CURBING CASES OF EXTORTION AMONG ACADEMICS IN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study investigated the cases of extortion in tertiary institutions and the strategies used for curbing them. Three research questions and one hypothesis guided the study. The population comprised 8668 final year students, Heads of Departments (HODs) and Deans in 4 tertiary institutions in Abia State. A sample of 280 respondents (200 students and 80 HODs and Deans) was used for the study. A four point modified Likert type questionnaire titled Curbing Academics Extortion Questionnaire (CAEQ), made up of 18 and 6 items respectively were used. The instruments were validated by experts in Educational Management and Planning and Educational Measurement and Evaluation. They were also subjected to a test re-test method of reliability, after being administered to some respondents in tertiary institutions in Imo State. A reliability coefficient of 0.73 and 0.78 respectively were determined. Copies of the two questionnaires with response scale of strongly agreed, Agreed, Disagreed and Strongly disagreed were administered to the respondents. The data were analyzed using mean, standard deviation and Z-test. The results indicated that, various forms of extortion are prevalent and are being encouraged by many factors. Also, that the strategies for curbing extortion are ineffective and there is no significant difference between the opinions of university staff and that of Abia Poly/COEA on this issue. The paper

recommended that value re-orientation among academics and other ways of curbing extortion require collaboration of stakeholders in order to achieve effective solution to the problem.

Keywords: Curbing, Academics, extortion, tertiary institutions, sustainable development.

Introduction

Education being a basic tool for national development has attracted a lot of attention and investments by nations of the world who aspire to achieve the goal of sustainable development. One of the ingredients needed for the achievement of this goal is the right values which the nation must acquire and also transmit from generation to generation. The tertiary institution is well positioned to ensure the achievement of this national goal because of its importance in human capital development. According to Nwangwu (2007), tertiary education refers to the education given after secondary education in universities, colleges of education, polytechnics as well as other institutions offering correspondence courses. The critical role which tertiary institutions should play in our national development is vividly summarized in the National Policy on Education (2004) among others, as:

- To contribute to national development through relevant high -level manpower training
- To develop and inculcate proper values for the survival of society
- To promote scholarship, community service, national unity and international understanding.

The academic staff is the power house of tertiary institutions, without which they cannot function. Mgbekem (2004) observed that the academic staff (Lecturers) are the teaching staff of tertiary institutions. They also carry out other major responsibilities such as academic and professional leadership inform of Unit/Departmental headship, deanship of colleges/faculties and the office of the vice chancellor etc. Therefore, no group of persons plays a more critical role in the realization of the goals of tertiary education for sustainable national development than the academic staff (Mgbekem, 2004).

National development may refer to desirable advancement in the socio-economic, political, scientific and technological life of a nation. And when a nation is able to keep development at a given pace over a long period of time, it can be seen as sustainable development. The concept of Sustainable National Development remains the modern parameter of measuring development. The Bruntland Commission, (1987) defined sustainable Development as "the development that meets the needs of the

present without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs." In another definition, Munasinghe (2004), Sustainable National Development is a process of improving the range of opportunities that will enable individual humans and communities to achieve their aspirations and full potential over a sustained period of time while maintaining the resilience of economic, social and environmental systems. Age (2005), identified some objectives which Sustainable National Development is expected to realize: increase capital income and employment, promoting human welfare, satisfying basic needs and protecting the environment.

The academic staff contributes to national development in diverse ways. Through effective teaching and research, they help to produce highly knowledgeable and skilled graduates that will fast track the growth of the economy, for the overall development of the nation. Also through consultancy projects and other community development programmes, the academics imparts on the life of its nation directly or indirectly to engender development and sustain it. When this great responsibility is sacrificed on the altar of extortion, it poses grave consequences on the value system of the students and national development. According to Achibong (2012), the academic staff is crucial to the functioning of the knowledge industry. Societies rely on their activities in tertiary institutions such as universities to teach, carry out research and offer several community services, in order to achieve desired social, economic and technological development. In view of the above, the academic staff must therefore be a person of unquestionable character and necessarily be a self- disciplined individual with high moral standards. As it is with human nature, individuals with some negative traits have infiltrated the academic staff in recent times. Unfortunately, one of those negative traits that is growing rapidly and seriously pulling down the Ivory tower is extortion (Odukoya, 2014).

Extortion in tertiary institution may refer to any action of individuals or group of persons that tend to cause or induce students to make illegal payments for reading materials, continuous assessment and examination related issues on campus (Odukoya, 2014). Odukoya, contended that such actions or insinuations are inimical to the tenets of the University and the academic profession and must always be condemned in strong terms. Extortion of students by academic staff comes in different forms. Ocheyenor (2016) observed that sorting or extortion is a form of academic corruption which occurs in diverse ways. He noted that extortion may take place during selling of text books and other reading materials, marking and recording of continuous assessment and examination grades. He stressed further that these lecturers either threaten students to get the money or use Class Representatives and other familiar students to take advantage of the class.

The growing cases of corrupt practices in University campuses is alarming (Kuranchie,Twene& Mensah, 2014). Kuranchie et al, stated that asides sexual

harassment, extortion of various kinds, is perceived as one of the worst forms of corruption growing steadily on university campus in recent years. According to them, this may come in various forms such as selling of substandard reading materials, selling of continuous assessment grades to highest bidders and sorting of examination grades. Abiodun (2015) also identified various ways by which lecturers extort their students in tertiary institutions. He observed that graduates who are termed unemployable due to their inability to pass job interviews may have paid for their grades in one way or the other while in school. Abiodun, further stressed that many of such graduates were products of sorting and other illegal forms of acquiring continuous assessment and examination grades.

The alarming rate at which the menace of extortion has continued unabated in our tertiary institutions is of great concern to the academia. Several researches have been carried out in this regard and many more academic discuss organized to determine the root causes and possible solutions. It has been observed that greed and loss of moral values among others are the underlying factors encouraging extortion among academic staff. Achibong (2012) identified lack of ethical values, students and parent's pressure, faulty employment procedures, poor supervision and other management related issues as factors that encourage extortion in universities. Achibong, emphasized that the delay in meting out deserved punishment to offenders due to the bureaucratic process involved in disciplinary procedures, 'sacred cow' syndrome in the society that shields culprits and other factors, often provide the atmosphere for morally weak academics to indulge in extortion. Also, it is often difficult for management to punish culprits due to students' unwillingness to testify against such staff for the fear of reprisal or victimization by other academic staff. Similarly, Kuranchie, Twene and Mensah (2014) noted that academics who indulge in extortion and other corrupt practices are those who are immoral and have no regard for professional ethics and to worsen the matter, university management are not firm enough to deal with the problem. Akinyemi (2015) supported the above when he stated in summary, that academic corruption thrives on factors bothering or relating to lecturers' weaknesses, students' evil intents and authorities' failure to act.

While discussing on strategies for curbing extortion in tertiary institutions, Akinyemi (2015) advocated for a holistic approach involving management, lecturers and students in collaboration with government, parents and other relevant agencies. He advised the erring academics to always re-examine their consciences in order to serve as role models for students. He also encouraged management and academic unions to be proactive when there is need to sanction the few bad elements whose activities are capable of pulling down the Ivory tower and slowdown the pace of national development. Odukoya (2015) opined that the world over is knowledge driven and so academics must be vanguard of knowledge resulting from students' hard work and

honesty. He charged the academic community especially students to report any cases of unethical practices among lecturers to the unions and management for appropriate actions. Abdulkareem and Alabi (2004) and Akinyemi (2015) all supported the setting up of government anticorruption machineries in campuses to fish out and punish bad eggs among staff and students.

Nigeria as a nation striving towards achieving sustainable development cannot do without the contributions of academics. The fact that extortion and other corrupt practices on campus, to a large extent bother on our value system, underscores the need for value reorientation among staff and students. Academics must learn to keep their social life within the level of their legitimate income and be morally upright at all times. Students should be honest and always work hard to earn their grades. Curbing extortion and other unethical practice on campus should be seen as a collective responsibility of management, staff and students, in collaboration with government and other agencies.

Statement of the Problem

Tertiary education in Nigeria is challenged by series of problems such as inadequate funding, decaying infrastructure and equipment, as well as inadequacy of qualified academics and so on. While efforts are being made to tackle these challenges, there are indications that the menace of extortion is on the increase by the day. Some lecturers now charge money for all kinds of substandard reading materials and even Continuous Assessment grades as against the rules of tertiary institutions. The problem of this study therefore, is what forms of extortion are prevalent in tertiary institutions, the factors that encourage them and how they can be controlled. This study would be beneficial to the government, administrators and lecturers in tertiary institution, students, parents and the general public. It will serve as an eye opener to all the Tertiary education stake holders to see the severity of this problem and the possible ways of eradicating it.

Research Questions

The Study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the forms of extortions prevalent among Academics in tertiary institutions?
2. What are the factors that contribute to extortion in tertiary institutions?
3. What are the strategies for curbing extortion in tertiary institutions?

Hypothesis

H01: There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of management staff (HODs and Deans) in Universities and that of Abia State Polytechnic / College of Education on the strategies for curbing extortion.

Methodology

This study employed a descriptive survey design. The population of the study comprised all the final year students, heads of departments and deans of faculties in the four tertiary institutions in Abia State. They are Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike (MOUAU), Abia State University Uturu (ABSU), College of Education Arochukwu (COEA) and Abia State Polytechnic Aba (Abia Poly). There are about 8500 final year students and 168 Deans and Heads of Department in these four Institutions, giving a total population of 8668. Random sampling with replacement was used to select 200 students and 80 staff of these four institutions. 50 students and 20 staff (14 HODs and 6 Deans) were sampled from each of the institutions, giving a total sample size of 280 subjects used for the study. Two set of four point modified Likert type questionnaire titled "Curbing Academics Extortion Questionnaire (CAEQ) were used, one for the students and one for the HODs/Deans. The one for students was made up of 18 items while that of HODs/ Deans contained 6 items. The items in the two questionnaires have a response scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD) respectively. The instruments were validated by expects in educational Administration and Planning and Educational Measurement and Evaluation. They were also subjected to test re-test method of reliability, using Product-Moment reliability statistic, after being administered to some students and administrators in two tertiary institutions in Imo State. Reliability coefficients of 0.73 and 0.78 respectively were determined. Copies of the two questionnaires were administered by hand with the help 3 research assistants to the respondents. A total of 192 copies of questionnaire for students and 69 for staff were received and the data analyzed with mean, standard deviation, pooled mean and z-test.

Results

Research Question 1: What are the forms of extortions prevalent among Academics in Tertiary Institutions?

Table 1: **Mean score and standard deviation of the forms of extortion prevalent among academics in tertiary institutions**

S/No	Items	Mean	SD	Decision
1.	Buying of textbook/handout is compulsory in my department	4.55	0.86	Accept
2.	Using course Reps to collect levy or donations	4.03	0.94	Accept

S/No	Items	Mean	SD	Decision
	during lecturer's ceremonies e.g wedding, child dedication etc			
3.	Using course Reps to collect donations from students for recharge card	3.30	1.04	Accept
4.	Using course Reps to collect money from students during submission of assignments	2.80	0.84	Accept
5.	Charging money for high continuous assessment grades	2.75	0.70	Accept
6.	Charging money for high grades after marking examination scripts for money	2.84	0.98	Accept
7.	Leakage of examination questions for money	2.84	0.98	Accept
8.	Using P.G students, course Reps etc to mark examination scripts and awarding grades for money	3.65	1.09	Accept
9.	Writing projects for students in exchange for money	4.18	0.60	Accept
10.	Charging students money for old project copies	3.80	0.89	Accept
11.	Charging students for compulsory project data analysis	4.50	0.88	Accept

Pooled mean 3.59 Accept

Table 1 show that the mean score of respondents in all the items 1-11 are more than the bench of 2.50. The pooled mean of 3.59 which is also more than the bench mark, indicated that the respondents accepted that all these forms of extortion by academics staff are highly prevalent in the four tertiary institutions in the study area.

Research question 2: What are the factors that contribute to extortion in Tertiary Institutions?

Table 2:   Mean score and standard deviation of factors that contribute to extortion in tertiary institutions

S/No	Items	Mean	SD	Decision
12.	Lecturers not covering their scheme before examination	4.02	0.81	Accept
13.	Greed and love money	3.84	1.16	Accept
14.	Lecturers not being punished by management for extortion	4.22	063	Accept
15.	Course reps benefiting from extortion by lecturers	3.36	1.92	Accept

16.	Students encouraging extortion in order to acquire higher grades	3.23	1.15	Accept
17.	Students not being hardworking leading to examination failure	3.68	1.30	Accept
18.	Students unwillingness to report or testify in cases of extortion	4.20	0.79	Accept

Pooled mean 3.80 Accept

Table 2: above shows that the mean score of respondents in all the items 12-18 are more than then benchmark of 2.50. Also, the pooled mean of 3.80 which is above the bench mark indicated that all the factors mentioned in the table are highly encouraging the problem of extortion in the study area.

Research question: 3 What are the strategies for curbing extortion in Tertiary Institutions?

Table 3:   **Mean score and standard deviation of strategies used by management for curbing extortion in tertiary institutions.**

S/No	Items	Mean	SD	Decision
1.	Organizing regular seminar/workshops on academic ethics	2.34	1.50	Disagree
2.	Appropriate sanction for not completing scheme (Lecturers) before examination	2.13	1.90	Disagree
3.	Regular moderation of examination results by depts./faculties	1.59	0.84	Disagree
4.	Demotion of lecturers for cases of extortion	1.34	2.30	Disagree
5.	Suspension of extortion culprits	2.02	1..03	Disagree
6.	Termination of appointment of extortion culprits	1.41	0.56	Disagree

Pooled mean 1.81 Disagree

Table 3 shows the mean score of respondents in items 1-6. All the mean scores and the pooled mean of 1.81 are below the benchmark. This indicated that the respondents totally disagreed, which means the strategies being used by management for curbing extortions in these institutions are not effective.

Hypothesis 1

There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of management staff (HODs and Deans) in Universities and that of Abia State Polytechnic / College of Education on the strategies being used for curbing extortion.

Table 4:   **Z-test analysis of Management Staff in Universities and thatof College of Education /Abia Poly on strategies being used for curbing extortion**

Institutions	N	X	SD	Df	Z-cal	Z tab	Decision
Universities	37	1.62	0.72	67	0.36	1.96	
COE & Poly	32	1.84	0.91				N.S

Table 4 above shows that the Z- calculated value of 0.36 is less than the z-table value of 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance. This however, indicated that the null hypothesis stated above is accepted. Therefore, there is no significant difference in the mean ratings of HODS and Deans in Universities and other tertiary institutions (COE and Poly) on the strategies being used for curbing extortion in the tertiary institutions.

Discussions

The findings in table one shows that all the items and the pooled mean are above the benchmark, which means the respondents accepted that these forms of extortion such as charging money for project writing, project analysis continuous assessment, examination script grading, substandard reading materials and all kinds of compulsory donations to the Lecturer through the Class Reps etc, are highly prevalent. This result agrees with Kuranchie, Twene and Mensah (2014) who decried the growing cases of corrupt practices among academics, stating that aside sexual harassment, extortions of various forms such as sale of substandard reading materials, selling of examination, continuous assessment and project grades etc is most prevalent in tertiary institutions.

The result of data analysis in table two shows that both the items and the pooled mean are above the benchmark. The respondents accepted that the following factors such as greed, lack of moral values, inability to cover the scheme of work before exams, poor management handling of extortion cases, Class Representatives benefitting from extortion and poor attitude to work on the part of students etc are the major factors contributing to the growing cases of extortion in the study area. This finding is in agreement with Achibong (2012) and Akinyemi (2015) who identified greed, lack of moral values, student and parent pressure, students' unwillingness to testify in cases of extortion and managements' failure to sanction offenders etc as the common factors encouraging extortion in schools.

The findings in table three shows that all the items and the pooled mean are less than the benchmark. It indicated that all the respondents totally disagreed. This means that the strategies for curbing extortion in these institutions such as appropriate sanction

for offenders, seminars/workshops, regular moderation of examination/continuous assessment grades etc are ineffective. This finding agrees with Akinyemi (2015), who emphasized on the ineffective strategies of tertiary institution managers and rather advocated for a holistic approach in curbing extortion which involves the collaboration of tertiary institutions with government, parents and other agencies.

Recommendations

Based on the findings above, the following recommendations are made:

1. The school management and unions should organize seminars and workshops for academics and students regularly to encourage value reorientation.
2. Management should institute mechanisms for rewarding hardwork and honesty among staff and students in order to discourage extortion.
3. There should be synergy between the school management, government and other stakeholders in the strategies for curbing extortion.

Conclusion

This study concluded that there is a high prevalence of extortion in tertiary institutions which is being encouraged by many factors relating to students, staff and management. The current state of ineffective strategies for curbing extortion, demands that there should be collaboration among stakeholders such as tertiary institutions, government, parents, security agencies, NGOs etc in order to proffer an effective and timely solutions to the problem. This will help the academics to plays their roles effectively towards, the achievement of sustainable national development in Nigeria.

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