STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF CORRUPT PRACTICES, IMPACT ON LEARNING AND IMPLICATIONS FOR UNIVERSITY GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA

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Abstract: *Corruption is a phenomenon that has assumed divers forms and have pervaded deeply into the fabric of our society. The consequences are manifest in nearly all our social systems, the political, social, economic and educational. This paper therefore undertook an exploratory study that focused on students' perception of corrupt practices, impact on learning and implications for University governance in Nigeria. The sampled was taken from a cross-section of students, in public universities across the six geo-political zones of Nigeria. Data was collected through an online survey, that elicited responses from students on the nature of corrupt practices prevalent in their Universities, the impact it has on students' learning outcomes and their likely remedies to inform the course of University governance. The results highlight specific ways to circumvent and possibly eliminate corrupt practices in the Nigerian Universities, and improve their management, performance and efficiency.*

[100]

Keywords: Corrupt Practices, Perception, Students, University Governance.

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Introduction

The university system in the past decade, has been witnessing an obnoxious infiltration of unwholesome practices in its activities and programmes. These practices are corrupt, and show up in different forms and dimensions, impacting negatively on students' learning outcome and the collective moral behaviour of the university community and society at large. Carr (2011) noted that corruption as a phenomenon had always existed, but in recent years the awareness and practice of it has escalated even internationally. Nnodum (2008) asserts that the issues of corruption and people's involvement in the practice have become an endemic and cancerous menace, plaguing and interfering with all facets of development and levels of human existence in Nigeria. He also observed that universities which are supposed to be citadels of learning and hallmark of sound character and integrity have become centres of brooding this "psychosocial monster" called corruption and producing high level dishonest and corrupt graduates.

Corruption as a term has been viewed differently by different people, however, Ruzindana (1999) sees corruption as a problem of routine deviation from established standards and norms of public officials and parties they interact with. Lawal (2006) views it as practices that are also human behaviours or acts that deviate from the norms and values of the society and has the tendency to break certain moral or social codes and administrative rules and procedures. Egwaikhide (2009) avers that the phenomenon called corruption manifests in Nigeria in various forms such as institutional corruption, political corruption, bureaucratic corruption, nepotism, sex for favour and other unwholesome activities that have become obstructive to the economic growth and development of the nation. This study observes that corruption is an anomaly, a deviation from and one of the numerous antisocial behaviours that has pervaded most sectors of the economy and education inclusive.

The study was embarked on, to investigate perception of corrupt practices prevalent in public universities across Nigeria, their impact on students' learning outcome and implications for university governance. This study is anchored on Luo (2005) Institutional model of corruption, which explains reasons for institutional corruption. The theory posits that the environment of an institution determines the extent to which corruption occurs. He highlighted three cardinal attributes that should not be lacking in the environment for corruption to thrive. These are transparency, fairness and complexity. The theory maintains that where there is lowering or partial implementation of rules, lack of openness and fair play on the side of the executives and ambiguity or complexity on institutional rules, people begin to involve themselves in corrupt practices.

This theory has tremendous implications for this study, because it helps one to explain why corrupt thrives. In such a transparent work setting, the tendency to engage in corrupt practices such as examination malpractice, sale of examination grades, forceful purchase of textbooks, nepotism, bribery for admission and employment among others, may not be there and if present may be rarely visible.

The infiltration of corrupt practices into the university system in Nigeria is not a good indicator, in terms of sustainability of university education. A report of investigation by Socio-Economic Rights and Accountability Project (SERAP) on corruption in Federal universities in Nigeria, revealed various forms of corrupt practices and allegations that exist which include unfair allocation of grades, contract inflation, truncation of staff salary on pay roll, employment of unqualified staff, examination malpractice, sexual harassment, sales of university certificates to undeserving persons, issuance of results to expelled students to graduate. These corrupt practices highlighted above seem to exist in similar forms in our universities (Deliversky 2017; Transparency International and Herzegorina, 2018). Idoniboye-obu (2014) carried out a similar study

on the prevalence, structures and patterns of corruption in higher education in Nigeria, using focus group discussion to elicit responses from undergraduate students. The results showed similar forms and prevalence in the eight universities under study. Further probe revealed that university administration are not equipped to fight corruption, but rather drive the process. This implies that the blatant impunity with which corruption is practiced can weaken academics, student quality and destroy governance of universities. To ignore corruption in the university system is to pose a serious question for university governance and education of the youths in Nigeria. The National policy on Education (FRN, 2014) specified seven goals of tertiary education which are meant to be pursued through specified programmes and routines such as teaching, research and development, virile staff development progammes, students' industrial work experience scheme (SIWES), maintenance of minimum educational standards, inter-institutional cooperation among others. However in terms of governance, the policy specified that the internal organization and administration of each institution shall have its responsibility. This implies that each university in Nigeria is self-governing and its unique leadership can be viewed to be a reflection of the quality of the outcome of its programmes and products.

The consequences of corruption are gloomy. They include many psychosocial challenges [102] such as depression, anxiety, fear, feeling of helplessness, suicidal ideation, social maladjustment of both staff and students, cultism, poverty, lawlessness, labour strike, student strike, unemployment, criminality, kidnapping, militancy, poor academic performance, low ranking of universities, students unable to defend their degree after graduation and so on (Dimkpa, 2018; Ocheyenor, 2016).

According to Majasan (1998) quality education is value loaded arguing that quality education should produce disciplined behavior, hard work, improved cultural heritage and mutual respect within and outside the school community. This implies that students' learning outcome in a corrupt laden university environment is bereft of the above characteristics. As such, this ridicules university governance because university education in its function remains an instrument for national development (Agbe and Bua, 2014).

To avert this impending calamity on the society, government efforts have been through many institutional reforms and supervision by the National University Commission (NUC), funding the system by the Tertiary Education Tax Fund (TETFUND) and Education Trust Fund (ETF) to reduce some of the charges on students. Some of the reforms since 1999 include; the autonomy act, which makes universities self-governing, government efforts towards synchronized university calendar, slight improvement in the remuneration of academics and non- academic staff all should have helped to reduce extortion, and other financial crimes, yet corrupt practices are evident in every activity and programme of the university. Literature reviewed shows that corrupt practices are prevalent in the University learning environment.

Corrupt practices and impact on students' learning outcome and future governance. Heynerman, Anderson and Noralyeva (2007) investigated the relationship between corruption and education outcomes in 50 countries. The investigation revealed that corruption is negatively associated with educational outcomes. Rumyantseva (2005) also asserts that if students realize that corruption is acceptable and even a way of life, they may be more inclined to carry this behaviour to all aspects of life. Corruption is anti-developmental to the extent that funds meant for development purpose are embezzled. (Kayoede, 2013).

The study by Deliversky (2017) which determined the corrupt practices perceived to be pervasive in academic institutions in Ghana recommends ways that these practices could be eliminated, by an enactment and enforcement of codes of conduct in the institution to ensure high

ethical standards. Torulagha (2018) & Okoye (2013) in agreement, strongly stresses the need to wedge war against corruption in the Nigerian society from the education sector. His argument is that education and society are intricately interwoven and exert influence on each other.

Research questions:

To investigate perception of corrupt practices, impact on learning and implications for university governance in Nigeria, the following research questions were formulated to guide the study.

1. What practices do you perceive as corruption that are prevalent in your university?
2. In what ways do you think these practices impact students' learning outcome?
3. What are the likely remedies to inform the course of university governance?

Methodology

The study adopted a non-probability sampling procedure, where accidental sampling technique was utilized. This enabled the researchers to make use of any unit of the population at hand. Students of the public universities across the six geopolitical zones constituted the population of the study. Stratified and convenience sampling techniques were employed to sample the respondents. The universities and faculties represented the strata. A total of 99 respondents (graduate and undergraduate students) filled the questionnaire from 18 universities and degree awarding institutions in Nigeria. Below on figure 1 is a bar chart showing the distribution of the [103] respondents across the geo- political zones and table 1 showing distribution of respondents by course of study across institutions.

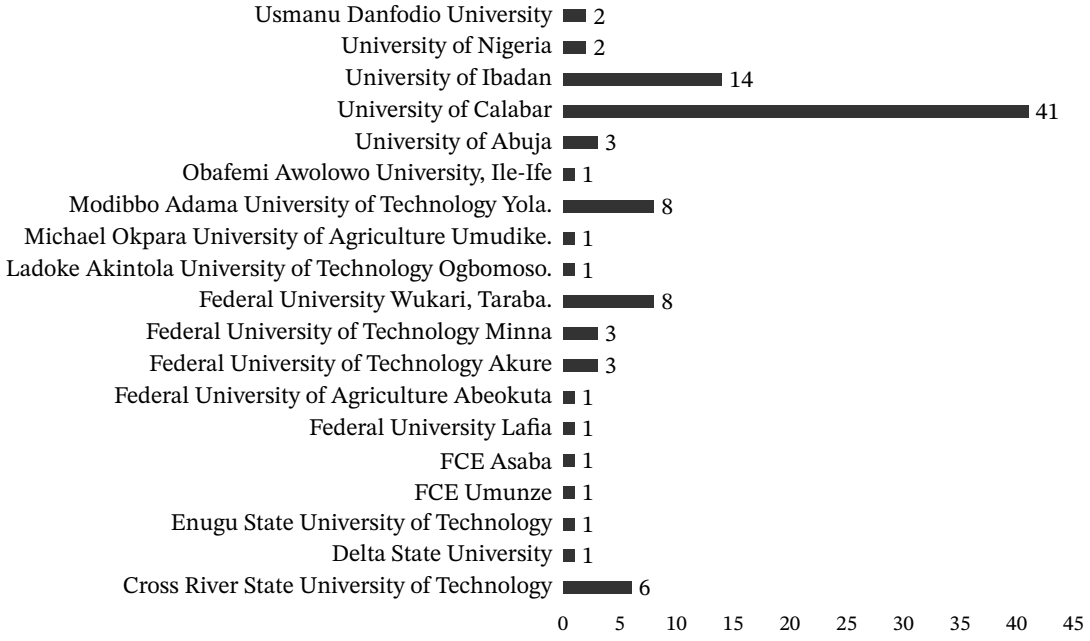


Figure 1: Bar chart distribution of respondents across institutions.

[104]

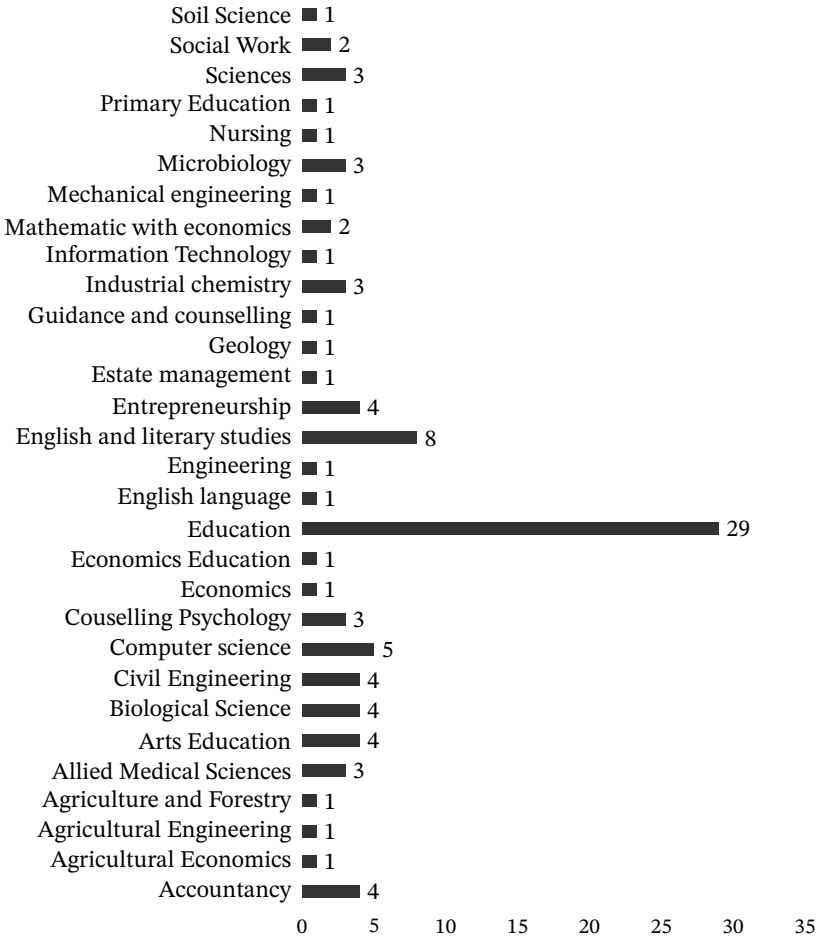


Figure 2: Distribution of respondents by course of study across institutions

Instrumentation:

The questionnaire was the major instrument used for data collection from both online respondents and by direct administration. It was essentially convenient considering the nature of the data being collected. The questionnaire was designed by the researchers, and validated through peer review and uploaded online using surveymonkey.com. A link to filling the questionnaire was generated and shared across different social media platforms and groups (Facebook and WhatsApp) of students of respective universities and degree awarding institutions across the six geopolitical zones of Nigeria. This made it possible to sample undergraduate and graduate students in universities across the geopolitical zones in Nigeria to express their views on the issues under investigation. The research instrument considered four sections which elicited information on demographic data, checklist on corrupt practices prevalent in the University Learning Environment, corrupt practices and impact on students learning outcome and university governance and ways of eliminating or reducing corrupt practices in the university learning environment. Due to the nature of the method used for data collection, attrition was recorded. Data collated were analyzed using frequency count and percentages.

Results

[105]

Research question 1:

What practices do you perceive as corrupt that are prevalent in your university? The result on figure 3 reveals practices perceived as corruption by university students under study.

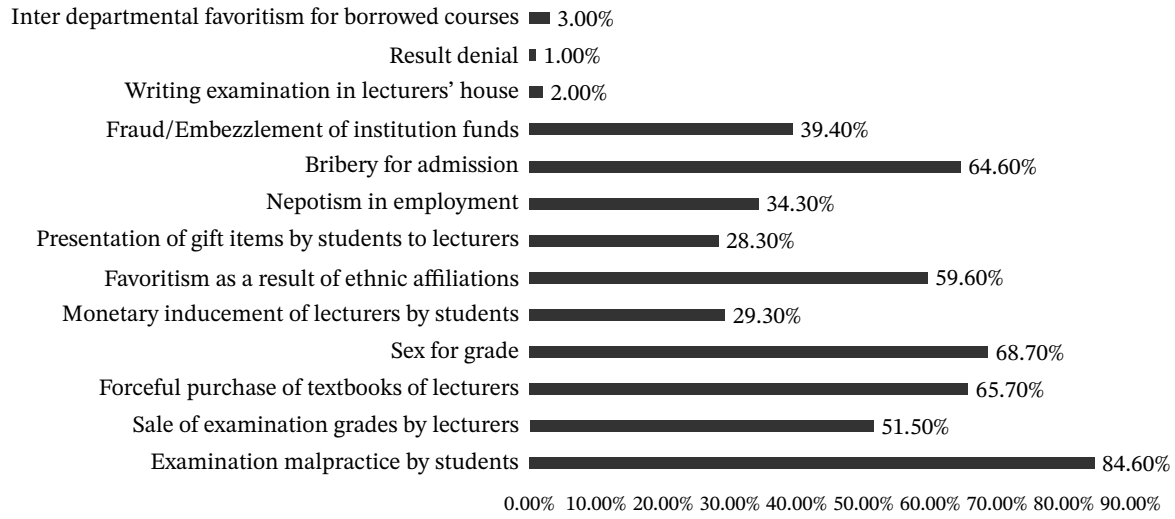
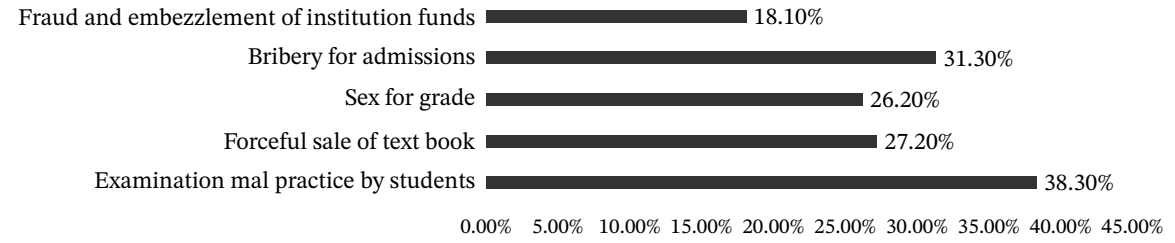


Figure 3: Practices perceived as corruption by university students

The most common of these are examination malpractice by students (84.6%), sex for grade (67.8%), forceful purchase of textbooks of lecturers (65.7%), bribery for admission (64.6%) and favouritism as a result of ethnic affiliation (59.6%). Other forms of corruption reported by a fewer number of respondents; include fraud/embezzlement of Institution funds (39.4%), nepotism in employment (34.3%) and monetary inducement of lecturers by students (29.3%) among several others.

Respondents were further asked to identify the five most corrupt practices in descending order of magnitude. The result is highlighted in the figure 4 below. The most significant of these is examination malpractice by students, followed by forceful sale of textbooks by lecturers, sex for grades, fraudulent admission procedure and embezzlement of institutional funds



[106]

Figure 4: Prevalence of five most corrupt practices identified by students

Research question 2:

In what ways do you think these practices impact students' learning outcome? Figure 5 highlights the effect of corrupt practices on students' learning outcome.

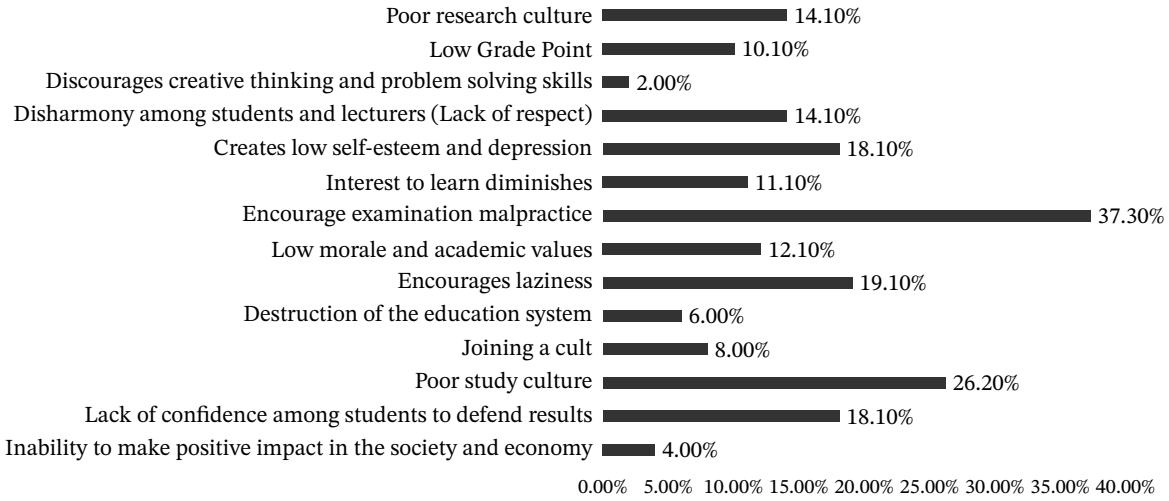


Figure 5: Corrupt practices on students' learning outcome.

Corruption outcome on learning is defined by a set of closely related factors ranging from an increased tendency to indulge in exam malpractices (37.3%), to poor study culture (26.2%), laziness among students (19.1%), followed by lack of confidence by students to defend results (18.1%), low self-esteem among students(18.1%) and disharmony among students and lecturers (14.1%), poor research culture (14.1%). Other outcome to learning informed by corrupt practices worthy of consideration includes low morale and academic values (12.1%), Interest to learn diminishes (11.1%) and low grade point (10.1%). [107]

Research Question 3:

What are the likely remedies to inform the course of university governance?

Figure 6 and table 1 reveal suggested ways of eliminating to the barest minimum corrupt practices in various institutions under study by those most affected who are the students.

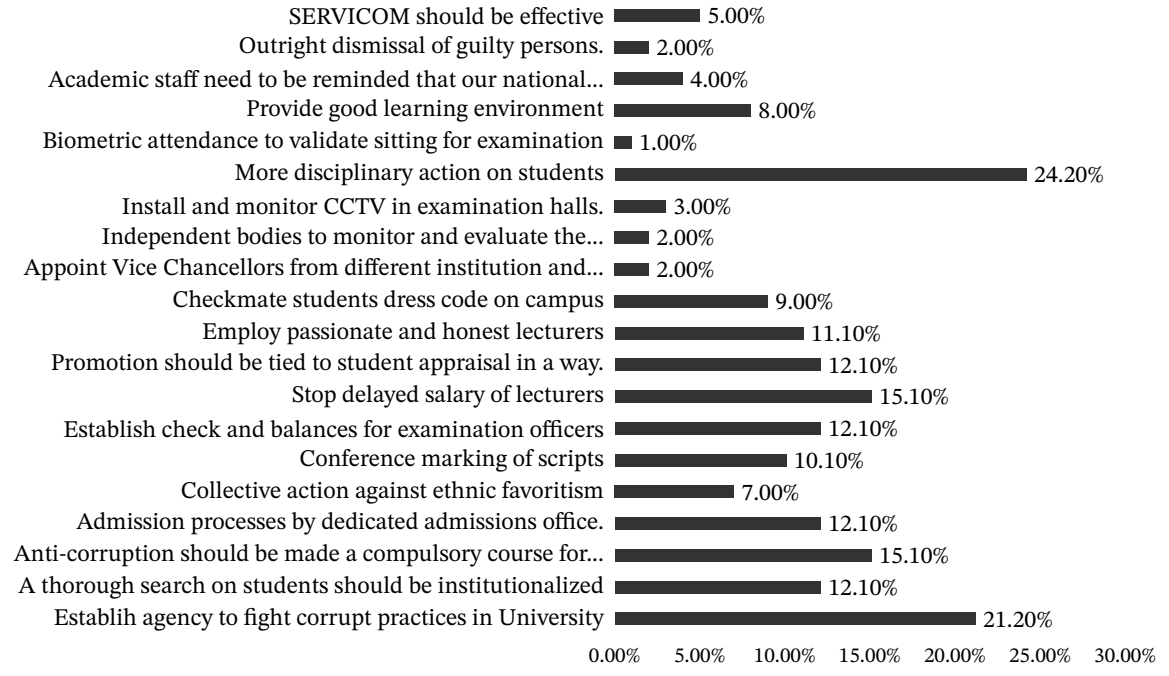


Figure 6: suggested ways of eliminating corrupt practices in various institution

Students have spoken and it is very explicit. They have made very interesting suggestions on the best perceived ways to eliminate corrupt practices, twenty possible options were provided to address corruption. The most significant are Students' Disciplinary committee should be more serious about sanction for defaulters (24.2%), dedicated government agency with oversight function on corrupt practices in University should be established (21.2%), Anti-corruption should be made a compulsory course for all (15.1%), and stop delayed salary of lecturers (15.1%).

[108]

Table 1. Suggestions on ways of eliminating corrupt practices in various institutions

S/N	Suggestion for eliminating corrupt practices	Frequency	Percentages
1	Establish government agency to fight corrupt practices in the University.	21	21.2%
2	A thorough search on students should be institutionalized	12	12.1%
3	Anti-corruption should be made a compulsory course for all.	15	15.1%
4	Admission processes should be taken care by dedicated admissions office.	12	12.1%
5	Collective action against ethnic favoritism	7	7.0%
6	Conference marking of scripts	10	10.1%
7	Establish check and balances for examination officers	12	12.1%
8	Stop delayed salary of lecturers	15	15.1%
9	Promotion should be tied to student appraisal in a way.	12	12.1%
10	Employ passionate and honest lecturers	11	11.1%
11	Checkmate students dress code on campus	9	9.0%
12	Appoint Vice Chancellors from different institution and ethnic group	2	2.0%
13	Independent bodies should be set up to monitor and evaluate the academic processes in the University	2	2.0%
14	Install and monitor CCTV in examination halls	3	3.0%
15	More disciplinary action on students.	24	24.2%
16	Biometric attendance to validate sitting for examination.	1	1.0%
17	Provide good learning environment	8	8.0%
18	Academic staff need to be reminded that our national development lies in education	4	4.0%
19	Outright dismissal of guilty persons.	2	2.0%
20	SERVICOM should be more effective	5	5.0%

Discussion of findings:

Although the most prevalent forms of corruption can be attributed to students through examination malpractice, corruption in the university is largely driven by the attitude of the teaching staff and management of the universities. This is because four out of the five most prevalent forms of corruption in the universities are attributed to the lecturers and the administration through forceful sale of textbooks, sex for grade, bribery for admission and embezzlement of institutional funds. This result confirms Luo's Institutional model of corruption, which posits that the environment of an institution predicated on transparency, fairness and complexity determines the extent to which corruption thrives. If admission can be gotten by bribery and examination grades

by sex, it only indicates that admission and examination processes are neither transparent nor fair. Corruption not only affects the students, but undermines their capacity to learn and have even demeaned their self- worth and personality. These views by students on the ways to stamp out corruption should be taken seriously as they are major stake holders.

The result of the study also agrees with Idoniboye-obu's findings on the prevalence and pat- [109]
terns of corruption in higher education. He concludes that universities are not ready to fight corruption, rather they facilitate the process.

Recommendations:

Based on the findings of this study, the following are recommended.

To curb examination malpractice which was found to be the most prevalent in this study, the university administration should set up a monitoring system for checks on violation of ethical principles in the following areas:

1. i. Timely commencement of lectures at the beginning of the semester, and monitoring the number of appearances a lecturer makes in class through a log book will facilitate students to learn and reduce the urge to sort, and indulge in other sharp practices to pass examination. ii. Set up a grievance and feedback mechanism such as suggestion boxes, and email where students can air their views in the areas of proficiency in lecture delivery, mastery of the subject matter, class attendance, moral and character related issues.
2. Continuous ethical re-orientation via moral persuasion, and periodic training and re-training of lecturers and other relevant administrative staff on ethics, should be organized by the university.

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