

UNETHICAL PRACTICES IN THE NIGERIA'S UNIVERSITY SYSTEM: PATTERN, CAUSES AND SOLUTIONS

By

**DR. SADIQ ISAH RADDA¹
SOCIOLOGY DEPARTMENT
BAYERO UNIVERSITY, KANO
iraddasadiq@yahoo.com**

ABSTRACT

In the world over, unethical conducts are threatening the human race by undermining the activities of organizations both public and private. Universities in Nigeria are not spared of unethical practices that appear to be threatening their mission and vision of providing quality education for individual and national development. This paper posits that criminologists can no longer neglect the unethical conducts that occur in Universities due to the remote and immediate dangers it portends to the youth and the nation at large. It is argued in this paper that although the unethical practices are numerous, there are variations with respect to the regions of the country, departments within a University and individual academics in the Universities. In other words a sweeping generalization on all the universities and its staff is not tenable. The paper argues that staff (both academic and non-academic) commits unethical practices for, among other reasons, sexual gratification from girls, money and other items of value from parents, guardians, students, etc. As a result of the portent dangers that the unethical practices will cause Nigeria the paper suggest strategies for combating the menace that include adequate oversight functions in the University processes, stiff punishment for offenders, sensitization of the general public to be wary of dubious characters in the Universities, raising the awareness of the students to shun cutting corners in place of hard-work, adequate moral instruction, vigorous fight against corruption in the country, etc.

INTRODUCTION

There is no profession without a code of ethics and the teaching profession is no exception. These professional etiquettes tell the practitioners the dos and the don'ts of the profession; and what is professionally acceptable or unacceptable depends on the profession. Students are the raw materials and main subject-matter of those who teach at various levels. Hence, the students, their parents, guardians and relations are the primary

¹ Being a paper presented at the 9th Annual BEN-AFRICA Conference held on 3 - 5 August 2009 Accra, Ghana by Dr. Sadiq Isah Radda a Senior Lecturer with the Department of Sociology, Bayero University, Kano. His area of specialization is Criminology with specific interest in Human Rights, Criminal Justice Agencies, Corporate Crimes/Scandals and youth delinquent behaviors

victims of teachers' professional misconduct while they are trying to get education in the University. In sum, the teaching code of ethics requires teachers not to take advantage of students' parents, guardians and relations while dealing with them. Furthermore, teachers are expected to be fair, objective, helpful and resourceful to their students. Importantly, teachers are supposed to serve as role models to their students in words and actions which will assist in moulding the character content of the student in the learning process (Adaralegbe, 1981).

According to Mead (1999) when we look at the world we are today realistically and become aware of what the actual problems of learning are, our conception of education change radically. The role of education in human development, emancipation, liberation and empowerment is inestimable and can never be over-emphasized. Education is obtained through schooling systems that are peculiar to nations. In Nigeria, educational levels include primary, secondary and tertiary levels. At the tertiary levels, University is the apex of learning. It is uncommon for criminologist to focus their attentions on the malpractices that take place in the academic world, i.e, the University which is an unintentional oversight.

This paper examines the malpractices that are becoming endemic in the university believing that if these malpractices are not checkmated, the products of the universities are likely to see different forms of malpractice, unethical behaviours and criminal conducts as normal and acceptable while their labour is engaged in the larger society. The paper is divided into six sections. The first section discusses the purposes and role of a

University while the second section looks at the patterns of unethical practices in the Universities. The third section looks at the origin of crises in the Nigerian Universities, the fourth section examines the motivation for the unethical practices and the fifth section dwells on the solutions to the problems highlighted. The sixth section concludes the paper.

THE PURPOSES AND ROLE OF A UNIVERSITY

The central purpose a University in any given society is to offer an atmosphere for learning for the benefit of the learner, the society and humanity in general. Hence, a University must strive to identify itself with the local as well as the international needs of society. The idea of a University according to Flexner (1930) is not outside, but inside the general social fabric of a given area. Accordingly, it is not something apart, something historic, something that yields as a little as possible to forces and influences that are more or less new. It is on the contrary an expression of age, as well as an influence operating upon both the present and the future.

According to Audu (1980) university has three major functions: it is meant to impart manpower skills; it is involved in the pursuit of knowledge through organized research; and it engages in contributing to national and international dialogue and criticism. The first function of teaching is the most obvious university function and the one around which the other elements of university organization and work involve. University education is where the highest skills of a community are imparted (Jega, et al, 2004; Enesi, 1999).

The second function is the research function despite the fact that research goes on in other institutions besides universities. However, Universities offer special opportunities for many forms of research. Not only does their teaching function and the dialogue it engenders between teachers and students nourish research, it suggests research emphasis and structures which are related to its communication to others.

There is the third function which is the dialogue and criticism which in the long run is as important as the first two, especially in the developing countries. However, this aspect has not always received as much attention as it deserves. The university employs skilled person's, offers them security of tenure and removes them from the market-place. In return a country can expect social criticism of a constructive kind from such persons.

Accordingly, the university was founded to pay due respect to human values and to be run "on those beliefs, values and traditions that the society holds most sacred;" the founders of Universities believed that it should be 'a symbol of the spirit of its community, the guardian of its morals and formulator of its hope.'" Additionally, it should monitor the inevitable changes that come with time and in assimilating and disseminating universal truths; and it should "safe guard these essential values and nuances that give the society its identity" (Audu, 1980:7, Kerr, 2003). In sketching the functions of a university one cannot refuse to recognize that there are times when these functions are not performed as expected.

PATTERNS OF MALPRACTICE IN THE UNIVERSITIES

Unethical conducts in the Universities are becoming disturbing such that non-staff of the University are taking advantage of the ugly trend because of the realization that these

things are possible. For example, Sanni Osaghe impersonates as a lecturer in the University of Lagos and collects huge sums of money in collaboration with academic staff, WAEC officials, JAMB officials, workers in academic office, registry, etc to get admission, get mobilized for NYSC or alter exam scores. It is worth noting that there is variation according to regions in Nigeria and according to Departments within a University. In other words, the unethical conducts appear to be more endemic in Southern Universities compared to those from Northern Nigeria. In general terms, unethical conducts appear to be more associated with social and management science courses even though no discipline has complete immunity.

Furthermore, it is worth noting that non-academic staff engages in one malpractice or the other. For example, there were cases of non-academic staff collecting money from students and local contractors, accepting sexual favours from girls, etc in order to perpetrate one malpractice or the other. The malpractice they get involved in include stealing letter-headed papers for students for forgery, changing results, Grade Point Average (GPA) or Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) for students, faking certificates, 'graduating' non-graduated students and posting them for the National Youth Service Corps, etc. Additionally, students are involved in malpractice in the form of involvement in examinations malpractice, offering bribes to staff (both academic and non-academic) to get undue advantage, luring lecturers with sex and material items to get undue advantage in the University. However, the malpractices by non-academic staff and students would not gain ground if the academic staff can be ethical, principled, academically firm and above board.

This section of the presentation analyzes the malpractices usually committed by academics in the performance of their professional duties. The section examines the malpractices by chronologically analyzing the processes that obtain in the university setting. The stages include malpractice at the point of admission; malpractice at the point of level co-ordination; malpractice during examinations; malpractice in results verification; malpractice during marking; and malpractice during results compilation; These will be briefly explained below:

Malpractice at the Point of Admission

There is evidence suggesting that some lecturers take undue advantage of the admission season to get money, other material favours and sexual gratification from unsuspecting applicants and their parents in the case of money and other material favours, and sexual satisfaction from female applicants. In fact, there are some lecturers that used to purchase and hoard admission forms in order to profiteer in times of scarcity. There are other lecturers who personally collect admission letters of successful applicants to deliver same to the applicants' parents or to the applicants themselves to create the notion that were it not for their efforts, things would have been different. This kind of needless gesture opens a life-line for the material and sexual appetite of the opportunistic lecturer.

Malpractice at the Point of Level Co-ordination

It can be said that Level Coordinators wield enormous powers emanating from the near-absolute and exclusive knowledge they have about the problems of their students. It is practically impossible (or extremely difficult) to track down every bit of dealing that Level Coordinators undertake regarding students. Although Level Coordinators may not use their positions to expressly harm a student, they can take advantage of students with

problems that are willing to play the dirty game with them. Here Level Coordinators can criminally alter students' record in exchange for money, materials, sexual intercourse or due to certain parochial considerations.

Malpractice During Examinations

There are certain malpractices perpetrated by lecturers during examinations for the usual reasons: money; materials; sexual intercourse; or due to certain parochial considerations. These nefarious practices take the form connivance with the lecturer and a bright student to sit for the examinations on behalf of the other student being used and favoured. Apart from being criminal, this is the height of immorality and degeneration by an academic staff. It is a sad practice akin to a military/police man renting guns to armed robbers or a medical doctor poisoning his/her patient. This practice epitomizes professional collapse and decay. There are instances where lecturers give (especially female students) their examinations to write at home or at any convenient place long after the examination of the course is over.

Malpractice in Results Verification

There are many reasons why students want to verify their results. Students may be reported absent for a course they sat for, there could be missing scripts, there could be inaccurate recording of Continuous Assessment (C.A) or exam score, and many other human and non-human errors. Available evidence indicate that some lecturers deliberately ask the students they want to favour not to sit for their examinations, not to handover their scripts after the examinations, to ensure that their names are on the examinations attendance list, etc. If a student succeeds in doing any of these, a case for results verification is established. It is here that the lecturer gives the student whatever

score he wishes for the usual reasons: money; materials; sexual intercourse; or due to certain parochial considerations.

Malpractice During Marking

During marking, lecturers are left with their Creator, conscience and characters. This is more pronounced in courses that are not externally moderated where the lecturer wield enormously exclusive power and control in which he can make and mar as it pleases him. Even moderated courses hardly get properly scrutinized due to general systemic debilitation and failure in the education sector. Therefore, if a lecturer builds his interest (negative or positive) into the marking process it hardly fails. There are no reliable and transparent methods of checks and balances regarding fair and objective marking of students' scripts.

Malpractice During Results Compilation

Results compilation is a very difficult undertaking that is time-consuming, energy sapping and a source of frustration. It is usually a bad season! Some lecturers take advantage of the heat of the moment and the untidy situation to perpetrate malpractice in the form of altering students' scores and even cooking figures. It may also involve gross malpractice during CGPA Computation and Degree Classification to the advantage of favoured students. Since scrutiny at Departmental level is difficult and with pressure from Faculties, SBC, Senate, NYSC Secretariat and the students themselves, whatever personal interest is built by a lecturer may not be detected. Malpractices are perpetrated at this level for the usual reasons: money; materials; sexual intercourse; or due to certain parochial considerations.

ORIGIN OF CRISES IN THE NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES

There is the need to briefly examine the genesis of the crisis in our Universities that will give us an opportunity to understand the problem that affects the university. Many scholars had written on the crises in the Nigerian Universities (Ezera 1960 (as cited in Onwuejeogwu, 1991) Ajuluchukwu 1962 (as cited in Onwuejeogwu, 1991), Aluede, 1995; Babatope, 1974; Ojo, 1995). In sum, the crises took the form of violent demonstration by students' body called NANS. Also, there were disruptions caused by ASUU in 1992 for embarking on a nation-wide strike and NASU had their strike requesting for improved condition of service. Since then, the system had been witnessing one crises or the other caused by government failure to meet staff expectations, students' demands and academic staff needs. It should be noted that within these interval of strikes, academic activities were rendered inactive and staff expectations materially and otherwise increased.

The failure of government to address such problems in the University as shortage of books and other teaching aids, poor infrastructure that make university atmosphere unattractive, intolerable congestion and shortage of such facilities as lecture theatre, libraries, laboratories, students' hostels, staff housing and offices space and recreational facilities for both staff and the students further frustrated academic staff and students thereby lowering their morale and commitment, (News watch, September 21, 1992). All of these endemic problems are exacerbated by wanton corruption, selfishness and greed by the political class. While politicians' pay package is unusually palatable, academic staff are paid pittance that makes some of them engage in unethical conducts

MOTVATION FOR UNETHICAL PRACTICES

In general terms it can be concluded and asserted that these malpractices (and many more unreported ones) are motivated by three major reasons: search for sexual intercourse by

male academics in exchange for favours; search for monetary/economic gains in exchange for favours; and influence of primordial/parochial variables in conducting official business.

Search for Sexual Intercourse by Male Academics in Exchange for Favours

This is where male academics exclusively dominate. Available evidence indicates that some lecturers solicit sexual favours from female students to gain diverse favours. The favours include (though not limited to) high grades, high CGPA, better class of degree, leaking questions prior to examinations, employing the services of better students to write examinations for female students, making arrangement for the female students to write the examinations at convenient times and places, allocating marks to female students even without writing examinations, etc. These kinds of girls and lecturers can be considered willing parties and partners in ‘progress.’

However, there is a sad dimension to the sexualization of examination and other academic undertakings. This is where an intelligent and hardworking female student gets hooked by the lustful appetite a lecturer. Even though she can read and pass a particular course, the lecturer in question frustrates and fails her in his course (s) until she offers herself for sex. This, without doubt, is the most cruel, callous, criminal and immoral component of all the malpractices known to the academic world. Classically speaking, it is this kind of attitude towards the female students that constitute sexual harassment with all its ugliness.

Search for Monetary/Economic Gains in Exchange for Favours

Findings show that some lecturers have formed the habit of commercializing exam grades and project supervision. In this regard, a student simply pays money and gets a grade for a course and project without working for it. Related to this are lecturers that collect items of value in exchange for academic favours. The items of value include (though not limited to) textile materials (both males and females), food items (perishable and non-perishable), exotic gifts like wrist-watches, perfume, leather bags, gold and other jewelry, food stuff like eggs, palm oil, groundnut oil, rice, yams, etc. Some Muslim academic staff collect return air-tickets to travel for the Muslim Holy Pilgrimage (*Hajj*) or the Lesser Holy Pilgrimage (*Umrah*!!) In tune with the spirit of reciprocity, students who give these items (just like female students who give part of their bodies) expect something in return; and the expectations border on getting undue advantage in relation to the course (s) in question.

The Influence of Primordial/Parochial Variables in Conducting Official Business

It is unfortunate that some lecturers have succumbed to primordial/parochial sentiments in dealing with some of the students. The primordial/parochial sentiments take the form of giving some students undue advantage because of blood/kinship ties, ties based on tribal, religious and regional consideration and ties emanating from sharing the same state of origin or coming from the same community; another reason is the class-mate syndrome. There is ample evidence to show that some lecturers engage in one malpractice or the other due, largely, to one or a combination of these primordial/parochial sentiments. Like in all other cases, the malpractice here involves giving one student unfair (and sometimes criminal) advantage over others.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To stem the tide of the nefarious activities of some lecturers the recommendations below are worthy of consideration. Two broad approaches are required to save the academic world from moral extinction and oblivion.

- 1. Proactive Approach:** The lecturers involved in one malpractice or the other in Nigeria's Universities though quite few are known nearly to everybody because their activities have become open secret. Thus, it will be useful if they can be approached by a Committee of Elders (CE) to quietly meet and discuss with them with hard evidence so that they are advised to stop the bad habit immediately. This proposed Committee of Elders (CE) should be tasked with the responsibility of developing an acceptable and workable methodology of sourcing reliable information concerning unethical practices in the academic world with which it can constantly use to draw the attention of wrong-doers.

Also, there is a need for a Surveillance & Investigation Committee (SIC) whose duties will be receiving and verifying allegations of unethical practice on any lecturer by a student, parent, organization or aired in the media. The findings of this Committee should be forwarded to the Committee of Elders (CE) for action. Additionally, there is a need for a Student-lecturers Liaison Committee (SLC) whose job will be to urgently convene a meeting in the event of any rumour on malpractice by lecturers. The outcome of their meeting should assist Surveillance & Investigation Committee (SIC) to do its work after which the proposed Committee of Elders (CE) swings into action. Furthermore, The University system needs a Malpractice and Media Relations Committee (MMRC) whose duty will be to work with the media outfits in exposing specific wrong-doers based on reliable evidence and facts. This is to halt the collective punishment and castigation meted out to academics and the system as a whole.

2. Reactive Approach: Swift reaction to lecturers' unethical practice requires the efforts of the statutory university structures beginning from the academic Departments to the Councils. The structures should be revitalized to make them work and they should be up and doing on these crucial matters. The hitherto nasty *esprit de corps* of shielding corrupt and immoral lecturers has to give way to the cause of justice and fairness. All relevant sections of the University rules and regulations that prohibit the malpractices prevailing in the system must be fully and promptly evoked on erring persons. Furthermore, to forestall unethical practices there is the need for vigorous oversight

functions by HODs and Deans on the activities of Level Co-ordinators; also, there is the need for vigorous sensitization and awareness campaigns on the menace prevalent in the Universities so that all concerned can exercise caution. Furthermore, University managements should make concerted efforts towards the computerization of academic records and developing a network that can be accessed by interested people. In addition, the government has to improve the condition of service and living conditions academic and non-academic staff in the Universities commensurate with the demand of their jobs. Finally, the involvement of ASUU in stemming the tide cannot be over-emphasized especially because all academic staff are members of this Union and will heed to the call of the Union.

CONCLUSION

As a result of the unethical practices taking place in the Universities, the academic world is at crossroads and on trial. Academic life and community are becoming less dignifying due to the misconduct of some academics. Clearly, the academic world is fast losing its credibility, integrity and honour. This is, largely, due to decline in its hitherto known cherished values of objectivity, fairness, service to humanity, nationalism, patriotism, productivity and search for the truth at all costs. Multi-faceted patterns of malpractices are taking root in the Nigeria's academic world thereby threatening the system and its operators. Granted that we have a systemic failure in Nigeria, yet Nigerian academics *must* continue to be the conscience and brain (engine room) of the society no matter the odds. It may not be easy but it is a task worth pursuing.

REFERENCES

Adaralegbe, A. (1981), A Philosophy for Nigerian Education. Heinemann Educational Books (Nigeria) Ltd Ibadan.

Audu, I (1980).....(incomplete)

Enesi, I.S. (1999), University Management: The Nigerian Experience, Nigerian University Press. Usmanu Danfodio University Sokoto.

Flexner (1930)------(incomplete)

Jega, A.M.et al, (2004), Consolidating the Citadel: Bayero University, Kano.

Kerr, C. (2003), The Use of the University 5th edition. Harvard University Press.

Mead, H (1999)

Ojo, J.D. (1995), Students' Unrest in Nigerian Universities: A Legal and Historical Approach-Intec Printers Limited, Ibadan.

See: "Scandal in the Ivory Tower: A Fake Lecturer Exposes Universities' Admission Racket" in Saturday Sun, July 4, 2009:p13