Perception of Academic Dishonesty and Participation by Undergraduate Students of Kogi State University, Anyigba

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Abstract: - This study was carried out to analyze the perceptions of academic dishonesty and participation by students of Kogi State University, Anyigba-Nigeria. Data for the study were collected through the application of self administered structured questionnaire. The study has shown that many of the students had engaged in academic dishonesty and/or witnessed their colleagues engage in the practice. The study has also shown that most of the students perceived cheating in examinations by copying their colleagues’ work, sharing of answers for assignments and the exchange of money for marks as less serious offences. This perception of academic dishonesty is due to the non distribution of institutional guidelines to the students and the lack of orientation programmes about academic dishonest behaviour. It is therefore recommended that concerted efforts should be made to address academic dishonesty in all institutions of higher learning in Nigeria. Managers of higher institutions of learning should pay particular attention to this to avoid the transfer of these practices to the workplace. Universities particularly should ensure that institutional rules on academic dishonesty are distributed to the students at the time of registration. Orientation programmes should be periodically carried out to acquaint the students and reawaken their understanding of the consequences of academic dishonest behaviours. School administrators should be more innovative in designing the orientation programmes to avoid dishonest behaviours. It is when this is done that the Nigerian public will begin to develop confidence in the quality of our graduates and even in our academic institutions as being capable of raising future leaders with integrity.

Key Words: Perception; Academic dishonesty; Participation; Kogi State; University

I. INTRODUCTION

Academic dishonesty is a phenomenon that is widely described as widespread at tertiary institutions (Prenshaw, J.P; Straughan, D.R and Albers-Miller, D.N (2001). It is occurring in both developed and developing countries (Kyei,K.A and Nduno,K” (2014). Studies abound on the prevalence of academic dishonesty at colleges and universities (see Omoriegie and Osa-Edoh, 2005; Pino and Smith, 2003). According to Guthrie (2009), academic dishonesty is any academic behaviour that does not comply with stated assessment requirements and other institutional policies; when students behave in ways intended to gain undue benefit in relation to their assessment.

The Nigerian education is not an exception in this unholy academic practice (Imran and Ayobami, 2011). The Nigerian educational institution has witnessed unprecedented upsurge in the rate of academic dishonesty particularly in the last three decades (Olatunbosun, 2009). Besides educational commentators, the Nigerian daily newspapers have been decrying the rate of academic dishonesty in the country. Scholars have therefore dissipated a lot of efforts and energy to ascertain the causes of academic dishonesty. These scholars such as Alutu and Aluede,(2006), Nwadiani (2005) Olatunbosun (2009) have identified several reasons for the involvement of students in academic dishonesty.

First, most of the higher institutions in Nigeria are overpopulated. Many of these institutions are thus coping with the expansion in student numbers. The consequence of this is that the student to teacher ratio has become so large. Due to the large number of students, many of them hardly comprehend what the teachers say and therefore rely on gossip lectures. The fear of failure because of the inability to get the correct information makes students to engage in academic dishonesty.

Secondly, education in Nigeria has become a less valued object. It is no longer for itself but for what it can offer. Thus, in contemporary Nigeria, academic certificates have become the most authentic and valid key to so many rights and privileges. The paper certificates are seen by most Nigerians as the only ticket that can secure the means of livelihood (Kakwagh, 2013). This certificate consciousness is making many students to take short cuts through academic dishonesty. Therefore, pressure or desire to graduate with a good certificate makes students to be engaged in academic dishonesty.

This show of interest by scholars shows that academic dishonesty has attained a serious dimension in Nigeria. However, most of the studies have concentrated on establishing the causes and consequences of academic dishonesty and not on the perceptions of the phenomenon by the students themselves. This study therefore seeks to analyze the perceptions of academic dishonesty and participation by students of Kogi State University, Anyigba-Nigeria.
II. LOCATION OF THE STUDY

The study was conducted amongst students of Kogi State University, Anyigba—a university owned by the Kogi state government of central Nigeria. Kogi state university was established in 1999 essentially to enhance the accessibility of university education not only to qualified indigenes of the state but also to other Nigerians. Its ultimate goal is to encourage the advancement of learning and the stimulation of accelerated development of the state through strategic research activities and manpower development.

The university is located at Anyigba-a peri-urban centre in Dekina local government area of Kogi state. The university is administratively divided into eight (8) faculties. The university is administratively divided into eight (8) faculties namely; Social Sciences, Natural Sciences, Management sciences, Arts and Humanities, and Agriculture. Others are Law, Medicine and Education. All these faculties have varied accredited academic programmes.

III. METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION

As already stated, Kogi state university is made up of eight (8) faculties. Four of these faculties namely; Social Sciences, Management Sciences, Arts and Humanities and Education were purposively selected and surveyed. The reason for choosing these faculties is because they are characterized by high student population. In each faculty, 60 copies of the questionnaire were self administered to the students making a total sample size of 240.

Data were collected through self administered structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was structured in three parts A, B; C. Section A sought information on students’ demographic variables. Section B was concerned with students’ awareness and understanding of the university’s regulations on academic dishonesty and the sources of their information. It also dealt with the students’ perceptions of the seriousness of the regulations. The section also sought to understand the frequency of occurrence of academic dishonesty from the students and what they (students) thought were the factors influencing them to participate in academic dishonesty. Section C sought to ascertain the practices students considered as academically dishonesty behaviour and as to whether they had previously engaged in any of the practices.

IV. RESULTS

Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SEX</th>
<th>FREQUENCY</th>
<th>PERCENTAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MALE</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>51.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FEMALE</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>48.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AGE</th>
<th>FREQUENCY</th>
<th>PERCENTAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-22</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>37.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23-27</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>42.08</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the table it can be seen that out of the 240 students sampled and surveyed, 123 (51.25%) of the students were males while 117 (48.75%) were females. Most of the students, 101 or 42.08% were within the age bracket of 23-27 while 89 or 37.08% were within the 18-22 age brackets. Only 13 (5.42%) were within the 33 years age bracket. On the whole, the table shows that most of the students were young adults.

In terms of level, 111 46.25%) were in 300 level while 87 (36.25%) were in 400 level. Only 42 (17.50%) were in 200 level. No student in the 100 level was covered because at the time of the survey, they were still referred to as ‘freshers’.

Most of them had not spent up to two months on campus.

V. INSTITUTIONAL REGULATIONS

The university student information handbook is a document that contains the DOS and DON’TS and with the associated punishments. Students were therefore asked whether they were aware of the policies especially as they relate to academic dishonesty. Most of the sampled students (227 or 94.58%) said they were aware of the rules regulating academic behaviour and the punishments for misbehaviour.

On how they got the information, 36 (15%) said they had seen the student information handbook while the majority of them—110 or 45.83% said they had never seen the document but got the information regarding academic dishonesty from lecturers and other students (see table 2). This clearly shows that lecturers and other students were the major sources of information on academic dishonesty.

Table 2: Source of information on academic dishonesty

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of information</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student handbook</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orientation</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecturers</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>45.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other students</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>33.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With regards to dishonest academic behaviour, almost all the students agreed that they had witnessed unethical behaviours such as cheating in examinations by copying from other students. Only few students said they
never witnessed their colleagues cheat. On whether they had ever reported their colleagues for cheating, 220 or 91.67% said they had never reported. With respect to specific forms of unethical academic behaviour, all the students identified cheating during examinations, sharing of answers in assignments, exchange of money for marks, allowing another person to copy your work, copying the work of another person with or without his/her permission as the most common forms of academic dishonesty. Eighty two (82) students said they had copied other students’ work with their permission while 67 said they had done so without permission. The students said those who cheat often do it by arrangement. That is, the sitting arrangement is pre-planned - the brilliant student sits in front while those to copy sit at the sides or at the back. All the students said these forms of cheating were less serious offences. It should be noted that most of the students who responded that they had engaged in cheating were in 200 and 300 levels. However, this is not to say in any way those higher level students were exempted from the practice.

In contemporary Nigeria, a good academic certificate is a sure way to success. This certificate consciousness has pushed many students to academic dishonest behaviours. In fact, this was the position of all the students- the pursuit of good academic grades and the pressure not to disappoint parents and guardians. The students particularly emphasized that influences from parents/guardians for good academic records have been pushing them to engage in academic dishonest behaviours.

V. DISCUSSION

The results have shown that most of the students were aware of the policies on academic dishonesty and the penalties for violations. However, it can be discerned that there were no practical means of letting the students to avoid such behaviours. For example, most of the students never went through an orientation process that would have enlightened their understanding and curtailed their involvement in academic dishonesty. The absence of the orientation process means the students had limited knowledge about academic dishonesty. Knowledge from lecturers and other students is mostly concerned about conduct in examination halls and penalties for violating such regulations.

It has been shown that students who are at the verge of graduation cheat less in examinations not because they went through any orientation programme but because they had better knowledge about the consequences of cheating-expulsion or rustication. Most of the students understood academic dishonesty narrowly to mean the use of extraneous materials in examination halls. They even saw cheating in examinations and assignments as a non serious academic dishonest behaviour. Their understanding of academic dishonesty does not even include plagiarism and non acknowledgement of sources of information in essays. The use of extraneous materials in examinations, plagiarism and the non acknowledgement of the sources of information are very common practices in Kogi State University Anyigba because of the high student-lecturer ratio. Due to the large number of student population, lecturers find it difficult to detect plagiarism when marking scripts and assignments.

The findings have shown that most of the students had witnessed their colleagues cheat. However, they could not report them because of the lack of moral right to do so as they themselves had cheated too by copying their friends’ work. For example, the findings have revealed that students plan their sitting arrangements before they enter into examination halls. It is through this sitting arrangement that the practice of cheating is perpetrated. Even when the arrangement is disrupted, they still connive with other course mates to allow the practice to continue or happen. It can thus be said that academic dishonesty is, in many cases, a group-oriented practice.

It must be admitted that students of Kogi State University Anyigba have limited access to literature resources. Kogi State University Anyigba has hardcopy library textbooks and the e-library. The two are supposed to provide access to hardcopy library textbooks and to research publications online. Unfortunately, the e-library does not function properly while the hardcopy library has no latest textbooks. The non functional status of the library has, in a manner of speaking, encouraged the students to develop the tendency to cheat.

It is revealed that the involvement of students in academic dishonest behaviour is done for two principal reasons to obtain good grades and to please parents/guardians. This is understandable because in Nigeria good grades mean good certificate which in turn enhances job prospects and/or future education. Good grades and certificates make parents/guardians to feel that their investment in their children/wards’ education is paid off.

VI. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Nigerian educational institution has been witnessing a lot of challenges. One of the challenges is the unprecedented upsurge in the rate of academic dishonesty. Scholars and educational commentators have decried the rate at which this menace is perpetrated. This study was an attempt to ascertain students’ perception of the phenomenon. The study has shown that majority of the students were aware of the rules governing academic dishonest behaviour. However, this awareness was acquired through lecturers and other students and not through student information handbook nor orientation programmes. The study has also shown that most of the students had witnessed their colleagues engage in academic dishonest behaviour but never reported. It has also revealed that the most occurring forms of academic dishonesty are cheating in examinations such as copying colleagues’ work with or without their permission and sharing of answers for assignments. Almost all the students indicated that these were less serious offences. This implies that the students consent to cheating. Pressure for good grades and the
desire to please parents and guardians were indicated by the students as the compelling factors for the involvement in academic dishonest behaviour. It is therefore recommended that:

1. Concerted efforts should be made to address academic dishonesty in all institutions of higher learning in Nigeria. Managers of higher institutions of learning should pay particular attention to this to avoid the transfer of these practices to the workplace.

2. Universities particularly should ensure that institutional rules on academic dishonesty are distributed to the students at the time of registration.

3. Orientation programmes should be periodically carried out to acquaint the students and reawaken their understanding of the consequences of academic dishonest behaviours. School administrators should be more innovative in designing the orientation programmes to avoid dishonest behaviours. It is when this is done that the Nigerian public will begin to develop confidence in the quality of our graduates and even in our academic institutions as being capable of raising future leaders with integrity.

REFERENCES