Examination of Its Impact on Academic Excellence and National Development in Nigerian Universities, 2000-2024

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ABSTRACT

This study offers a comprehensive analysis of the pervasive corruption within Nigerian universities from 2000 to 2024, conceptualizing it as a metastatic "cancer" that undermines academic excellence and cripples national development. Through a qualitative research design employing historical and thematic analysis, the investigation reveals how corruption has become an institutionalized ecosystem. The paper delineates the interlocking forms of corruption—spanning government, university staff, students, and parents—and demonstrates how they create a self-perpetuating cycle of mediocrity. The findings expose a foundational link between systemic government failures, such as politicization and chronic underfunding, and the operational corrupt practices of academic extortion, nepotism, and academic fraud. The study concludes that dismantling this corrupt ecosystem requires a systemic, multi-stakeholder approach. It proposes a roadmap for reform centered on stringent regulatory oversight, the unequivocal reinstatement of merit-based systems, and a concerted cultural shift towards integrity and accountability. This research provides a critical framework for policy interventions aimed at restoring the integrity of Nigerian higher education and unlocking its potential as a catalyst for national progress.

Keywords: Academic Excellence; National Development; Cancer of Corruption; Higher Education; Nigerian University Education.

INTRODUCTION

The Nigerian university system has a complex and dynamic history, shaped by internal and external factors. The imposition of Western education during the colonial era laid the foundation for the country's modern education system (Nwafor, 2009). Universities, originally established in Medieval Europe to serve the needs of the church and state (Altbach and Berdhal, 1981; Nwafor, 2009), have evolved to play a critical role in nation-building. However, the Nigerian university system has been severely compromised by corruption, a pervasive and insidious problem that threatens academic excellence and national development. Corruption has become a cancer, silently destroying the foundation of the education system and undermining its integrity (Ibrahim, 2020). Despite efforts by the government, National Universities Commission (NUC), and Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) to eradicate corruption, it persists, perpetuating a cycle of poverty, inequality, and underdevelopment.

Existing research on corruption in Nigerian universities has significant limitations. While studies have examined the evolution of higher education in Nigeria, there is a dearth of research on the historical context and evolution of corruption in the university education system. Furthermore, studies often focus narrowly on government and lecturer culpability, overlooking the roles of students and parents in corruption. Moreover, research frequently fails to distinguish between various forms and instances of corruption, such as bribery, embezzlement, and nepotism. This study aims to address these gaps by providing an updated analysis of corruption in Nigerian universities and its impact on academic excellence and national development.

Specifically, this study will examine the historical perspective of corruption in the Nigerian university education system, explore the forms and instances of corruption, and investigate its causes and effects. It will also provide insights into the consequences of corruption for the country's economic, social, and political future. Through a thorough examination of secondary and observational data, this study will contribute to a deeper understanding of corruption in Nigerian universities and inform efforts to develop effective solutions. By exploring the complex dynamics of corruption, this research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of its impact on academic excellence and national development in Nigerian universities from 2000 to 2024.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

Academic Excellence

Academic excellence, as defined by Alhosani et al. (2023), involves creating an environment that fosters critical thinking, innovative skills, intellectual growth, and high academic standards. Alternatively, it can be seen as the demonstrated ability to excel in scholarly activities. According to Almarwani, a comprehensive definition of academic excellence must consider its multidimensional nature, encompassing aspects such as learning, teaching, curriculum, governance, assessment, extracurricular activities, and digitisation (Almarwani, 2023).

Building on this, we define academic excellence as the relentless pursuit of educational distinction, marked by a harmonious convergence of superior learning experiences, innovative teaching, well-designed curricula, effective governance, rigorous assessment, enriching extracurricular activities, and seamless integration of digitisation. This multifaceted approach cultivates critical thinking, intellectual growth, and creative problem-solving, ultimately producing knowledgeable, skilled, and responsible individuals who drive national development and global progress. Achieving academic

excellence requires focus, commitment, and core values, which are reflected in key factors influencing university rankings, including research quality, teaching quality, international outlook, graduate employability, innovation in entrepreneurship, and global recognition (Daoud, 2023). These factors underscore the importance of a well-rounded approach to academic excellence. The significance of these factors is evident in the Times Higher Education (THE) 2025 world university rankings, which evaluated institutions based on 18 performance indicators grouped into five areas: teaching, research environment, research quality, international outlook, and industry (innovation and consultancy).

The rankings demonstrate that academic excellence is closely tied to an institution's ability to excel in these areas. Notably, Covenant University, a private institution in Ogun State, emerged as Nigeria's best university for the second consecutive year, making the top 1000 list globally (Suleiman, 2025). This achievement highlights the university's commitment to academic excellence and its ability to meet the standards set by the THE rankings.

National Development

National development is a multifaceted concept that encompasses the opportunity for individuals to realise their potential, promote well-being and security, and optimise their potential (Adama, 2006). It involves the growth of a nation in terms of unity, education, economic well-being, and mass participation in government (Elugbe, 1990). Creating a conducive atmosphere for individuals to realise their potential, fostering a buoyant economy, and providing social infrastructure are crucial for national development (Inyanda and Adama, 2003). A developed society prioritises eliminating poverty, providing basic needs, and ensuring a decent standard of living for its citizens (Lichman, 1972). Education plays a vital role in national development, supplying the needed human resources and driving societal progress. A well-educated population with individuals in their rightful positions enhances societal growth (Orji and Job, 2013).

In the context of this present study, "The cancer of corruption: an examination of its impact on academic excellence and national development in Nigerian universities," corruption in education can significantly hinder national development. By compromising academic excellence and limiting access to quality education, corruption deprives individuals of opportunities to realise their potential, ultimately stifling societal progress and development. Furthermore, corruption can disrupt the social group relations role of education, which promotes national unity, peaceful coexistence, and national development (Orji and Job, 2013). Addressing corruption in education is essential for fostering a conducive environment for individual potential realisation and driving national development.

Cancer of Corruption

The concept of "Cancer of Corruption" is a metaphorical representation that draws parallels between the disease of cancer and the destructive nature of corruption. Cancer, as defined by the National Cancer Institute, is a disease in which some of the body cells grow uncontrollably and spread to other parts of the body. However, Brown et al (2023), pointed out that this definition tends to describe what cancer "looks like or does" but not describe what it is or has become. Thus, these scholars proposed that an updated definition of cancer should include the force of natural selection acting on the initiation and progression of cancer cell populations. Furthermore, they defined cancer as a disease

of uncontrolled proliferation by transformed cells subject to evolution by natural selection.

In explaining “cancer” being a disease, it is a known fact that cancer cells grow, spread, resource use, and metabolite production, tissue disruption, and co-option of normal non-cancerous cells disrupt normal bodily functions, ultimately causing pain, organ failure, and cancer-related syndrome. It also affects the mental health of the people around them, disrupting families and friendships. Uncontrolled proliferation implies the expansion or growth of the subject in question, cancerous cells. Thus, cancer has proliferation rates that far exceed their death rates, perhaps due to its uncontrollable nature caused by a failure of the normal mechanism or system designed to control or govern the process or maintain homeostasis, leading to undesirable potential harm. Cancer cells transform by shifting between levels of selection. The initiating cancer cell shifts from being part of the whole organism to become its own unit of selection among its population and environment (Brown et al, 2023). For evolution, cancer initiation and progression are ultimately driven by the force of natural selection, which implies the force of evolution that promotes adaptations and adaptedness. Thus, for cancer to occur, there must be heritable variation that influences the success of the struggle.

On the other hand, the most famous or popularly used definition of the concept of corruption defines it mostly as the use of official position, ranks, status by an office bearer for his/her personal benefit. This is seen in Myint’s definition (Myint, 2000). This definition depicts instances of corruption such as bribery, extortion, fraud, embezzlement, nepotism, cronyism, appropriation of public assets and property for private use, and influence peddling. Furthermore, scholars use this definition mostly to view corruption from the political view. Azelema (2008) defined corruption as any form of action or omission enacted by a member of an organisation by using the advantage of the position he occupied at the moment to violate the rules, norms, regulations, and ethics of the organisation for personal or selfish interest at the detriment of the organisation or other parties involved. This second definition does not just view or centralise it to only the political sector but members of an organisation, which could be members of the family, political field, educational institutions like academic and non-academic staff, and students who, through their actions or omission, take advantage of their positions at the moment (official or not) to violate ethics, rules, and regulations for his/her selfish interest at the detriment of the organisation.

Based on Brown et al’s definition of cancer and Azelema’s definition of corruption, the metaphorical representation “cancer of corruption” The “Cancer of Corruption” refers to a pervasive and insidious phenomenon characterised by the unchecked proliferation of corrupt practices, fuelled by self-serving interests and abuse of power, which metastasises throughout organisations and societies, disrupting normal functioning, eroding trust, and causing debilitating harm to development, governance, and the well-being of individuals, communities, and the nation-state.

Corruption in university education can be likened to cancer cells that grow, spread, and disrupt normal functions. Just as cancer cells outcompete normal cells for resources and evade mechanisms designed to control their growth, corruption in universities can outcompete merit-based systems, divert resources meant for development, and evade accountability mechanisms.

This corruption can lead to compromised academic standards, unfair advantages, and decreased meritocracy, ultimately affecting the quality of education and research. As

corruption proliferates, it undermines the integrity of the academic system, erodes trust in the institution, and diminishes the value of the degrees awarded. The consequences are far-reaching, impacting not only the university but also the nation's development. Corruption can deprive the nation of skilled, innovative, and ethical professionals, hindering economic growth, social progress, and human development.

CORRUPTION IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES: A LENS OF INSTITUTIONAL THEORY

Corruption in Nigerian universities is deeply entrenched in the institutional fabric, perpetuated by norms, informal practices, and lax enforcement of rules (North, 1990). Bribery, nepotism, and patronage networks thrive in this environment, undermining meritocracy and crippling the universities' ability to fulfill their roles in education and national development.

Institutional theory provides a critical lens through which to understand this phenomenon (Scott, 2014). It reveals how corruption becomes institutionalized when it aligns with or exploits existing norms, informal practices, or weakly enforced formal rules (North, 1990). The theory also highlights the importance of legitimacy, where organisations conform to accepted norms and values to gain legitimacy within their environment (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983).

Corruption is a debilitating scourge that has permeated the fabric of Nigerian university education, undermining its very foundation and crippling its potential to drive national development. Through the lens of institutional theory, it becomes evident that corruption in Nigerian universities is deeply entrenched in the institutional fabric, perpetuated by norms, informal practices, and lax enforcement of rules. The proliferation of bribery, nepotism, and patronage networks has created a toxic environment that undermines meritocracy, compromises academic integrity, and stifles innovation.

The consequences of corruption in Nigerian universities are far-reaching, with far-reaching implications for education quality, national development, and societal progress. Corruption not only denies deserving students access to educational opportunities but also compromises the quality of graduates, thereby undermining the competitiveness of the Nigerian workforce in the global economy.

EVOLUTION OF CORRUPTION IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITY EDUCATION: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The pervasive corruption in Nigerian university education is a debilitating legacy of colonialism, perpetuated by systemic flaws, socioeconomic pressures, and governance failures. The instances of corruption currently plaguing Nigerian university education have their roots in the colonial era, where the imposition of a foreign education system prioritised the interests of the colonial powers over the needs of the local population (Nwafor, 2009). Colonial authorities engaged in various forms of exploitation and illicit activities, laying the groundwork for the corrupt practices that continue to affect Nigeria's education system today.

Understanding this historical context is crucial for addressing the systemic issues that perpetuate corruption in Nigerian universities. According to Nwafor (2009), the history of Western education in Nigeria is a chequered one, with the Europeans' civilising mission not having education of Africans as their principal objective. Instead, education became an instrument for providing the colonial imperialists with the necessary manpower needed in both religious and secular circles (Nwafor, 2009). The introduction of Western

education in Nigeria dates back to the 15th century when Catholic missionaries established a school in the Oba of Benin's palace (Nduka, 1964).

The colonial administration's acquiescence of the missionary-established education system was facilitated by dubious transactions and calculated manoeuvring, enabling them to subvert the system for their own benefit, thereby laying the groundwork for endemic corruption, external domination, and long-lasting repercussions that would manifest in diverse ways (Nwafor, 2009; Suleiman, 2012). Scholars like Nwafor (2009) and Suleiman (2012) have exceptionally documented the involvement of colonialists in the education system of Nigeria. Their claims, however, support the aforesaid assertion. According to Nwafor (2009), the government's participation in education could be traced to the visit of Colonel Ord, who was in a commission of enquiry to West Africa (1864-1865) to Lagos. While in Lagos, he observed that there was no form of government assistance to educational institutions in Nigeria (Nwafor, 2009). This observation compelled the colonial government to take tangible action. Between 1877 and 1882, a paltry sum of £200 was given to each of the three missions in Lagos when the colonial government felt that the entire running of the education system should not be left in the hands of the missionaries alone (Nwafor, 2009; Suleiman, 2012). This condition led to the laying of the conditions for grants-in-aid; consequently, the West African Education Ordinance was enacted for the purpose of promotion and assistance of education in the Gold Coast colony.

The ordinances did not provide for local culture and customs and the basis of education of the African, and the proposed grants-in-aid were rendered inaccessible, cumbersome, and found unworkable (Nwafor, 2009). This historical trajectory reveals the entrenched elitism and restricted access to higher education that defined the colonial era, laying the groundwork for ongoing challenges in Nigerian universities

Nigeria's university education system is a testament to the enduring legacy of colonialism, with elitist policies that have perpetuated systemic inequalities and exclusions (Ibrahim, 2022). The founding of Fourah Bay College (FBC) in 1827, initially intended to facilitate West Africa's access to British universities, paradoxically underscored the restrictive nature of colonial education. Catering to a select few, this institution exemplified the limited opportunities available to the broader population, thereby entrenching disparities that persist today.

The establishment of Yaba Higher College in 1932, with its focus on practical skills, was perceived as inadequate by Nigerian nationalists and elites who advocated for authentic university education (Ibrahim, 2022). Their efforts culminated in the Elliot Commission's recommendations, which paved the way for the University of Ibadan's establishment in 1948 as an affiliate of the University of London. This historical trajectory reveals the entrenched elitism and restricted access to higher education that defined the colonial era, laying the groundwork for ongoing challenges in Nigerian universities.

In 1959, as the government of Nigeria was preparing for independence, it appointed the Ashby Commission, which was tasked with investigating Nigeria's needs in higher education over the next 20 years (Jega, 1995). The commission's report recommended the establishment of more universities, including the University of Nigeria (1960), Nsukka; the University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University), Ile-Ife (1962); Ahmadu Bello University; and the University of Lagos (Jega, 1995; Gabriel and Yusuf, 2023). The six universities established during this period, 1960 to 1970, were still referred to as the first-generation universities.

Building on the colonial legacy, the post-colonial era has seen corruption further undermine the system's integrity, quality, and ultimately the country's human capital development and socioeconomic progress (Ibrahim, 2022). During Nigeria's oil boom era, corruption and mismanagement of funds undermined the nation's higher education system (Ibrahim, 2020). The government squandered vast oil revenues, while corrupt officials embezzled funds, made nepotistic appointments, and accepted bribes. The restructuring of Nigerian universities through mergers and demergers was marred by a glaring lack of transparency and accountability, casting a long shadow over the integrity of the educational sector (Nyewusira, 2014). The abrupt merger of four universities of technology with established federal universities in 1984, followed by a swift reversal in 1987-1988 without resolving the cited funding issues, raises profound suspicions of corruption and self-serving motives (Nyewusira, 2014).

The military grip on Nigerian universities was marked by corruption, mismanagement, and a disregard for academic freedom (Jega, 1995). Corruption permeated the university system, with resources being squandered through inflated contracts and dubious projects approved by administrators with military patronage. The chronic underfunding of education, coupled with the embezzlement of what little funding was allocated, resulted in a decline in the quality of education, marked by overcrowded classrooms, poorly equipped laboratories, and a brain drain of qualified academics (Jega, 1995).

The Babangida regime's corruption, coupled with staff corruption, severely undermined university education, leading to brain drain, strikes, and a decline in academic standards (Jega, 1995). ASUU's resistance to these corrupt practices added to its credibility as a patriotic, organised interest group advocating for genuine democracy and university autonomy. The proliferation of private universities in Nigeria is a direct consequence of the systemic corruption and decay in the public university system (Ibrahim, 2020). Since 1999, the number of universities has skyrocketed from a manageable few to 162, with private universities growing from 45 in 2010 to 74 in 2018. This rapid expansion of private universities is driven by the failure of public universities, plagued by corruption, inadequate funding, and frequent strikes (Gabriel and Yusuf, 2023).

Corruption has insidiously infiltrated the Academic Staff Union of Universities' (ASUU) struggle for better funding for Nigerian universities, morphing it into a self-serving endeavour (Ibrahim, 2020). The prolonged strikes have become a lucrative venture for lecturers to receive salary arrears after each strike and engage in paid teaching at private universities during the strike period and receive other benefits. This unsavoury dynamic has reduced the strikes to a means for lecturers to enrich themselves, while students are left to bear the brunt of disrupted studies, delayed graduations, and a general decline in the quality of education (Ibrahim, 2020). The government's failure to honour its commitments has created a vicious cycle of strikes and broken promises, further exacerbating the decay of the university system.

In present time, corruption continues to plague Nigerian university education, manifesting in various forms such as cultism, examination malpractice, bribery, and sexual harassment etc., highlighting the urgent need for comprehensive reforms to restore integrity and ensure quality education.

THE MEDIOCRITY TRAP: FORMS, CAUSES AND EFFECTS OF CORRUPTION IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITY SYSTEM

The Nigerian university system is entangled in a web of corruption, aptly described as the “mediocrity trap.” This pervasive issue encompasses various forms of corruption, including bribery, fraud, and nepotism, which compromise the quality of education and undermine the system’s integrity. The mediocrity trap has far-reaching consequences, affecting not only the academic standards but also the nation’s human capital development, economic growth, and global competitiveness. Understanding the causes, forms, and effects of corruption in the Nigerian university system is crucial to developing effective solutions to address this challenge and restore the system’s credibility.

Forms of Corruption in Nigerian University System

The Nigerian university system faces significant challenges related to corruption, which undermines the integrity and quality of education. Forms of corruption such as government-related corruption, university staff corruption, student-related corruption, and parent-related corruption, have become entrenched in the system. These corrupt practices compromise the validity and reliability of academic assessments, create unfair advantages, and hinder the development of critical thinking and intellectual honesty. The following are various forms of corruption in Nigerian University Education:

Government-Related Corruption

Government-related corruption in Nigerian universities manifests in various ways. Politicking and nepotism influence appointments and admissions, often prioritizing personal connections over merit. This unfair practice is further exacerbated by regulatory capture, where government agencies tasked with oversight are swayed or controlled by corrupt interests, weakening standards and regulations. Furthermore, funding mismanagement is a significant issue, with officials embezzling or misappropriating funds meant for educational institutions. This deprives universities of essential resources, hindering their ability to provide quality education and conduct meaningful research.

In addition, accreditation and approval processes are often compromised, with officials accepting bribes to accredit substandard programmes. This not only undermines the credibility of the education system but also puts students at risk by allowing subpar institutions to operate. Policy manipulation is another form of corruption, where government officials craft policies that serve their personal interests rather than the public good. This leads to policies that benefit specific individuals or groups, rather than promoting education quality and integrity. These corrupt practices ultimately compromise the integrity and quality of education in Nigerian universities.

Staff Corruption

University staff corruption in Nigerian universities compromises the integrity and quality of education. Staff members engage in academic fraud by falsifying academic records, certificates, or transcripts for personal gain. They also facilitate examination malpractices, including allowing or participating in cheating, leaking exam questions, or altering grades. Furthermore, extortion is prevalent, with staff demanding or accepting bribes from students in exchange for grades, admission, or other favors. This creates an unfair environment where students who cannot afford to pay are disadvantaged. Staff members also engage in academic dishonesty, including plagiarism, intellectual property theft, or falsification of research data, which undermines the credibility of academic research.

Additionally, favoritism and nepotism are common, with staff showing undue preference to certain students or colleagues based on personal relationships or gain. Grade inflation is another issue, where staff award undeserved high grades to students, often in exchange for bribes or favors. Moreover, some staff members exploit their power to coerce students into sexual favors in exchange for grades, admission, or benefits, creating a hostile environment. These corrupt practices erode trust in the education system and have serious consequences for students and society.

Student-related Corruption

Student-related corruption in Nigerian universities manifests in various ways. Students engage in examination malpractices, including cheating, bribing, or using unauthorised materials during exams, which undermines the validity and reliability of academic assessments. Some students also hire impersonators to sit exams or complete assignments on their behalf, compromising the authenticity of academic credentials. Furthermore, students engage in plagiarism and academic dishonesty, passing off others' work as their own or falsifying research data. This undermines the integrity of academic research and can have serious consequences for the advancement of knowledge. Students often collude with staff or other students to secure undeserved grades or admission, involving bribery, extortion, or other forms of corruption that create an unfair environment.

Some students engage in cultism and violence, using intimidation or violence to achieve their goals or settle scores, which creates a hostile and insecure environment. These corrupt practices compromise the integrity and quality of education, undermine the credibility of the institution, and have serious consequences for individuals and society.

Parent-related Corruption

Parent-related corruption in Nigerian universities involves parents contributing to corrupt practices that undermine the integrity and quality of education. They may offer bribes or use their influence to secure their child's admission, grades, or academic favors. Some parents pressure lecturers or administrators to provide undeserved grades or special treatment, compromising the validity of academic credentials.

Parents might also enable or cover for their child's academic dishonesty, such as plagiarism or cheating, hindering the development of critical thinking and intellectual honesty. Those with connections or wealth may use these resources to secure preferential treatment for their child, perpetuating inequality and corruption within the institution. By doing so, they may inadvertently teach their child that success can be bought or achieved through unfair means, rather than through hard work and merit. This perpetuates a culture of corruption and undermines the value of education.

Causes of Corruption in Nigerian University System

The university system in Nigeria is plagued by corruption, which is perpetuated by various enablers, including government officials, university staff, students, and parents/guardians who, through their actions or omissions, contribute to the proliferation of corrupt practices. These enablers often prioritise personal interests over the pursuit of academic excellence, thereby undermining the integrity of the education system.

The Government as Enablers of Corruption

The government plays a pivotal role in shaping the trajectory of university education in Nigeria, and its actions or inactions significantly contribute to the prevalence of corruption within the sector. The government's inadequate funding of universities creates an environment where institutions are forced to seek alternative, often corrupt, means to supplement their resources (Joseph-Erinsakin, 2021). This scarcity drives institutions to engage in practices that compromise their integrity, such as demanding bribes from students or accepting substandard academic work in exchange for grades.

The government's regulatory framework is weak and ineffective, allowing corrupt practices to go unchecked. Although the government has established agencies to supervise and monitor academic activities in higher education, these agencies are often inefficient and enmeshed in corrupt practices themselves (Ibrahim, 2021). The lack of robust oversight mechanisms and accountability structures emboldens individuals within the university system to engage in corrupt activities, knowing there's little risk of consequences.

The politicisation of education contributes to corruption. Politicians and government officials often interfere with university governance, appointments, and admissions for personal or political gain (Jega, 1995). This undermines the merit-based system and creates opportunities for corruption, as unqualified individuals are appointed to positions of authority or admitted to programmes based on political connections rather than academic merit. Ghost workers are often found on payroll lists, receiving salaries without performing any duties (Joseph-Erinsakin, 2021). Top management officials perpetuate this level of corruption, which retards the growth of educational institutions in the country.

Government corruption in accreditation and approval processes compromises the quality of education and undermines the credibility of the system. When government officials accept bribes or favours in exchange for accrediting or approving universities or programmes, it can lead to the proliferation of substandard institutions and programmes, ultimately harming students and the broader society.

The government's failure to respect university autonomy also contributes to corruption. By exerting undue influence over university governance and decision-making processes, the government creates an environment where corruption can thrive. Universities may feel pressured to comply with government demands or risk facing consequences, which can lead to a culture of compliance rather than a culture of integrity. Poor remuneration and late payment of salaries to university lecturers have also contributed to the prevalence of corruption. The salaries paid to lecturers in Nigeria are low compared to other countries, and the irregular payment of salaries has reduced their purchasing power. Many lecturers resort to taking bribes from students and engaging in other corruption-related activities, further compromising the integrity of the university system.

The University Staff As Enablers

University staff play a significant role in enabling corruption within the higher education sector. Their actions, behaviours, and attitudes contribute to an environment where corrupt practices thrive. Lecturers who prefer to stay at a particular university or remain in urban centres pay substantial bribes to university administrators. This practice leads to universities in urban areas being overpopulated with lecturers, while those in rural areas are understaffed. Many lecturers also offer their salaries to secure promotions

ahead of their colleagues. These anomalies constitute corruption in the university system, detrimental to the development of education in society.

Some sub-institutions within universities engage in corrupt practices. University administrators, such as Vice-Chancellors and their governing councils, deliberately inflate the value of project contracts, compromising the quality of administration (Jega, 1995). Lecturers also engage in corrupt practices, such as forcefully selling handouts and books to students. They punish students who do not buy these materials by reducing their merited scores in examinations, a form of extortion.

Lecturers openly and directly demand bribes from students, while others do so indirectly, creating an environment where students feel compelled to pay for grades or favours. Nepotism and ethnicity favoritism are prevalent, with lecturers showing preference to students based on relationships or ethnic backgrounds rather than merit. Some lecturers re-administer exams to students who have paid in cash or kind, including sexual favours, and provide them with answer cheats. Others arrange machinery to help students who have paid their way, further compromising the integrity of the academic process. Nepotism and tribalism play a significant role in the university system, with appointments, admissions, and promotions often based on family ties or ethnic affiliations rather than merit.

Lecturers may also engage in corruption related to students' research projects. They may ask students to pay a certain amount of money before approving a topic or instruct students to contract typing and binding services to them at inflated prices. Some lecturers award grades to students who have not carried out research work, compelling them to pay a specified amount. Corruption also occurs in educational administration, including recruitment, admission, and promotion. Entrance examinations are often not merit-based, and recruitment of staff is often influenced by personal connections. Senior staff, such as Vice-Chancellors, embezzle university funds, place ghost workers on salaries, and engage in over-invoicing contracts (Egbefo, 2012).

The Students as Enablers

Students play a significant role in enabling corruption within Nigerian universities. Corruption is often attributed to university staff and administrators, but students also contribute to the perpetuation of corrupt practices. Some students pay bribes to lecturers in exchange for grades, admission, or other favours. Others feel pressured to pay bribes to secure good grades or avoid harassment from lecturers. In addition to bribery, students engage in other forms of corruption, such as academic dishonesty, including plagiarism, cheating, and collusion. Some students arrange for others to write exams on their behalf or pay for academic services. Others join cult groups that threaten lecturers to secure passing grades or attempt to seduce lecturers sexually in exchange for good grades.

Course representatives and class representatives often exploit their positions to extort money from fellow students, assuring them of good grades in exchange for money or other benefits. These representatives sometimes collaborate with lecturers to take money from desperate students. Students also enable corruption by accepting and perpetuating corrupt practices, such as buying and selling term papers, projects, and assignments (Joseph-Erinsakin, 2021). This creates a culture where students believe they can buy their way through university without putting in the necessary effort.

Furthermore, students in student union government arms, such as the Students Executive Council, Students Representative Council, and Students Judicial Council, often

venture into corrupt practices like vote buying. During elections, financially well-to-do aspirants pay students to purchase voting pins for online balloting. Some aspirants hire thugs to threaten or force students to vote for them. Once in power, these student leaders often embezzle funds meant for student development and activities. Some may have signed contracts with their “godfathers” and feel pressured to redeem these agreements, even if it means looting funds assigned for students.

Parents/Guardians as Enablers of Corruption

Parents and guardians play a significant role in enabling corruption in university education. Some parents are willing to pay bribes or engage in other corrupt practices to secure admission or grades for their children. This creates a culture where corruption is seen as a necessary evil to achieve success. Some parents feel that the education system is unfair or biased, and that corruption is the only way to ensure their child receives a good education. Others are unaware of the corrupt practices and are misled by university officials or students who promise them that paying bribes or engaging in other corrupt activities is the only way to secure a good grade or admission (Joseph-Erinsakin, 2021). Parents and guardians often put pressure on university officials to award their children good grades or admission, even if they do not merit it. This leads to a situation where university officials feel pressured to compromise their standards and engage in corrupt practices.

Furthermore, some parents buy term papers, projects, or assignments for their children, undermining the integrity of the academic process. This creates a culture where students believe they can buy their way through university without putting in the necessary effort. In some cases, parents are involved in corrupt practices such as falsifying documents or providing false information to secure admission or grades for their children. This leads to a situation where students who do not deserve admission or grades receive them, while those who do deserve them are denied.

Additionally, parents’ poor home training of their children contributes to corruption in university education. When parents fail to instill values of honesty, hard work, and integrity in their children, they are more likely to engage in corrupt practices to achieve their goals (Joseph-Erinsakin, 2021). Without a strong moral foundation, students are more susceptible to the temptation of cheating, bribery, and other forms of corruption. Parents who are not actively involved in their children’s education are often unaware of the corrupt practices their children engage in and are unable to provide guidance and support to help them make better choices.

EFFECTS OF CORRUPTION ON ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Corruption has become a pervasive and insidious force in Nigeria's university education system, undermining its foundation and threatening the future of the nation's youth. The impact of corruption on higher education is multifaceted, far-reaching, and devastating, with consequences extending beyond academia to affect society. The nature and characteristics of cancer can be metaphorically applied to corruption in Nigerian universities. Just as cancer is defined by uncontrolled cell growth and proliferation, corruption in universities can spread rapidly, infiltrating various aspects of academic life. This uncontrolled growth leads to a decline in academic standards, erosion of trust, and compromised integrity (Madu, 2020). Corruption ravages the system, diverting resources

from essential activities, resulting in inadequate infrastructure, staff shortages, and poor quality education.

The adaptability and resilience of cancer cells can be compared to corruption's ability to adapt and perpetuate itself. For instance, the cost of running university education escalates daily, partly due to institutionalised corruption prioritizing personal benefits over institutional goals (Madu, 2020 and Agbo, 2017). Funds meant for vital projects are often diverted to "white elephant projects" with inflated invoices, straining limited resources. Notable examples of corruption include bribery for grades, admission, and jobs (Joseph-Erinsakin, 2021), perpetuating inequality and social injustice. Mismanagement of funds is also significant, with corruption reducing funds for university programmes due to embezzlement and mismanagement (Ayeji and Andeshi, 2023). Funds are often misused, with some university managements spending on exotic vehicles instead of essential facilities like lecture halls and staff accommodations.

The consequences are far-reaching, affecting not only education but also national development. A poorly educated workforce hampers economic growth, innovation, and global competitiveness. Corruption stifles individual and societal growth, leading to a lack of skilled manpower, reduced productivity, and increased social inequality. Deficits are a major concern, with corruption leading to diversion and looting of funds meant for infrastructure, resulting in inadequate facilities. Essential infrastructure like libraries, laboratories, hostels, and internet services are lacking, hindering effective administration and delivery of academic services. Corruption has damaged the image of Nigerian educational institutions internationally. Funds meant for development have been diverted, resulting in poor quality education. This mismanagement of funds hinders university education's role in social and economic development.

The Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) has fought against corruption and poor funding through strikes, disrupting academic calendars (Ibrahim, 2020). Some notable strike durations include 1981 (6 months), 1992 (6 months), 1994 (6 months), 1996 (7 months), 2003 (6 months), 2006 (2 months), 2007 (3 months), 2009 (4 months), 2010 (5 months), 2013 (6 months), 2018 (4 months), and 2020 (9 months). These strikes have caused students to suffer long interruptions, delayed graduation, and additional financial burdens. Ultimately, corruption in higher education profoundly impacts Nigeria's national development, hindering economic growth, social progress, and global competitiveness. Just as cancer hampers growth and development, corruption stifles individual and societal growth, leading to a lack of skilled manpower, reduced productivity, and increased social inequality.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The cancer of corruption has ravaged Nigerian universities, undermining academic excellence and national development. Its destructive nature has spread and escalated, compromising academic standards, fairness, and meritocracy. Corruption manifests in various forms, including government-related, staff, student, and parent-related corruption, all of which compromise education quality and integrity. The historical roots of corruption, dating back to colonialism, have entrenched disparities and undermined the system's integrity. Inadequate funding, weak regulatory frameworks, and politicisation of education fuel corruption, while self-serving interests and prolonged strikes exacerbate the problem.

Given the far-reaching effects of corruption, including decline in academic standards, erosion of trust, and compromised integrity, it is imperative to develop effective solutions. To address these challenges, comprehensive reforms are necessary to restore integrity and ensure quality education. Building on this need for reform, several key strategies can be employed. First, robust regulatory mechanisms should be established to ensure transparency and accountability in governance and operations. Additionally, merit-based appointments, admissions, and grading systems can help minimise opportunities for bribery and nepotism. Furthermore, increasing funding for universities and improving lecturer remuneration can reduce the incentive for corrupt practices. Promoting a culture of integrity is also crucial, achievable through awareness programmes and workshops emphasizing ethical behavior, academic integrity, and moral values.

Ultimately, comprehensive reforms prioritizing quality education, accountability, and transparency are necessary to address corruption's historical and ongoing challenges. By implementing these measures, Nigerian universities can mitigate corruption's effects, promote academic excellence, and contribute to national development, restoring the education system's integrity and enhancing Nigerian graduates' global competitiveness.

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