

Autonomy Of Higher Education, Academic Freedom And The Place Of Corruption In Nigeria

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Abstract: Higher Education is the highest level of Manpower development for any nation and as such expected to be above board in issues that wreck integrity, excellence and sustainable development. This seems like a mirage as there is no gainsaying that the issue of corruption in Africa is an epidemic that has continually plagued even Higher Education and has hindered the attainment of such economic and national goals. The study investigated autonomy of higher education, academic freedom and the place of corruption in Nigeria. The study adopted the descriptive survey research design. The population of this study comprised academic, non-academic staff, Students and employers of labour from universities, Polytechnics and Colleges of Education in Southwestern Nigeria. Two research questions were posed for the study. A five point Likert-type "Autonomy of Higher Education, Academic Freedom and the Place of Corruption in Nigeria Questionnaire" (AHEAFPCNQ) was constructed and administered among 800 academic, 600 non-academic Staff, 1000 students from higher institutions: Universities, Polytechnics and College of Education. This also includes 500 members of staff from 5 Production Companies. The instrument was validated while the Cronbach's alpha method was used to determine the internal consistency of the items and this yielded a result of 0.87. The study revealed that with the current practices, there is no clear cut on what autonomy of higher education means to stakeholders. By implication, there would be little or no impact if complete academic autonomy is granted. Therefore, the need to advocate for academic freedom with strategic mitigating scheme to checkmate disastrous eventualities and futuristic disaster of corrupt practices when full academic freedom is granted.

Keywords: Autonomy, Higher Education, Decentralization, Corruption, Mitigating Strategies

I. INTRODUCTION

Corruption is the virus responsible for every abnormality in the society including institutions. It is not just the main characteristic of the less developed nations but also a trademark of the advanced countries. Socio-cultural values of each society help to shape what constitutes corruption, and her impact on governance. No citizen, leader, or government would want to agree that it tolerates corruption. It is the enemies of all, but most people romance with it, thrive in its atmosphere, cut corners and cannot do anything in the normal way. This perception about corruption explains the existence of various legislations and agencies established to crush the monster called corruption, even though the realities on ground

scarcely show the presence of sanctions for aberrations across board. It therefore suffices to say that the place of corruption is essential to determine autonomy of higher education and the status of academic freedom in Nigeria.

Higher education institutions across the globe have been concerned about autonomy since the State appears to seek ways of protecting the huge investment of public funds. Four recent developments have heightened autonomy of higher education and academic freedom in Nigeria which include autonomy conceptualization, different rationales underlining reform for enhancing university, assumption about how autonomy reforms relate to changes within HEIs, empirical illustrations. However, it will be useful to clarify the concept of university autonomy at this juncture.

The word Autonomy is generated from the Greek words *auto nomos* (*auto* meaning self, and *nomos* meaning law). Considering these together; it means to give oneself one's own law. Contextually, it is the capacity of an individual or institution to make an informed, uncoerced decision by its own self; it is the state of having independence or freedom to decide a course of action or operation. The European Universities Association for example, defines autonomy as being organisational, financial, staffing and academic independence of Universities. Similarly, *the 1997 UNESCO recommendation concerning the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel* contains an elaborate clarification of the concept of University Autonomy. It was contained in the University Autonomy; paragraphs 17-21 as:

Autonomy is that degree of self-governance necessary for effective decision making by institutions of higher education regarding their academic work, standards, management and related activities consistent with systems of public accountability, especially in respect of funding provided by the State, and respect for academic freedom and human rights.

Autonomy is the institutional form of academic freedom and a necessary precondition to guarantee the proper fulfilment of the functions entrusted to higher-education teaching personnel and institutions.

It places an obligation on countries to protect higher education institutions from threats to their autonomy coming from any source. According to UNESCO, there are three essential components of meaningful University Autonomy: *Self-governance, collegiality and appropriate academic leadership.*

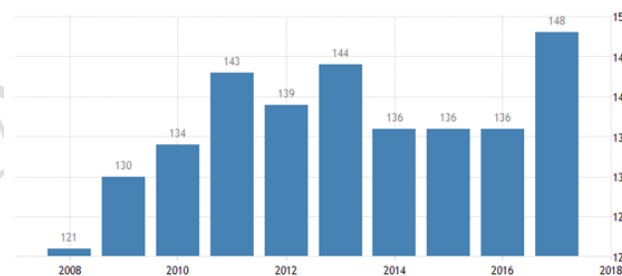
Assessing these components one after the other, self-governance refers to the ability of universities to exercise internal control or rule over itself; means internal integrity and the ability of an institution to derive authority for its key decisions from within. Collegiality refers to shared power and authority vested among colleagues. In an autonomous university, decision making powers are exercised amongst scholars, students, staffs and stakeholders in the academic environment in a fair and democratic way to foster university growth and development of itself and relevant stakeholders. As such, those decisions are autochthonous (*i.e.* home grown/indigenous) and derive legitimacy from within. The third aspect of University autonomy is appropriate academic leadership which refers to leadership at all relevant department levels of a University by the most qualified members of that University community. It refers to a meritocratic system in which the most qualified scholars are promoted to occupy leadership positions, based on the fundamental belief that power should be vested in individuals according to merit.

There are two historical views: the classical and the contemporary views. The classical view sees university autonomy as total independence from State control. This is a structural view of autonomy, which advocates decision-making as well as financial, organisational, managerial, staffing, and academic control within the institution. This view of university autonomy existed during the classical period, when the university was an elite, feudal institution, grounded on a restrictive model of learning; accessible to a very small and elite proportion of the population; and funded through private donations or endowment by the wealthy and/or by the

church. This classical model of autonomy still exists today in private universities, because they are not dependent on State funding.

The other view of university autonomy is the contemporary view which was developed with the rise of the Nation-State, when the investment of public funds in university education became necessary in order to develop the manpower needed to build and sustain the State and its institutions. This was particularly the case after the Second World War, when it became necessary to train more citizens, provide safety nets for them, while also equipping the State against or for future warfare. More than a citadel of learning, the university soon became the bedrock of manpower development, scientific research, and the site of innovations in collaboration with industries but seems to be characterized with high rate of corrupt practices. The Question now is; how true is university autonomy in Nigeria...? How possible are these three essential components of meaningful University Autonomy as stated by UNESCO... in a country where the corruption index is alarming?

Nigeria is the 148 least corrupt nations out of 175 countries, according to the 2017 Corruption Perceptions Index reported by Transparency International. Corruption Rank in Nigeria averaged 120.45 from 1996 until 2017, reaching an all-time high of 152 in 2005 and a record low of 52 in 1997.



Source: Tradingeconomics.com/Transparency International 2018

Figure 1

According to Transparency International (2018) education is a fundamental human right and a major driver of human and economic development. It strengthens personal integrity and shapes the societies in which we live. Since education typically comprises 20-30 per cent of a country's budget in an ideal State, it is critically prone to corruption, from national education ministries to local schools and universities. This percentage however is not applicable to many developing nations especially in Africa. The end result is limited access to and poor quality of education, and a social acceptance of corruption through a corrupted education system (Transparency International, 2018).

Historically, there are several means by which corruption reflect in higher education in Nigeria going by the operational process of higher institutions. One of the major ways in which the government exerted its influence on the universities was in the appointment of the Chairman of Council and a few strategic members of the body. This also includes the ratification of the appointment of the university's vice chancellor. Considering this from the classical model of university autonomy, each university was granted independence from the government in its internal management

with a reflection on decision-making mechanism, student admission process, and the day-to-day running of its academic programmes. There are several forms of corruption in higher education which Goolam (2016) identified as political interference in governance of higher education institutions, fraud in internal financial management of the HEI and nepotism/favouritism in appointment and promotion of faculty.

Other ways in which autonomy of higher is through the drastic reduction in the current budgetary allocation to education by federal and state governments; the approval of the appointment of new Vice-Chancellors for 13 federal universities early 1970s, the premature dissolution of the Governing Councils of Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, and the University of Port Harcourt, following controversies over the appointment of their Vice-Chancellors; and the appointment of new executives for three governmental institutions, each with a crucial role in university affairs, namely, the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board; the National Universities Commission; and the Tertiary Education Trust Fund. These show that higher education institutions autonomy and academic freedom are fundamentally keys to the growth and development of human capital which determines the sustainability drive of any society. However, Bussell (2015) pointed out that there are many ways to define corruption in detail. But no definition can be applied to all research purposes.

Indeed, corrupt practices that have hindered the autonomy of higher institutions and academic freedom have repeatedly being hinged around the involvement of the political class in the administrative running of HEIs. There have been instances of imposition of VCs on institutions and poor delineation of involvement by regulatory bodies such as NUC and JAMB, whose role often usurp the senate of higher education institutions. The lack of autonomy and academic freedom in the nation's ivory tower seems to be an impediment to the full realization of the goals of the university (Haastrup, Ekundayo and Adedokun, 2009).

Academic Freedom has been defined as "the freedom to explore, and follow the truth to its logical conclusion, the right of scholars to seek truth and to disseminate same without hindrance, the right to teach, investigate and criticize" (ASUU, 1992). Students as integral part of the academic community have a slightly but complementary definition of academic freedom which include freedom from the imposed restrictions of secondary school life (Yusuf, 2005). ED-2006/Academic Freedom Conference academicians and social scientists about the definition of this concept as being the freedom to undertake teaching and research in a free and unrestricted manner and the ability to publish research findings without fear of political and social consequences, the interpretation of this concept has been different in various social and political contexts. All these are reflections of contemporary view of university autonomy which appears to be characterized by elements of corruption.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The study covered autonomy of higher education, academic freedom and the place of corruption in Nigeria. It

could be said that higher education autonomy in Nigeria today is curtailed by the activities of these governmental institutions because they interfere with the quartet of freedoms essential to higher education success. While it is true that Nigerian higher institutions are essentially free to recruit their lecturers, it must be acknowledged that funding limitations force serious restrictions on who and how many they could recruit. The NUC's financial demand on the universities in carrying out its programme evaluation and accreditation has been particularly controversial, partly because it creates room for corruption and partly because it compromises the quality of such evaluation. The compromise is complicated by the handsome honorarium paid to the evaluators by the host institutions. This will affect the revitalization of Nigerian higher education system in the area of teaching and research. Teaching and teaching methods, including the use of technology, have been negatively impacted by poor funding by federal and state governments. With the federal budgetary allocation to education dipping from 12 to 8 per cent and state education allocations dipping by much more, while teachers and lecturers are owed several arrears of salaries, the questions arise as to the adequacy of teaching equipment and the teaching effectiveness of unpaid teachers with low morale. Corruption is said to pervade every sector of the Nigerian society including education. This is largely placed on the inability of higher institutions in Nigeria to produce and provide trained and high-level relevant manpower by developing the intellectual capability of individuals to enable them to understand, develop and inculcate proper values for the survival of society. This study in essence investigated the underlying issues and recommends checkmating measures based on the findings.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The main objective of this study is to examine autonomy of higher education, academic freedom and the place of corruption in Nigeria. Specifically, this research evaluates:

- ✓ stakeholders (lecturers, non-academic staff, students and employers of labour) on their knowledge and understanding of corruption and its consequences in relation to autonomy of higher education and academic freedom in Nigeria.
- ✓ forms of corruption in HEIs that could affect autonomy of higher education in Nigerian.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study has formulated the following questions for investigation.

- ✓ What is your perception to autonomy of higher education and academic freedom on Nigerian higher institutions?
- ✓ What are the forms of corruption in HEIs that could have negative effect autonomy of higher education in Nigeria?

II. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted the descriptive survey research design. The population of this study comprised 800 academic staff from two universities (University of Ibadan; Ibadan and Ekiti

State University; Ado-Ekiti); The Polytechnic Ibadan; Ibadan and Federal Polytechnic Ede; Emmanuel Alayande College of Education; Oyo and Federal College of Education Osiele in Ogun State with five different companies as employer of labour all in Southwestern Nigerian. A total of 1000 students served as respondents to the developed instrument.

SAMPLE AND SAMPLING

Simple random sampling technique was use for the study.

	Universities	Polytechnics	Colleges of Education	Total
Lecturers	300	250	250	800
Non-academic Staff	200	200	200	600
Students	400	300	300	1000
Employers of labour	5 Production Companies			500

DATA ANALYSIS

RESEARCH QUESTION 1: What is the perception of stakeholders (lecturers, non-academic staff, students and employers of labour) on their knowledge and understanding of corruption and its consequences in relation to autonomy of higher education and academic freedom in Nigeria?

TABLE 1: Showing the perception of stakeholders (lecturers, non-academic staff, students and employers of labour) on their knowledge and understanding of corruption and its consequences in relation to autonomy of higher education and academic freedom in Nigeria.

Demand for bribe:	Lecturers			Non-academic staff			Students			Employers of labour		
	Likely	Not Likely	Total	Likely	Not Likely	Total	Likely	Not Likely	Total	Likely	Not Likely	Total
Admission Encounter	168	632	800	148	452	600	927	73	1000	287	213	500
Bureaucratic red tape	733	67	800	321	279	600	520	480	1000	462	38	500
Unsolicited intervention (help)	254	546	800	48	552	600	678	322	1000	411	89	500
Need for 'connections'	734	66	800	487	113	600	522	478	1000	372	128	500
Secrecy about process	76	724	800	49	551	600	502	498	1000	389	112	500
Parental involvement	101	699	800	52	548	600	620	380	1000	421	79	500

Table 1

Table 1 shows that admission encounter process as an indication to assess the perception stakeholders (lecturers, non-academic staff, students and employers of labour) on their knowledge and understanding of corruption and its consequences in relation to autonomy of HEIs and academic freedom in Nigeria. Demand for bribe in terms of admission encounter, 79% and 75.3%, of the lectures and non-academic staff respectively were with the view that this is not likely to happen. On the contrary; students (92.7%) and employers of labour (57.4%).The perception of lectures and non-academic staffin view of unsolicited intervention (help)as another means to demand for bribe shows that lecturers (68.3%), non-academic (92.0%), students (32.2%) and employer of labour

(17.8%) that corruption is not likely to happen. In terms of the bureaucratic red tape; (91.6%) of lecturers, (53.5%) of non-academic staff and (74.4%) of the employers of labour were with the view that this is likely to happen while (52.2%) of students had a contrary opinion. This is also represented on graph 2:

GRAPH 2: Graphical illustration of stakeholders (lecturers, non-academic staff, students and employers of labour) on their knowledge and understanding of corruption and its consequences in relation to autonomy of higher education and academic freedom in Nigeria.

RESEARCH QUESTION 2: What are the forms of corruption in HEIs that could have negative effect on the autonomy of higher education in Nigeria?

Major Theme	Lecturers		Non Academic staff		Students		Employers of Labour	
	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree
Bribe/Bribery	2 (0.25%)	798 (99.75%)	89 (14.8%)	511 (85.2%)	869 (86.9%)	131 (13.1%)	252 (50.4%)	248 (49.6%)
Fraud	102 (12.8%)	698 (87.3%)	298 (49.7%)	302 (50.3%)	921 (92.1%)	79 (7.9%)	251 (50.2%)	249 (49.8%)
Negligence	610 (76.3%)	190 (23.8%)	301 (50.2%)	299 (49.8%)	542 (54.2%)	458 (45.8%)	231 (46.2%)	269 (53.8%)
Exam Malpractice	27 (3.4%)	773 (96.6%)	278 (46.3%)	322 (53.7%)	502 (50.2%)	498 (49.8%)	289 (57.8%)	211 (42.2%)
Theft/stealing	331 (3.4%)	469 (58.6%)	487 (81.2%)	113 (18.8%)	89 (8.9%)	911 (91.1%)	248 (49.6%)	252 (50.4%)
Unruly Behaviour	289 (36.1%)	511 (63.9%)	481 (80.2%)	119 (19.8%)	531 (53.1%)	469 (46.9%)	351 (70.2%)	149 (29.8%)
Compulsory selling of course materials	456 (57.0%)	344 (43.0%)	502 (83.7%)	98 (16.3%)	738 (73.8%)	262 (26.2%)	427 (85.4%)	73 (14.6%)

Table 2: Forms of corruption in HEIs that could have negative effect autonomy of higher education in Nigeria?

Table 2 shows that majority of the lecturer who responded to the indices set to determine the forms of corruption in HEIs that could have negative effect autonomy of higher education in Nigeriawere with the view that bribe/bribery 798 (99.75%) for lecturers and 511 (85.2%) for non-academic staff could not occur as a major form of corruption. This was against the view of students and employer of labour who agreed at 869 (86.9%) and 252(50.4%) respectively. This trend in the view of the respondents was also similar in terms of HEIs to commit fraud.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS OF FINDINGS

The result form the study revealed that stakeholders (lecturers, non-academic staff, students and employers of labour) have divergent opinion on their knowledge and understanding of corruption and its consequences in relation to autonomy of higher education and academic freedom in Nigeria. Subsequently, this is also applicable to the various forms of corruption in HEIs that could have negative effect autonomy of higher education in Nigeria. Based on these, it is very difficult to ascertain the view of stakeholders on autonomy of higher education, academic freedom and the place of corruption in Nigerians together.

Considering the outcome of the study, conclusion could be made on the fact that full autonomy is impossible to the extent that HEIs are funded by Federal and State governments. Base on this, there is no institution that could be granted full autonomy. This will contradict the classical model. What should be advocated for should be full academic freedom for each university to decide on who teaches what, how, and to whom. Similarly, in order for these submissions to happen, the

functions of JAMB, the NUC, and the Ministry of Education in relation to the universities should be critically reviewed. By so doing, HEIs in Nigeria will be able to check the excess in the areas of bribe/bribery from students to pass, fraud which take different forms during the teaching-learning process. Also is in the area of examination malpractices and unruly behaviour and unnecessary selling of handout or hand book as course materials before students could pass courses.

IV. CONCLUSION

Considering autonomy of higher education, academic freedom and the place of corruption in Nigeria through admission encounter process, bureaucratic red tape, unsolicited intervention (help), need for "connection", secrecy about process and parental involvement; it could be concluded that these are not likely to happen based on the views of academic staff and non-academic staff but a contrary view was elicited from the students and employers of labour. In terms of the form of corruption in HEIs that could have negative effect on autonomy of higher education in Nigeria, academic and non-academic staff of higher institution disagreed on bribe/bribery, fraud, negligence, examination malpractices, theft/stealing, unruly behaviour and compulsory selling of course materials while students and employer of labour have contrary view on this.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

Corruption in higher education in Nigeria was seen as multidimensional and highly complex for the development of the sector. More detailed studies are needed to unveil the mechanisms and mechanics of corruption in Nigerian higher education among staff as well as the management. In terms of mitigating strategies against corruption in HEIs in Nigeria, there should be clarity of function as HEIs owned by government, interference should be minimized. The government should fund their HEIs fully while the management of these institutions should be solely left in the hand of the management of the institutions upholding

transparency and accountability dispositions. In addition, execution of decentralization among HEIs should be highly structured in hierarchical manners and so it is crucial for HEIs to have complete academic freedom over internal matters that directly or indirectly affect knowledge development, research and community development.

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