CORRUPTION AND RETROGRESSION OF THE EDUCATIONAL SECTOR: THE WAY FORWARD

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Abstract
The paper analyses corruption and the retrogression of the educational sector and the way forward. Secondary sources of data were used. The paper notes that corruption has eaten deep into the fabrics of the Nigerian society which is affecting all the sectors of the economy including the educational sector where various acts of academic corruption are perpetrated. The paper notes that the educational sector is as corrupt as the public and private sectors where there is low efficiency, wastage and misappropriation of resources which is affecting the quality of primary and secondary school leavers as well as graduates of tertiary institutions. Unfortunately, the educational sector seems to escape critical observations regarding the corrupt conduct of educational bureaucrats, administrators of various educational institutions and even the students. It was recommended among others that there should be a systematic overhauling of the educational system by the Federal Ministry of Education by strengthening the regulatory systems and management and that the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) and the Independent and Corrupt Practices commission (ICPC) should urgently turn their searchlight towards the educational sector in order sanitize it.

Keywords: Corruption, retrogression, educational sector, way forward

Introduction
Corruption has grown so widespread and sophisticated that it threatens to undermine the very fabric of society. It is a global phenomenon which affects individuals, institutions, countries and global developments. In some countries, almost nothing gets done unless a palm is greased. A bribe to the right person will enable one to gain admission into an institution of learning, pass an exam, drive freely through a security check point, get a driver’s license, win a contract, jump a queue, get a job or win a lawsuit. Corruption is like a heavy pollution that weighs on people’s spirits. It permeates the very fabrics of every society, irrespective of whether it is developed or developing, large or small, planned or market economy (World Bank, 2004).
In Nigeria since 2015, the print and electronic media have reported glaring occurrences of corrupt practices such as the pensions fund scam, oil subsidy scam, and several cases of diversions of public funds by high ranking public servants in government ministries, departments and agencies following President Buhari’s anti-corruption war. In 2012, the Transparency International Corruption Perception Index ranked Nigeria among the most corrupt countries in the world as it had done in the preceding years.

Corruption
The concept of corruption has no single universally accepted definition but available literature on corruption indicates that the patterns of corruption vary from country to country. The UNDP Anti-Corruption Practice Note of 2004, referring back to a policy paper approved by the Executive Committee in 1998, defines corruption as “the misuse of public power, office or authority for private benefit through bribery, extortion, influence peddling, nepotism, fraud, speed money or embezzlement. Although corruption is often considered a sin of government and public servants, it also prevails in the private sector (United Nations Development Programme, UNDP, 2010). Transparency International (2010) defines corruption as “the abuse of entrusted power for private gain”. The World Bank (2000) defined corruption as the abuse of public office for private gain. It is any practice, act or omission of public official that is a deviation from the norm and cannot be openly acknowledged and is hidden from the public eye. Lipset and Lenz (2000) defined corruption as “an effort to secure wealth or power through illegal means. It is private gain at public expense. Corruption introduces discrimination and arbitraries in decision-making so that rules, regulations and procedures become unimportant within a course of action. Corruption has negative attributes such as bribes, over invoicing, advance fee fraud (419), election rigging and falsification of voters’ registers, money laundering, examination malpractices, nepotism, identity theft etc.

Over the centuries, anticorruption laws have proliferated. Nevertheless, legislation has not succeeded in curbing corruption. Millions of bribes change hands every day, and billions of people suffer the consequences. Bribery and corruption run especially rampant in the world of commerce. Some companies allocate a third of all their profits just to pay off corrupt government bureaucrats. As the scale of this corruption has increased, the consequences have become catastrophic. During the last decade, “crony” capitalism—corrupt business practices that favor the privileged few who have good connections—is said to have ruined the economies of entire countries (Gray & Kaufmann, 1998).

Inevitably, the ones who suffer most from corruption and the economic devastation it spawns are the poor—the ones who are rarely in a position to bribe anyone. As Klitgaard (2000) succinctly puts it, “corruption is but one form of oppression.” The author lamented that at its height, the Roman Empire was the greatest human administration the world had ever seen. Roman legislation was so effective that it is still the basis of the legal code of many countries. Despite Rome’s achievements, however, her legions were unable to conquer corruption as one insidious enemy. Consequently, corruption hastened Rome’s downfall. This can happen to Nigeria if urgent and adequate measures are not taken.

Causes of Corruption
The causes of corruption are summarized by Klitgaard (2000) as follows:

i) Two powerful forces that keep stoking the fires of corruption are selfishness and greed. Because of selfishness, corrupt people turn a blind eye to the suffering that their corruption inflicts on others, and they justify bribery simply because they benefit from it. The more material benefits they amass, the greedier they become. This is in agreement with the saying that a mere lover of silver will not be satisfied with silver, neither any lover of wealth with income. Granted, greed may be good for making money, but it invariably winks at corruption and illegality.

ii) For some, being corrupt may be the easiest way or indeed the only way to get what they want.

iii) At times, a bribe may provide a convenient means of avoiding punishment.

iv) Many who observe that politicians, policemen, and judges seem to ignore corruption or even practice it themselves merely follow their example.

v) As corruption snowballs, it becomes more acceptable until it is finally a way of life.
vi) People with pitifully low wages come to feel that they have no option. They have to demand bribes if they want to make a decent living.

vii) When those who extort bribes or pay them to gain an unfair advantage go unpunished, few are prepared to swim against the tide.

viii) Similarly, because sentence against a corrupt individual has not been executed speedily, the heart of others who are watching has become fully set in them to engage in corruption too.

ix) Human governments are funded by their citizens, most often through taxes and duties. This flow of money tempts some officials to steal, while others accept bribes from individuals who want them to reduce their taxes or other payments due the government. A vicious circle may result—the government raises taxes to make up for such losses, and this in turn fosters more corruption. In an environment like that, people who are honest may suffer the most.

In their own contribution, Gray and Kaufmann (1998) identified the following seven factors that trigger corruption:

i) Value of wages and salaries.

ii) Presence of strong opportunities and awareness of how to perpetrate corruption.

iii) Weak measures of accountability.

iv) Large population in a given area.

v) Availability of natural resources (wealth).

vi) Lack of political will to curb corruption.

vii) Assistance from the global community to perpetrate corruption.

Dike (2005) listed other causes of corruption to include:

i) Great inequality in the distribution of wealth.

ii) Political office holding as the primary means of gaining access to wealth.

iii) Conflict between changing moral codes.

iv) Weakness of social and governmental enforcement mechanisms against corrupt practices and

v) Absence of strong sense of nationality.

Corruption in the Educational Sector

As successive governments of Nigeria put different measures to curb corruption through different commissions, they have particularly beamed their searchlight on the behaviour of public officials (civil servants, military and police personnel, elected officials etc.) and former public officials, contractors, business associates of public officials and families of public officials. However, one sector of society that has escaped the penetrating searchlight is the educational sector. The educational sector seems to escape critical observation regarding the conduct of educational bureaucrats, administrators of various educational institutions and even the students. It is argued that the educational sector is as corrupt as the public and private sectors (Hallak, 2002). Therefore, the war on corruption cannot be won without making a determined effort to purge the educational sector of the psychosocial beast. It appears that there is a symbiotic relationship between the educational culture and the psychosocial and political culture of the society at large. What happens to society at large affects the educational sector and whatever happens in the educational sector affects the society at large. Those in the educational sector learn and adopt predominant values generated by society at large and the society at large learns and adopts predominant values generated by the educational sector (Dike, 2005).

It is very necessary to clean the educational sector since education is the second or third most powerful and effective instrument of socialization. Indeed, after the family and possibly religion, education follows as the most important agent of socializing children and the youths generally (Mahuta, 2007). As a result, if children and the youths are not properly socialized, they are very likely to end up adopting destructive social values. As can be seen, Nigerian youths, for the past twenty or more years, have increasingly adopted habits and tendencies that are destructive to social harmony because the values in society tend to push them in that direction. Most of these habits and tendencies are eating deeply into the philosophy and
moral foundation of education in the country. The educational sector today, seems to produce graduates who are not sufficiently disciplined and equipped with the appropriate academic and professional skills, hence, they have no moral restrictions about breaking the law, perpetually looking for shortcuts to amass wealth and are morally bankrupt. These developments are byproducts associated with corruption in the educational sector as the society at large continues to spread corruption around.

The Nigerian educational environment, due to academic corruption, is turning many young men and women into an uncaring, unnecessarily aggressive, and the devil-may-care kinds of individuals. They have been socialized to believe that might is preferable to civility, that morality and ethics are not important virtues, and that it is important to win at all cost. They have increasingly been socialized to believe that it is proper and necessary to take whatever action, including killing in order to prevail in academics. They learn these behaviors from the administrators and teachers/instructors/lecturers/professors who supposed to mold them into hard-working honorable citizens. Having imbibed these kinds of values and behaviors, many university graduates have become amoral. They lie, cheat, manipulate, threaten, exploit and kill in some instances to achieve selfish desires.

It will take about ten to twenty years to re-orient the current educational culture and to enable students appreciate the importance of academic proficiency, the value of knowledge, and the significance of being honorable leaders in the future. There is no doubt that many young politicians, including governors, senators and local government chairs, who have ruled Nigeria in the last seven years are products of the spoilt educational system in Nigeria (Dike, 2005).

It is time for the anti-corruption war to be extended to the educational sector. The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and other corruption fighting agencies should focus their investigative tentacles on educational institutions and compel those who have questions to answer to explain what happened under their administrative supervision of various educational institutions. It is not possible to wipe out corruption while educational institutions are allowed to cultivate corrupting and amoral behaviors.

The youths are the future leaders of the country. This means that the national security of the nation depends greatly on the educational system to produce able leaders. If the educational sector fails to produce able leaders, then the country is doomed. While the educational sectors in Japanese, Chinese, Indian, Brazilian etc. are producing top notch management information specialists, scientists, engineers, doctors etc., the Nigerian educational system is producing some individuals who are perpetually preoccupied with looking for ways to exploit the society for their personal advantage, instead of contributing positively to the advancement of the society at large (Hallak, 2002). Indeed, an educational system that extols financial quick fixes is not an education at all.

The causes of corruption in the educational sector in Nigeria as highlighted by Oyinloha (2009) include the followings:

i) **Poverty:** This can take effect especially when teachers are poorly paid too assertive promotion or been motivated. This can also occurred as a result of exploitation from the principal to the students through sorting to upgrade their continuous assessment (CA) to get higher grade during or before the examination.

ii) **Paper qualification:** So much emphasis on paper qualification for employment or promotion forces people to uncontrollably engage in all forms of corruption to acquire such qualifications from institutions of learning.

iii) **Unemployment:** This may take effect in a situation whereby the applicant may find it difficult to secure a job in his profession and finally find himself in a teaching field which may not be his basic profession as a result of unemployment in the labour market.

iv) **Low teachers' salaries:** When teachers are poorly paid, they may be compelled to use corrupt practices to get money.
Glaring Instances of Corruption in the Educational Sector

Unlike in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, the 1990s and 2000s are characterized by poor academic standards, unorganized extra-curricula activities and wretched infrastructures and facilities. Nigeria’s school compounds and campuses today are like facilities located in war zones. They are unkept and in a serious state of disrepair. Many primary and secondary schools are comparable to makeshift refugee camps in a war zone with broken windows, chairs, and desks. In some schools, the roofs are leaky and when it rains, classes are interrupted. Most polytechnics, colleges of education and university campuses today are like archeological artifacts due to lack of maintenance. It appears that many educational administrators today are not as motivated and committed as their counterparts three decades ago. This means that some chancellors, vice chancellors, registrars, rectors, provosts, deans, administrators, principals, headmasters and teachers really do not care about what happens to education in the country.

Corruption began to negatively affect education in a serious manner in the middle and late 1980s as the psychosocial beast (corruption) beclouded the minds of those who ruled Nigeria. The scramble to loot as much as possible by those in position of power resulted in the neglect of the educational sector (Mahuta, 2007). Suddenly, education that was considered to be the corner stone for the development and modernization of Nigeria was ignored, neglected, and starved of the necessary funds and policy initiatives needed to move it forward. Increasingly, national and state governments started cutting educational funds, thereby, creating the impression that education was no longer an important strategic tool in directing the country’s growth. With this development, the looting of educational funds became acceptable. Thus, it became fashionable to loot funds allocated for academic enhancement, capacity building, infrastructural development, modernization, and rehabilitation of educational institutions. The looting involved educational policymakers, bureaucrats in various educational ministries, and school officials responsible for administering the schools (primary, secondary schools and tertiary institutions). Since the late 1980s until today, education has been treated as an unimportant variable in the development of the country. Hence, elected officials in the current dispensation rarely talk about education. As a result, school buildings are crumbling; teachers are rarely paid in some states culminating in incessant strike actions. The value of teaching has been reduced to a point of irrelevance, so much so that teachers and others are forced to engage in other business activities in order to put food on the table at the expense of intensive classroom and research activities.

In Nigeria today, there is no concern for students. There are less scholarship programs today than in the 1970s and 1980s. During those two decades, both federal and state governments provided all kinds of scholarships to enable Nigerian youths to pursue higher education either in Nigeria or overseas. During the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, many secondary schools had dormitories. This was the case for both private and public secondary schools. The dormitories were well kept and supervised. As a result, it was very easy for a student in the East to go to secondary school in the North or West and vice versa while their parents went to sleep. Students ate three times a day and were generally well taken care of. Today, there is a concerted effort to eliminate dormitories, so that an increasing number of students commute from home. Quality has been sacrificed due to the insatiable desire by politicians, some educational bureaucrats, school administrators and teachers/instructors/lecturers/professors to find the easiest means to accumulate wealth. Thus, academic performance is not taken seriously anymore.

The followings are practical instances of corruption in the educational sector:

1. Corruption is so pronounced in the educational sector that students are occasionally compelled to pay for grades in many secondary and tertiary institutions by some professors/lecturers/instructors/teachers. Students who have money do not have to even attend classes to get passing grades. They pay according to the grades they want. On the other hand, students who cannot afford to pay are sometimes penalized by some teachers/instructors/professors and school officials for failing to pay.

2. On many tertiary institutions, some lecturers, registrars, and record keepers sometimes intentionally withhold students’ grades until they pay a certain amount of money.
3. It is unfortunate and very disheartening to note that in some higher institutions in Nigeria, higher degrees like Masters degree and Doctor of Philosophy degree have been paid for and awarded to candidates who cannot defend such degrees anywhere.

4. In some tertiary institutions, some instructors/lecturers/professors sell makeshift copies of textbook extracts. Students are expected to buy the copies or are forced to fail the classes for failure to buy. It is speculated that many professors accumulate wealth through this way to build houses and establish other businesses. Selling copies of book extracts is considered to be a very lucrative business for unscrupulous faculty members.

5. In some tertiary institutions, some instructors/lecturers/professors will deliberately make the structure and content of examination questions so tough for the students to answer. At the end of the examination, students are forced to “see” their instructors/lecturers/professors concerned or they risk failing the course.

6. It is an open secret that many students pay professional examination takers to take standardized examinations for them. This, it is rumored, seems to be very prevalent in the secondary schools. It is further rumored that sometimes, principals and teachers participate in the business of paying professional examination takers so that the record of academic performance in the standardized examinations is improved. Sometimes students who are about to graduate from senior secondary schools are expected to contribute funds for the purpose of hiring examination takers to impersonate them in either SSCE, NECO examination etc aided by the school management.

7. It is also an open secret that the process of taking standardized examinations involves paying invigilators at the exam centers to ignore malpractices by the students or allow the professional examination takers to do their jobs for their clients. It is so sad that so many miracle centers exist today where candidates who hardly make a correct sentence in English will pass with A in English or a candidate who cannot calculate simple percentage will pass with B in Mathematics.

8. It is also a common practice that students who are financially well-of sometimes go to the headquarters of various examination councils or boards to pay staff members to award them high grades for various subjects in the standardized examinations.

9. Both male and female students are victimized by corrupt teachers. Female students seem to suffer the most because it is alleged that some teachers/instructors/lecturers/professors expect female students to sleep with them, in addition to paying for grades. This is regarded as a package of activities that female students are expected to comply with in order to pass a course.

10. Male students also suffer greatly from the corruption and unethical behavior of school officials and the faculty. Many male students are forced to join cults in order to increase their ability to influence the educational process. In other words, those male students who are not financially endowed to pay for grades or just refuse to play along with the financial schemes of the teachers/instructors/lecturers/professors and some administrators are forced to join cults and use the cults to threaten teachers who extort money from them.

11. Another brand of corruption at the primary and secondary school levels at present is that, during open days, parents who fail to grease the palms of the teachers will risk having their children’s grade in their examination lowered.

Conclusion
Corruption of whatever type and in whatever sector is destructive and wrong, since it benefits the unscrupulous to the detriment of others. Corruption in the educational sector had weakened the sector, leading to low efficiency, wastage and misappropriation of resources, low quality service delivery culminating in yearly turn-out of poor primary and secondary school leavers and graduates from tertiary institutions. Where personal effort and merit do not count as a result of corruption and academic success comes through manipulation, favouritism and bribery, then the very foundations of society are shaken. Corruption in the educational sector affects more people than corruption in other sectors, both in rural and urban areas basically because schools are the breeding grounds for future generations. Corruption threatens equal access, quantity and quality of education. Its consequences are particularly harsh for the poor who,
without access to education or with no alternative but low-quality education, have limited or no hope of escaping the circle of poverty, especially in a certificate crazy society like Nigeria.

**Recommendations**

To curb corruption in the academia, the following recommendations are made:

1. There should be a systematic overhauling of the educational system by the Federal Ministry of Education by strengthening the regulatory systems and management of the sector.
2. The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and the Independent and Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) should urgently turn their scorching searchlight towards the educational sector in order sanitize it.
3. The Federal Ministry of Education should strengthen and emphasize the teaching of civic and moral education from primary to tertiary education through a well defined educational policy document.
4. There should be introduction of role modeling, improved funding and incentives for the education sector and adequate provision of basic infrastructure by the Federal Ministry of Education.
5. There should be commensurate penalties against any staff and student found guilty of any act of corruption at any level of education by the regulatory bodies of the various educational institutions.
6. Credible men of proven integrity should man specialized agencies like Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) and Independent and Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) and they should act without fear or favour by bringing to book whoever is found guilty of corruption in the educational sector. The activities of these agencies should be monitored too.
7. The Federal government of Nigeria, through the National Orientation Agency, in collaboration with the Federal Ministry of Education should encourage a general sense of civic virtue and inject a seed of integrity into the educational sector.
8. Special whistle blowing should be introduced in the educational sector by the federal government through the Federal Ministry of Education and other specialized bodies.

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