



## Corruption and University Education in Nigeria, 2004-2022: The Underdevelopment of Nigerian University Educational System

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**Abstract:** To say that corruption has been midwived into almost every aspect and structure of Nigerian society particularly the university education system in the country might not be an exaggeration. This study examines the effect of corruption on university education in Nigeria. The study relies mostly on secondary data, even though the researchers also employed personal observation based on his experience as a university teacher. The data were collected from print and online publications. Content analysis was the method of analysis employed. The structural-functional theory was used in analysing the subject matter. The study revealed that corruption has negatively affected the quality of university education through symptoms like an increase in the administrative cost of running university education, mismanagement of available funds, infrastructural deficits, shortage of qualified academic staff, and ultimately poor quality of university education. The study recommends among other things that, The Federal Government of Nigeria and the state government should employ the service of an integrity-based non-governmental organisation to monitor the activities of the various public universities to reduce corrupt practices in procurement, promotion, award of contracts and in other academic activities in the country. The suggested solution will check the excesses of corrupt staff in the university education system.

**Key words:** Corruption, University Education, political system, Nigeria

### Introduction

The rationale behind the establishment of university education seems to be linked to the development of a nation-state. This is because university education is noted to have the capacity to enhance the social and economic development of a nation (Ayeni & Ezirim, 2023:227). Thus, the National Policy on Education posits that university education is expected to make an optimum contribution to national development through the intensification and diversification of its programs for the development of high-level human resources (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004). University education is expected to encourage and disseminate research results to both government and industries (Ololube, 2016). University education is the most advanced educational system that gives directives for career development (Ajape, Ogunode & Jegede 2020). University education is no doubt the final stage of formal education that makes an individual independent. University education focuses on teaching, researching and providing community services. University education in Nigeria

is grouped into tertiary education which is defined by Federal Republic of Nigeria via National Policy on Education in 2013 as education given after Post Basic Education in institutions. The goals of tertiary education are to contribute to national development through high-level manpower training; promote and encourage scholarship, forge and cement national unity; and promote national and international understanding and interaction (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013).

The development of University education in Nigeria is influenced by the culture and the level of corruption that operates in the country. This is so because different structures in society shape everything that happens in society, including the university education. Ahmodu and Sofoluwe (2018) maintained that corruption manifests in Nigeria mostly as; bribery, embezzlement, money laundering, financial misappropriation, falsification of academic records, non-remittance of tax or money collected, contract inflation and ghost worker syndrome. In 2018, the Socio-Economic Rights and Accountability Project claimed that there were allegations of corruption in several federal universities relating to the unfair allocation of grades; contract inflation; truncation of staff's salary on the payroll; employment of unqualified staff; certificate scandal; examination malpractice; sexual harassment; and issuance of results for expelled students to graduate (Punch 2020).

The high level of corruption in Nigerian society is likely to affect the university education system. Even though scholars have explained various ways in which corruption manifest itself, many study have yet to vividly investigate the effect of corruption on the university education system of Nigeria as this study is set to do. The above gap in literature informs the reason for the present study.

The objective of this study is to investigate the extent to which corruption has affected university education in Nigeria.

This study attempts to provide an answer to the research question that says, how has corruption affected the university education system in Nigeria?

The study employed an ex-post facto research method; hence secondary source of data was used in the paper. The data were collected from print and online publications. The study used content analysis as the method of analysis

### **Conceptual Clarification of Terms: Corruption and University Education**

Corruption has been conceptualized to mean different things to different people. For instance, Odoaba and Elijah (2007) viewed corruption as a deliberate and conscious deviation and violation of rules, norms, and cherished values of society by someone or group of persons occupying position(s) of trust because of an inordinate desire for power, wealth and recognition. Corroborating the above, Osipian (2012), saw corruption as the abuse of authority for material gain. The above submission is also shared by Ayeni and Nwaorgu (2018, p. 86) in this manner, corruption is "any behaviour that breaches the laydown rules and procedures in addition to favouring an individual or group over another". Related to the above line of thought is Agbo (2017) in the explanation of corruption in the education system, corruption is the abandonment of expected standards of behaviour by staff and students as well as other educational authorities in and outside our tertiary institutions to get undeserved advantages in the form of personal or material gains.

Garner (2013) however viewed corruption in two different ways: First, corruption means depravity, perversion, an impairment of integrity, and moral principle, especially the impairment of a public official's duties by bribery. Secondly, corruption is defined as the act of doing something with the intent to give some advantage inconsistent with official duty and the rights of others. Not only that, Corruption is an absurd or deviant disposition of people in institutions of higher learning which violates ethical standards (Chinyere, & Chukwuma, 2017). The prevalence of corruption in tertiary institutions is viewed to negate the core values of education at this level.

On the other hand, university education is a structure designed to provide the highest form of formal education for manpower training and development, under the family of tertiary institution.

### **Theoretical Framework of Analysis**

The study employed structural functional theory. The theory has its origin in sociology and anthropology and was adapted in political science by Gabriel Almond (1960), Coleman (1960) and others. The tenet of the theory is that every society is made up of a system with structures that perform various functions for the survival of the system. The political system is made up of input functions and output functions (Almond, 1960); hence the input functions of a political system are political socialisation (family, school, church et cetera) and recruitment (political party), interest articulation (Non-governmental organisations and business organisation), interest aggregation (legislative bodies, political executive, media communication, interest group, bureaucracies) and political communication. The two types of functions in the political system are accomplished by some structures for the continued existence of the system (Ayeni & Nwaorgu, 2018). Output functions are legislative, executive and judicial structures of government (Almond, 1960). The various structures in the political system, whether they are input functions or output functions are members of the society that have all been captured by the hydra-headed monster called corruption. Corruption seems to have penetrated the input and output functions of the political system in Nigeria. This informs the argument of Ayeni and Nwaorgu (2018) that the structure facilitates feedback mechanisms from output to input in a continuous process to ensure the survival of society. The occupants of the input and output functions of a political system dictate whether the university education will perform its functions of bringing about social and economic development or not.

In an article titled, corruption in Nigeria, a scholar explained that Africans in the public service seek to further their financial interest (Okonkwo, 2007). Our observation as researchers affirmed the above position. The love of self above the collective interest is on the increase; hence the people who occupy the various structures in the political system are not left out. When any structure in the political system fails to perform its functions with integrity, we can say that there is corruption in the system. In the words of Ayeni and Nwaorgu (2018, p. 88), “the inability of the Nigerian political system to discharge their functions with impartiality brings about corruption instead of development”.

### **Effects of Corruption on University Education in Nigeria: An Observation**

Every good or bad act has both positive or negative effects and consequences; hence corruption as a social phenomenon is not an exception. Various corrupt acts are being perpetrated by people in Nigeria, particularly in the Nigerian university education system. Agbo (2017) observed that corrupt acts include writing a good remark (confidential report) for a student (or a staff) who does not deserve it, contracts inflation and variation, lobbying to be posted to juicy departments, lobbying to be put in juicy committees, lobbying to be given more courses and larger classes, sycophancy, favouritism, bribery, absenteeism, truancy, making “gifts” to persons in authority to take some personal advantages, kickbacks, nepotism, et cetera. The foregoing acts of corruption have consequences on the society and the university education system of Nigeria in particular.

The university education system in Nigeria is plagued with problems of corruption. Hence the reason why corruption has been identified as one of the major problems affecting university education in Nigeria (Ahaotu & Ogunode, 2021). Consequently, Ogunode, Ohunene and Olatunde-Aiyedun (2022) listed; corrupt school administrators, weak monitoring and evaluation systems, weak trade unions, poor participation of university stakeholders, weak preventive systems and poor accountability systems as the factors responsible for the high rate of financial corruption in the Nigerian public universities. On causes of corruption in Nigerian universities, Agbo (2017) pointed out bureaucratic factors, undue emphasis on certificates, non-payment of staff salaries promptly, environmental factors, moral decadence, failure of leadership, materialism and deviation from ethical

principles and values. For this study, the following are the effects of corruption on the Nigerian university system:

#### *Increase in the administrative cost of running a university education*

The cost of running a university education in Nigeria seems to be on the increase daily. This view is sustained by Agbo (2017) who concluded that institutionalized educational corruption increases administrative costs as the institutions' goals are replaced with the personal benefits of some persons. Consequently, Suleiman (2005) had earlier asserted that corruption directs resources from the designed projects to white elephant projects that are heavily invoiced; while also increasing the costs of running the universities in addition to eroding the consistency of grants and funding. The above has made the normal functioning of university education in achieving social and economic development an uphill task.

#### *Mismanagement of available funds*

Mismanagement of funds is an offspring of corruption. Ogunode, Josiah, and Solomon (2021) attested to this when they observed that the high rate of corruption in the university system is reducing the volume of funds released to implement the university programme due to mismanagement of funds and embezzlement. Thus, Acho and Abuh, (2016) have earlier asserted that despite the inadequate funding of university education in Nigeria; the little funds appropriated are being mismanaged. According to Tiamiyu (2012), there is a lot of mismanagement of funds by educational boards and the amounts of money meant for higher education are mismanaged because university education in Nigeria has joined other public sector institutions in having a sizeable number of uncompleted or abandoned projects. The observation of the researchers of this study attested to the various abandoned projects in Nigeria's university education system courtesy of corruption. For instance, most managements of university education in Nigeria spend millions of Naira to purchase exotic vehicles for university officers at the detriment of basic classroom furniture and other uncompleted buildings. The above is corroborated by Asiyai, (2015) in this manner, when the authority mismanaged the money meant for the smooth running of the university, and did not put housing accommodation for staff in place, insecurity set in. This is a major problem with many Nigerian universities. Punch Newspaper (2020) aptly validated the above by saying that much of the little funds that go into the university education system are stolen. The mismanagement of available funds through corruption has the capacity of hindering university education as a structure that is supposed to bring about social and economic development to society.

#### *Infrastructural Deficits*

The personal observation of the researchers of this study in their scholarship at different Nigerian universities revealed that there is an infrastructural deficit in the university education system. Infrastructure that is supposed to help in the delivery of academic activities has failed to perform its role. Ogunode (2020) defined Infrastructure facilities as facilities aiding the delivery of academic and non-academic services in educational institutions. Infrastructural facilities include; libraries, laboratories, halls, offices, administrative blocks, hostels, road facilities, water, electricity, internet etc. The availability of infrastructural facilities in adequate quantities will support effective administration of educational institutions and the inadequacies will prevent effective administration of educational institutions. Ogunode, Abubakar and Ajape (2021); and Ogunode, Akin-Ibidiran and Ibidiran (2022) noted these infrastructure facilities are not adequate in many universities for both students and academic staff.

This has led to what Ebehikhalu and Dawam (2017) refer to as the abysmal state of teaching and learning infrastructure in Nigerian Universities which is a consequence of the financial imbroglio in the nation's ivory tower, due to the high level of corruption in the management of universities' resources. Suleiman (2005) notes that corruption, as an abuse of power has led to infrastructural deficit and failing education standards. Ogunode, Jegede, Adah, Audu and Ajape (2021) concluded that inadequate infrastructural facilities in many public universities in Nigeria have been linked to the high rate of corruption in the system. The money provided for infrastructural facilities is

diverted and looted, leaving the universities to suffer a shortage of facilities. The infrastructural deficit that is caused by corruption in the university education system has the capacity of hindering the university education as a structure that is supposed to bring about social and economic development to the society

#### *Shortage of Qualified Academic staff*

Shortage of qualified academic staff in some Nigerian universities might not be unconnected to corrupt practices in the recruitment processes. Ogunode et al (2021) supported this assertion by saying that corruption in the university administration leads to a shortage of qualified academic staff, as there are corrupt practices in the recruitment processes in Nigerian public universities where unqualified staff are recruited resulting in a shortage of professional lecturers in the system. The problems of ghost workers in many public universities have also led to a shortage of staff in the system. Dawood (2012) opines that Vice-chancellors who are in charge of their institutions' funds transfer these funds to their bank account for their personal use in addition to placing ghost workers on salaries. Ogunode and Paul (2021) identified corruption as another big reason for the shortage of professional teachers in Nigerian educational institutions. The funds budgeted and released for the employment of teachers are looted or diverted by some administrators in educational institutions. The school administrators institutionalized what is called ghost workers in their various schools and are collecting their salaries instead of employing the lecturers in the schools. The shortage of academic staff occasioned by corruption can hinder the university education as a structure that is supposed to bring about social and economic development in society

#### *Poor Quality of University Education*

There seems to be a correlation between corruption and poor quality of university education in Nigeria. Acho (2017) agrees that corruption is capable of sapping the development potential of not only the university education but the entire nation. Specifically, corruption in the education sector has the potential to eclipse any meaningful educational policies and programmes. Again, corruption stunts pertinent variables necessary for educational development, including multiplier effects, by rendering impotent the very structures, institutions and human resources that are designed to facilitate social and economic development. Mobegi (2015) argues that in any country where mismanagement of funds is experienced, the quality of education is bound to decline

Because of this Agbo (2017) maintained that corrupt practices in university education have far-reaching consequences as it jeopardizes the provision of qualitative education for the citizenry. This is because unqualified academic staff and quacks would find their way into the system; hence educated illiterates are daily being produced while our certificates are received with contempt by the international community. The poor quality of university education caused by corruption can hinder the university education as a structure that is supposed to bring about social and economic development in the society

#### *Negative Image*

Corruption has an image symbol, just as integrity has an image. Asiyai, (2015) revealed that corruption in public universities has resulted in a poor image of Nigeria on the international scene. Corruption practices have done more harm to the educational institutions, as corruption within the university education has created a bad image for the Nigerian educational institutions. It is also responsible for the poor quality of education because funds meant for the development of facilities that ought to improve the quality of education have been diverted (Ogunode & Isaac, 2021). Since Nigerian institutional leaders mismanage their funds, the quality of higher education is bound to deteriorate. The mismanagement of available funds through corruption can hinder the university education as a structure that is supposed to bring about social and economic development in the society

#### **Conclusion**

The study has been able to examine corruption and university education in Nigeria from 2004 to 2022. Corruption is the bane of underdevelopment in the educational sector in Nigeria. Corruption increases the administrative cost of maintaining university education, brings about infrastructural deficit and ultimately results in poor quality of university education in Nigeria. Corruption is any form of abuse that violates standard and normal practices; hence it has hindered the social and economic development of university education in Nigeria. The paper revealed that the corruption in the university education system in Nigeria is responsible for the underdevelopment of the country.

### Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were suggested: The Federal Government of Nigeria and the state government should employ the service of an integrity-based non-governmental organisation to monitor the activities of the various public universities to reduce corrupt practices in procurement, promotion, award of contracts and in other academic activities in the country. The suggested solution will check the excesses of corrupt staff in the university education system.

The Federal Government of Nigeria and the state government should ensure that only lecturers with integrity and high moral standards are employed as university lecturers. The suggested solution will enhance the image of the university education and improve the quality of the university education system.

The Federal Government of Nigeria and the state government should ensure that University lecturers are the highest-paid public servants at both the state and the federal level. The suggested solution will reduce financial corruption and enhance the quality of university education in Nigeria.

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