# A SURVEY OF CORRUPT PRACTICES IN THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM IN NIGERIA FROM SOCIOCULTURAL PERSPECTIVES

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**OLAWUYI**, B.O., **AJAYI**, O.S. & **UYANNE,** E.O.
*The Department of Social Sciences Education,*
*Faculty of Education, University of Ilorin, Ilorin,*

## Abstract

*Corruption has been widely acknowledged as a bane to national growth and development. This phenomenon is not peculiar to a given nation or continent but a global issue. While some view corruption as the abuse of public offices for private gain, others see it as the misuse of entrusted power for private gain. In whichever way it has been viewed, the basic thing is that corrupt practices breed corruption. The educational sector as one of the important sectors in Nigeria is being managed by individual members of a larger society where corruption is systematically developing into the norm of the society. This paper therefore x-rayed corrupt practices perpetrated in the educational system from sociocultural perspective. It also examined practices constituting corrupt practices in the educational system from the perspective of university staff and students. This study adopted survey design. The sample size for the study comprised 123 staff and 177 students selected using the accidental sampling technique. A structured questionnaire titled "Prevailing Practices in the Educational System Questionnaire" was used to gather data for the study. This instrument was validated before its use and*

*yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.85. Data collected were analysed using frequency and percentage, and Cohen's Kappa test of agreement. The results revealed that majority of the staff and students displayed shallow knowledge on practices constituting corruption in the educational system. Opinion of staff and students were also found different on certain practices as corruption. It was concluded that people are yet to completely grasp what corrupt practices actually entails and the need for value-reorientation and enlightenment is advocated.*

## Introduction

Corruption has been identified as a major cog in the wheel of progress of any nation. It is described as a widespread phenomenon that is raising global concern. The results of survey conducted by Transparency International on corruption indicated that irrespective of the level of corruption perpetrated in the country, the participants unanimously condemned corruption (Hess & Sauter, 2013). It is quite disheartening that this act of corruption as perpetrated in almost all sectors of economy of any nation has unleashed untold hardship on many innocent individuals. Besides, its adverse effects have increased poverty level of many families and as well introduced the younger generation to many devilish activities.

The phenomenon of corruption is a global issue and no country in the world is completely immuned against the menace, even the developed countries. Though, its prevalence rate may differ from one country to the other, and so does its dimension (Bhargava, 2005). However, its effects are more pronounced in the developing countries like Nigeria. As a result of corruption, Nigeria has witnessed so many agitations and insecurity that has posed threat at one point or the other to the corporate existence of the nation.

Whenever corruption is mentioned, what easily comes to the mind of the majority of individuals is the embezzlement or misappropriation of funds. Though, embezzlement or

misappropriation of fund is part of corrupt practices, it is however a tip of the iceberg. The act of corruption transcends financial misapplication. Michael and James (1991) described corruption as act of evil or wrong perpetrated for money-making purpose. In his own definition, Rossouw (1999) described corruption as inducement through dubious means to violate one's legitimate responsibility towards one's principal that is capable of harming the interest of another party while the perpetrator receives financial benefits or rewards. Careful examination of the above two definitions of corruption showed their emphasis on monetary and financial rewards as the sole rational behind corrupt practices.

Experiences in the recent times have clearly shown that the act of corruption has steadily gravitated into different dimensions with many intermediates and ultimate rationales. These occurrences as culminated in another dimension of defining the phenomenon to be more embracing. The World Bank defined corruption as the use of public office for private gain (Tanzi, 1998). Similarly, Aina in the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC, 2012) defined corruption as the illegitimate conversion of collective or public good to private benefit. Another more encompassing definition of corruption was given by Transparency International. Transparency International (2013) defined corruption as the abuse of entrusted power for private gain. One common issue to all the definitions of corruption is the fact that the perpetrators abuse the power entrusted to them for private gain.

As observed by Svensson (2005), corruption is an outcome, and a reflection of a country's legal, economic, cultural and political institutions. In other words, corruption in any society or nation is an indication of corrupt practices perpetrated by those entrusted with power in various institutions. If the nation's key institutions such as legal, economic, cultural and political institutions has been infected with corruption, to what extent can educational system of such a nation can be immuned. There may be some sense in believing that individuals in educational sectors are corruption free. This is because people in this sector are expected to demonstrate a high sense of citizens' ethical attitudes and behaviours as a result of their

refined mind due to education. However, when it is also imagined that other key institutions in the country most especially, the political institution has a far-reaching influence and dictates the happenings in the educational system, the integrity of those managing our educational system may come under criticism. Education sector is expected to be particularly exemplary, and schooling should be fair. However, the reality is far different from that expectation in many parts of the world (Meier, 2004).

Hallak and Poisson (2007) defined corruption in educational system as the systematic use of public office for private benefits with significant impact on the availability and quality of educational goods and services, and as well has a consequence on access, quality or equity in education. In all nations of the world, education is never a privilege but a fundamental human right as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948. The implication of this is that all children of the world are entitled to free, quality, and equitable access to education (Meier, 2004). Corruption in educational system negates the original goal of education as it threatens equal access, quantity and quality of education. The dangers of corruption in educational system are better imagined than described because more people in the society feel the effects of corruption in this sector than in other sectors.

On factors stimulating the act of corrupt practices, Svensson (2005) opined that corruption can be a response to either beneficial or harmful rules. For instance, where there is existence of certain benevolent rules that permit individuals to avoid penalties for any wrongdoing through offering of bribes or when monitoring the rules is incomplete. Also, Djankov, LaPorta, Lopez-de-Silanes and Shleifer (2003) considered the occurrence of corrupt practices or corruption inevitable where there are bad policies or inefficient institutions.

According to ICPC (2012), the act of corruption most especially in higher institutions has direct and indirect effects on the society and many a times, these effects go unnoticed. A situation where fraud in the admission process excludes talented individuals from securing admission into higher institution of learning makes the nation the ultimate loser. When young people are frustrated out of tertiary institutions due to corruption in the examination process,

or are forced to drop out by indirect costs of higher education foisted on them by corrupt officials, or other harassment from member of the staff, the nation is the loser. When funds for research are diverted to other uses, the development process of the nation suffers an indirect knock as research that could lead to innovation is hampered. When less qualified individuals are recruited in place of more talented ones, or when bright and talented people are frustrated out by corruption in the promotion process, the training of the next generation is severely compromised ICPC (2012).

Similarly, in Nigeria, most especially in the educational system, the acts of corruption seem to be pandemic in nature, however, not many individuals are aware that certain practices as commonly perpetrated or experienced constitute corruption or at best engage in what is described as Sigmund Freud as denial of reality. Hence, this study therefore analysed social cultural forces that encouraged corruption in the educational system as well as what practices the individual stakeholders in the system considered as corrupt practices.

## Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to examine corrupt practices perpetrated in the educational system from sociocultural perspective. Specifically, this study:

1.  examined the corrupt practices perpetrated in the educational system from sociocultural point of view;
2.  examined practices constituting corrupt practices in the educational system from the perspective of University staff and students in Kwara State;  and
3.  determined the degree of agreement between staff and students on practices constituting corruption in the educational system in Nigeria.

## Research Questions

**Research Question 1:** What is the sociocultural explanation for corrupt practices perpetrated in the educational system?

**Research Question 2:** What are the practices constituting corruption in the educational system from the perspective of University staff and students in Kwara State?

**Research Question 3:** What is the degree of agreement between staff and students on practices constituting corruption in the educational system in Nigeria?

**Method**

This research adopted descriptive survey design. Descriptive survey design involves the process of obtaining information from a representative sample of a particular population. This descriptive survey design is of cross-sectional type which permits the researchers to gather the data on certain phenomenon of interest at one point. Unlike in longitudinal studies, cross-sectional survey allows the researcher to reach larger samples in a study and larger samples mitigate the problem of chance difference. The cross-sectional survey is described as the method of choice if the intention of the researcher is to gather the data on certain phenomenon of interest at one point in time (Ary, Jacob & Sorensen, 2010). The population of the study comprised all university staff and student in Kwara State. The sample size comprised 123 staff and 177students selected through accidental sampling technique. This technique of sampling was adopted as randomization of both the staff and students was impossible due to their work schedule. A structured questionnaire tilted "Prevailing Practices in the Educational System Questionnaire (PPESQ) was used to gather data for the study. PPESQ has two sections (A&B). Section A contains items on background information (personal data) of the staff and students. Section B contains 23 items designed to measure certain corrupt practices commonly reported in the educational system. Responses to these items took on four- point Likert Scale ranging from Strongly agree (SA) to Strongly disagree. The 23 items in PPESQ were generated from the extensive review of literature on the phenomenon. Reliability of the instrument was carried out by administering copies of the questionnaire to 20 students and10 staff members that were not part of the actual study. The data generated was subjected to a reliability test via internal consistency approach. The reliability co-efficient value obtained was 0.85 which was considered high enough for the purpose of this study. Data collected were analysed using frequency and percentage, and Cohen's Kappa test of agreement.

## Results

**Research Question 1:** What is the sociocultural explanation for corrupt practices perpetrated in the educational system?

### Sociocultural Explanation of Corrupt Practices Perpetrated in the Nigerian Educational System

Psychologists have advanced that human beings are the product of the interaction of heredity and the environment. Consequently, individual's behaviour appears to be influenced by sociocultural forces. Sanderson's (2010) sociocultural perspective describes individuals' behaviour and mental processes as influenced or shaped through sociocultural interaction. Sociocultural theory can be employed in the explanation of various sector of human life. Researchers such as Lambsdorff (2006) and Barr and Serra (2010) opined that there exist an interrelationship between culture and corruption. According to Banuri and Eckel (2012) culture interacts with corruption through formal institutions and social norms, however, the process of such interaction differ from country to country.

As observed by Onu (2014), citizen's conception of the Nigerian society within its content and context is faulty and since the country was amalgamated in 1914, issues of citizenship's true sense of belonging within the new geo-political space was not adequately addressed. The genesis of corruption in all sectors of the Nigeria economy seems to be attributed to the perceived marginalization of the constituting units that make up the Nigeria state. This culminates in individual ethnic groups' perception that any opportunity at the center or at the helms of affairs of any government position as an opportunity for the ethnic group which the man at the center or the helms of affairs represents.

In Nigeria, corruption and corrupt practices permeate every segment of our educational system, but adverse effects of are more pronounced and visible in our higher institutions of learning. Corrupt practices in our higher educational system according to ICPC (2012) include sharp practices in the admission and enrolment process of examination administration and record management, appointments and promotions, teaching and the delivery of learning

services, academic fraud including plagiarism and misapplication of research funds, contract award process, and of course, the mismanagement of funds including diversion of internally generated funds. Experience has shown that corrupt practices in educational system begin at policy level through ministry level and eventually and permeates towards activities at school level.

At policy level, allocation of resources to education is usually compromised with resultant effect of inadequate funding. The reason behind this is not far-fetched. In most cases, the policy makers prefer huge allocation to hard investments such as procurement of military hardware, road construction and other projects with political undertone and financial payback. At ministry level, corrupt practices such as diversion of funds allocated to procurement, construction and running of schools are commonplace. Even, funds allocated to educational institutions is usually embezzled or diverted to either political or individual's private use. At the school and administrative level, practices such as diversion of educational materials and supplies, influencing teachers transfer, offering and taking bribes to secure opportunity or avoid punishment, irregularities in teacher recruitment and promotion, appointment of school head based on influence, etc. are few of the common corrupt practices experienced in Nigeria. In addition, many overzealous parents offer bribes or other forms of inducement to ensure access, good grades and graduation of their wards.

**Research Question 2:** What are practices constituting corruption in the educational system from the perspective of University staff and students in Kwara State?

In order to address this research question, responses of both the staff and the students were scored and for the ease of presentation, Strongly agree and agree responses were collapsed as Agree while Disagree and strongly disagree responses were collapsed as Disagree. These responses were subjected to descriptive analysis and the result is presented in Table 1.

## Table 1: Practices Perpetrated in the Educational System in Nigeria

| SN | Prevailing Practices in the Nigerian Educational system | Staff | | Students | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Agree | Disagree | Agree | Disagree |
| 1 | Promotion of teachers or lecturers based on loyalties to superior or authority at the expense of meritocracy | 55 (44.7) | 68 (55.3) | 68 (38.4) | 109 (61.6) |
| 2 | Diversion of budget or other resources allocated to education in schools | 43 (35.0) | 80 (65.0) | 56 (31.6) | 121 (68.4) |
| 3 | Diversion of funds associated with procurement of materials and construction of facilities by few individuals in authority | 50 (40.7) | 73 (59.3) | 59 (33.3) | 118 (66.7) |
| 4 | Offering your superior financial inducement or order favour in other to secure opportunity or avoid punishment | 38 (30.9) | 85 (69.1) | 54 (30.5) | 123 (69.5) |
| 5 | Recruitment and promotion of teachers or lecturers without due process | 40 (32.5) | 83 (67.5) | 42 (23.7) | 135 (76.3) |
| 6 | Accepting gratification from parents to ensure access, good grades and graduation | 36 (29.3) | 87 (70.7) | 44 (24.9) | 133 (75.1) |
| 7 | Bypassing standard criteria for admission to favour certain segment of individuals | 43 (35.0) | 80 (65.0) | 58 (32.8) | 119 (67.2) |
| 8 | Approval of school projects for personal and political interest rather than educational needs. | 39 (31.7) | 84 (68.3) | 39 (22.0) | 138 (78.0) |
| 9 | Exposing examination questions or tests to high-paying or influential candidates before the actual commencement of exams | 31 (25.2) | 92 (74.8) | 16 (9.0) | 161 (91.0) |
| 10 | Selection of accreditation team based on nepotism (man-know-man) instead of merits and professionalism | 35 (28.5) | 88 (71.5) | 44 (24.9) | 133 (75.1) |

| 11 | Imposition of extra fees on students in the name of sourcing for alternative income | 28 (22.8) | 95 (77.2) | 34 (19.2) | 143 (80.8) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 12 | Teachers or lecturers colluding with students by selling examination papers in advance or fixing the results. | 28 (22.8) | 95 (77.2) | 32 (18.1) | 145 (81.9) |
| 13 | Teachers or lecturer handing out price lists for passing exams or obtaining certificate in an established school or higher institution | 16 (13.0) | 107 (87.0) | 31 (17.5) | 146 (82.5) |
| 14 | Allocation of salaries to ghost workers | 30 (24.4) | 93 (75.6) | 40 (22.6) | 137 (77.4) |
| 15 | Promotion of friends or colleagues without regard to their qualifications | 32 (26.0) | 91 (74.0) | 33 (18.6) | 144 (81.4) |
| 16 | Sexual harassment of junior female colleagues and students by teachers or lecturers | 32 (26.0) | 91 (74.0) | 32 (18.1) | 145 (81.9) |
| 17 | Intentional failing of students for inability to purchase teachers' or lecturers' textbook | 18 (14.6) | 105 (85.4) | 41 (23.2) | 136 (76.8) |
| 18 | Illegal deduction of staff salaries by the school authorities | 35 (28.5) | 88 (71.5) | 32 (18.1) | 145 (81.9) |
| 19 | Giving undue attention to some students at the expense of others | 26 (21.1) | 97 (78.9) | 31 (17.5) | 146 (82.5) |
| 20 | Appointment of principal officers on nepotism or favoritism instead of merit and competence. | 50 (40.7) | 73 (59.3) | 49 (27.7) | 128 (72.3) |
| 21 | Seeking gratification before attending to supervisee | 29 (23.6) | 94 (76.4) | 50 (28.2) | 127 (71.8) |
| 22 | Unnecessary absence from work without taking permission | 18 (14.6) | 105 (85.4) | 42 (23.7) | 135 (76.3) |
| 23 | Insistence on selecting the head for a particular position from a certain parts of local government, state or geopolitical zone | 38 (30.9) | 85 (69.1) | 50 (28.2) | 127 (71.8) |

Table 1 shows practices considered as corruption from the perspective of the university staff and students in Kwara State. It has shown that not less than 55.3% and 61.6% of the staff and students respectively disagreed that practice such as promotion of teachers or lecturers based on loyalties to superior or authority at the expense of meritocracy constitutes corruption in the educational system.  Likewise, 74.8% and 91.0% of the staff and students respectively disagreed that practice such as exposing examination questions or tests to high-paying or influential candidates before the actual commencement of exams constitutes corruption in the educational system. Indication is shown from this result that knowledge of people on practices constituting corruption in the educational system is shallow. As can be seen, only 44.7% and 38.4% of the staff and students respectively acknowledged as corrupt practices practice such as promotion of teachers or lecturers based on loyalties to superior or authority at the expense of meritocracy constitutes corruption in the educational system.

**Research Question 3:** What is the degree of agreement between staff and students on practices constituting corruption in the educational system in Nigeria?

In order to address this research question, Kappa measure of agreement was employed to determine the degree of agreement between staff and students on practices constituting corruption in the educational system in Nigeria. The result is presented in Table 2.

## Table 2: Cohen's Kappa (*K*) Test of Measuring the Degree of Agreement between Staff and Students on Practices Constituting Corruption in the Educational System in Nigeria

| S/N | Prevailing Practices in Nigerian Educational system | Staff | | Students | | *K* | P |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | A | D | A | D | | |
| 1 | Promotion of teachers or lecturers based on loyalties to superior or authority at the expense of meritocracy | 55 | 68 | 68 | 109 | -.059 | .275 |
| 2 | Diversion of budget or other resources allocated to education in schools | 43 | 80 | 56 | 121 | -.030 | .547 |
| 3 | Diversion of funds associated with procurement of materials and construction of facilities by few individuals in authority | 50 | 73 | 59 | 118 | -.067 | .195 |
| 4 | Offering your superior financial inducement or other favour in order to secure opportunity or avoid punishment | 38 | 85 | 54 | 123 | -.003 | .943 |
| 5 | Recruitment and promotion of teachers or lecturers without due process | 40 | 83 | 42 | 135 | -.079 | .093 |
| 6 | Accepting gratification from parents to ensure access, good grades and graduation | 36 | 87 | 44 | 133 | -.039 | .396 |
| 7 | Bypassing standard criteria for admission to favour certain segment of individuals | 43 | 80 | 58 | 119 | -.020 | .693 |
| 8 | Approval of school projects for personal and political interest rather than educational needs. | 39 | 84 | 39 | 138 | -.086 | .060 |
| 9 | Exposing examination questions or tests to high-paying or influential candidates before the actual commencement of exams | 31 | 92 | 16 | 161 | -.139 | .000 |

| 10 | Selection of accreditation team based on nepotism (man-know-man) instead of merits and professionalism | 35 | 88 | 44 | 133 | -.032 | .487 |
|----|------|----|----|----|-----|------|------|
| 11 | Imposition of extra fees on students in the name of sourcing for alternative income | 28 | 95 | 34 | 143 | -.031 | .454 |
| 12 | Teachers or lecturers colluding with students by selling examination papers in advance or fixing the results. | 28 | 95 | 32 | 145 | -.041 | .318 |
| 13 | Teachers or lecturer handing out price lists for passing exams or obtaining certificate in an established school or higher institution | 16 | 107 | 31 | 146 | .039 | .291 |
| 14 | Allocation of salaries to ghost workers | 30 | 93 | 40 | 137 | -.016 | .718 |
| 15 | Promotion of friends or colleagues without regard to their qualifications | 32 | 91 | 33 | 144 | -.065 | .127 |
| 16 | Sexual harassment of junior female colleagues and students by teachers or lecturers | 32 | 91 | 32 | 145 | -.070 | .099 |
| 17 | Intentional failing of students for inability to purchase teachers' or lecturers' textbook | 18 | 105 | 41 | 136 | .074 | .068 |
| 18 | Illegal deduction of staff salaries by the school authorities | 35 | 88 | 32 | 145 | -.091 | .034 |
| 19 | Giving undue attention to some students at the expense of others | 26 | 97 | 31 | 146 | -.032 | .431 |
| 20 | Appointment of principal officers on nepotism or favoritism instead of merit and competence. | 50 | 73 | 49 | 128 | -.118 | .019 |
| 21 | Seeking gratification before attending to supervisee | 29 | 94 | 50 | 127 | .042 | .366 |
| 22 | Unnecessary absence from work without taking permission | 18 | 105 | 42 | 135 | .079 | .053 |
| 23 | Insistence on selecting the head for a particular position from a certain parts of local government, state or geopolitical zone | 38 | 85 | 50 | 127 | -.024 | .621 |

**Key: A= Agree, D= Disagree, k+ =agreement, k- = No Agreement, Sig @ p<.05**

Table 2 shows the degree of agreement between staff and students on practices constituting corruption in the educational system in Nigeria. Two things are important in the interpretation of this result. Positive kappa values imply agreement between the two raters while the degree of significance of such agreement is determined by their respective p-values (p< .05). Negative kappa values indicate no agreement. According to Landis and Koch (1977), the strength of agreement is interpreted as less than 0.20 (Poor); 0.21-0.40 (Fair); 0.41-0.60 (Moderate); 0.61-0.80 (Good), and 0.81-1.00 as very good. As shown in the table, there seems to be non-significant level of disagreement between the staff and students on practices constituting corruption in educational system. However, the strength of this disagreement is very poor as indicated in the negative value of Kappa values. With the exception of practices such as "Exposing examination questions or tests to high-paying or influential candidates before the actual commencement of exams" ($k$=-.139, p< .05); "Illegal deduction of staff salaries by the school authorities" ($k$=-.091, p< .05); and "Appointment of principal officers on nepotism or favoritism instead of merit and competence" ($k$=-.118, p< .05) that had significant level of disagreement.

Non-significant and low level of agreement was also found between the staff and students of practices such as "Teachers or lecturer handing out price lists for passing exams or obtaining certificate in an established school or higher institution" ($k$=.039, p> .05); "Intentional failing of students for inability to purchase teachers' or lecturers' textbook" ($k$=.074, p> .05); "Seeking gratification before attending to supervisee" ($k$=.042, p> .05); and "Unnecessary absence from work without taking permission" ($k$=.079, p> .05)

**Discussions**
The findings of this study revealed that the percentage of both the staff and students who disagreed on many practices in educational system as corruption outnumbered those that acknowledged such practices as corruption. This is an indication that many individuals within the system still have shallow knowledge on practices that actually translates to corruption. At any point in time, people do

agree that there is corruption in the educational system of the nation, however, as shown in this findings, many failed to identify corrupt practices. Another possible explanation is the beliefs and slogan of "wait for your own time" in which many believed that in as much that the situation favours them, such is not corruption until when the pendulum swings against them. In actual sense, certain percentage of the staff and teachers agreed that these practices constituted corruption in the educational system; however, given the level of sensitization about corrupt practices in the country, the result is far below expectation. This finding partially corroborates findings of researchers such as Mauro (1997), Heyneman (2002), Meier (2004), and the report of study carried out by ICPC on higher education in Nigeria in 2012. The separate findings of these authors x-ray various corrupt practices perpetrated in the educational system in different countries of the world indicating the menace as global phenomenon.

Findings further revealed an existence of non- significant and poor strength of disagreement between the staff and students on practices constituting corruption in the educational system. Also, there was a non- significant but poor strength of agreement on practices such as "Teachers or lecturer handing out price lists for passing exams or obtaining certificate in an established school or higher institution"; "Intentional failing of students for inability to purchase teachers' or lecturers' textbook"; "Seeking gratification before attending to supervisee"; and "Unnecessary absence from work without taking permission".

## Conclusions and Recommendations

It appears from the findings of this study that people are yet to embrace the reality of corrupt practices in the educational system. The concept of corrupt practices seems to be understood by many as the embezzlement of funds meant of educational purposes, whereas; perception of individual to what seems to benefit them irrespective of moral justification of such act or whose ox is being gored  is questionable.

This study therefore recommended that the need for value re-orientation in the society should be emphasized.  Also, those in the

helm of affairs in piloting the nation should embrace the truth and create an enabling environment for a healthy completion instead of selection based on nepotism. The existing agencies created to curb corruption should be strengthened for better performance and their activities should touch every segment of the society. In addition, there is an urgent need to inculcate in the school curriculum, practices constituting corrupt practices and they can be curbed right from the primary school. This will go a long way in sensitizing the learners right from their childhood and as well make them embrace virtues for the benefit of all.

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