

ANALYSIS OF REVITALISATION OF ACADEMIC ETHICS AND INTEGRITY IN NIGERIAN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT THROUGH SELECTED AFRICAN LITERARY WORKS

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Abstract

*Teaching profession at all levels is presumed to be a noble one world-wide. It remains a profession that sees to both behavioural and mental development of any individual. Therefore, the role of a teacher in every society is very paramount. More importantly, all facets of a country's life depend on manpower produced from various tertiary institutions. Presently in Nigerian tertiary education, this purpose has been undermined due to numerous unethical practices, especially among the academic staff. On this background, the paper discusses some unprofessional conducts among the Nigerian tertiary educators such as sexual harassment, forgery, plagiarism, extortion, etc. Using analytical research approach, Ike's *The Naked Gods* (2015), Coetzee's *Disgrace* (2000), Nwosu's *Dogs in Ivory Tower* (2004) and Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Trafficked* (2008) are selected for this study. The paper identifies production of numerous unemployable graduates as one of the side effects of all the aforementioned behaviours bedeviling Nigerian higher institutions of learning. The article concludes by emphasizing the need to rebuild trust and integrity in tertiary institutions in Nigeria.*

Keywords: ethics, integrity, teaching profession, tertiary education

Introduction

Education remains the life-wire of every country, especially the underdeveloped ones. For education to play its vital developmental role in the life of any nation, it has to be qualitative at all levels. Thus, teachers are part of the determinant factors in this regard. According to Asaju and Adagba (2014), no nation can rise above its educational standard or level. This means that there can only be quality education when teachers at all levels are not just qualified in training and certificates possession, but are also ready to operate within the rules and regulations guiding their profession. Certainly, there is no profession without codes of conducts for its members. Such codes of conduct are otherwise known as ethics. Hornby (2015) defines ethic as “a system of principles or rules of behavior”. This means ethics are moral principles that control or influence someone's behaviours. Hence, the essence of such rules is to ensure strict adherence and efficiency in service delivery among members of a particular profession.

Today, in Nigeria, quality has almost become a thing of the past in the education sector because all levels of education now battle with menace of examination malpractices. Specifically at higher institution level, examination misconduct is often associated with unprofessional behaviours in which some academic staff members are often involved. As a result of this, the society is currently flooded by a lot of unmarketable outputs emanating from compromised academic environment—an environment where all professional rules and regulations have been gravely violated.

School is an organized environment for teaching and learning activities. Ebohon, Ugbijeh and Ademola (2017) affirm that learning environment is a vital part of educational system and has a great impact on teaching and learning at any level of education. Therefore, an ideal school environment should be the one where all staff members, particularly the academic ones make dignity and due process their watchword. It is quite a pity that school environment in Africa at

large and Nigeria in particular in the 21st century has degenerated morally and academically. The level of moral decadence at various higher institutions is quite alarming. This has become a serious concern for many contemporary African literary writers. In this paper, Ike's *The Naked Gods* (2015), Coetzee's *Disgrace* (2000), Nwosu's *Dogs in Ivory Tower* (2004) and Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Trafficked* (2008) are painstakingly analysed in this direction.

Unprofessional Conducts among Nigerian Tertiary Educators in the Selected African Literary Works

Literary works, irrespective of their genres, are usually employed to depict socio-economic realities in a society. This is the singular reason literary writers are always seen as social critics. They do thematically convert societal realities to fiction through the use of some literary devices with a view to educating, entertaining and correcting the general public at the same time. In respect of this, the case of authors of the selected literary works for this paper is not different. All of them, at one time or the other, decided to express themselves on what is known as *social malaises* impacting negatively on education in general and tertiary education in particular in their respective countries.

Education, like a two sided coin, involves teaching and learning with both of them taking place concurrently. Unfortunately, everybody is aware of the fact that standard of education has continued to diminish at all levels of education in Nigeria. This has been credited to perennial challenges such as inadequate funds, insufficient physical infrastructures, irregular supervision, inconsistency in government policies, lack of government political will to implement policies, etc. At present, in Nigerian educational system, attention of the public is gradually shifting away from some of the aforementioned problems as they keep resurfacing yearly. On the contrary, everybody's attention is presently drawn to various unprofessional conducts in education sector making headlines recently in the media, especially at higher institution level. Some of the shameful acts in which some tertiary education teachers now indulge in are discussed below using the selected literary texts.

The first is sexual harassment. This

particular act is more pronounced among the male lecturers. Many of them, especially the morally deficient ones, are fond of taking advantage of their female students sexually. Chioma and Esther in *Dogs in Ivory Towers* (2004) and Melanie Isaacs in *Disgrace* (2000) are examples of such numerous female students being molested on daily basis in various tertiary institutions across the country. In an ideal situation, both male and female lecturers are supposed to be men and women of integrity who maintain parent-like relationship with their students. This is because they are not only expected to impart knowledge into the learners, but to be their role models as well in all ramifications. In other words, lecturers are not only custodians of knowledge, but also character builders. This is because no higher institution student can be regarded successful academically without being adjudged to be worthy in character. The narrator in *Dogs in Ivory Towers* (2004) corroborated the view by saying that:

The intellectuals that befit our tertiary institutions are those who realize that there can be no erotic love relationship between them and their female students. Such are men of character and integrity who appreciate and respect the fact that with students on campus, they are essentially in "loco parents" (p.134).

Closely and directly associated with the point discussed above is trading sex for marks/grades. Pedagogically, evaluation remains an important aspect in teaching/learning process. Evaluation is an educational yardstick usually employed by the teacher to determine each learner's academic ability and understanding capability level of a subject matter. According to Baji and Wachiko (2015), evaluation is seen as value judgment and systematic process in education to determine the extent to which instructional objectives are achieved by learners. They identify formative evaluation and summative evaluation as the two main types of evaluation. The former is usually set in motion via assignments, class work, mid-term/semester test, continuous assessment (CA), while the latter concerns external and terminal examinations such as First School Leaving Certificate Examination, Senior School Certificate

Examination (SSCE), etc.

As an instrument, evaluation can be said to be optimally and maximally used when teachers are objective in the way they mark and allot marks. This explains the reason students' academic progress or otherwise is measured by grades they possess. It is a pity however that this all important aspect has been bastardised by the so-called Casanovas in various Nigerian tertiary schools. Many morally corrupt male lecturers now engage in all sorts of examination malpractices just to favour some of their female students in exchange for sex. This type of unprofessional scenario is painted by the South African writer, Coetzee, in his novel titled *Disgrace* (2000). In the novel, Prof. David Lurie sees inflation of marks as a means to perpetuate his ungodly relationship with Melanie Isaacs, one of his female students. This is made evident by Elaine Winter, a member of disciplinary panel set up to investigate Prof. Lurie. Below are her words:

There is a query about Ms Isaacs' attendance, David. According to her, — I spoke to her on phone — she has attended only two classes in the past month. If that is true, it should have been reported. She also says she missed the mid-term test. Yet, according to your record, her attendance is unblemished and she has a mark of seventy for mid-term. (Disgrace, pp. 40-41)

A second and related charge comes from the Registrar, through the Office of Student Records, and concerns the validity of Ms Isaacs' record. The charge is that Ms Isaac did not attend all the classes or submit all the written work or sit for all the examinations for which you have given her credit. (Disgrace, p.48)

All of the allegations against Prof. Lurie in the above quoted texts are nothing but gross misconducts. Such actions really contradict all principles of evaluation as it relates to students' academic assessment in all ramifications. Professionally, teachers at all levels of education are expected to be impartial. Nwosu (2004) concurs with this assertion by saying that:

The academics we need on our campuses today are those who grade their scripts objectively and award marks based on merit and not those who reserve high grades for students prepared to pay in cash or in kind. (Dogs in the Ivory Towers, p. 134)

The term “pay in cash” takes us to another unethical conduct dwelling among many higher institution lecturers in Nigeria. This has to do with extortion of students for money, using various means and methods. One of them is project supervision. Many lecturers have stooped so low by usually exploiting their project students financially, materially or both. To them, such is the only gateway for students who play along to finish their project writing in good time. In Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Trafficked*, characters like Dr Komolafe, Mr Ogamba and Dr Edmund Pepple represent lecturers in this category. For instance, Dr Komolafe requested for a jerry can of fuel from his student, Ofomata; Mr Ogamba is fond of collecting money from his students in the name of loan. He took fifty thousand naira loan (#50,000) from Ofomata which he never meant to pay back.

Similarly, in various tertiary schools in Nigeria, many lecturers now see production of handbooks as money making venture. They consider it to be a genuine/legal means of enriching themselves. In most cases, such lecturers do sell their handbooks, which are often below standard, at high price. To prevent students from avoiding to buy the handbooks due to their expensiveness, assignment and class work questions are usually attached to the books. As a result of this, students are often forced to buy irrespective of their socio-economic background. In fact, many lecturers do display their level of cruelty by making purchase of their handbooks a condition to passing their courses. Hence, students from poor families become victims of such inhuman decision. Adimora-Ezeigbo (2014) frowns at such by saying that:

It is nauseating the way lecturers sold students sheets of papers stapled in the name of handouts (handbooks). In addition, some of the books they sold to students were shoddily produced and lacked substance. But the students had no choice; they either bought the

books or failed the courses.
(*Trafficked*, p.34)

It is apparent in the above quotation that many higher institution lecturers hardly dedicate enough time for thorough research like before. Instead, they now find solace in plagiarism to get promotion. Originality is no longer given priority in academic conference papers and journal articles. According to Odebunmi (2015), plagiarism is an academic theft. This connotes appropriating other people's ideas without due recognition. Taking credit for other people's works has presently become order of the day in various tertiary schools across Nigeria. Aside from promotion, passion for quick and cheap money among the lazy lecturers is another factor leading to plagiarism.

Over the years, poor remuneration of teachers at all levels of education in Nigeria has continued to cause a serious concern. On several occasions, labour unions have to be at loggerheads with the government for increase in monthly workers' salaries. Unfortunately, whenever government finally succumbs to civil society pressure for salary increase, prices of goods in the market have to soar high. As a result of this, many teachers at all levels of education are now business-minded. They see trading in petty items, even within the school environment, as a way of complimenting their salaries. For instance, sale of consumable items such as groundnut, sweet and biscuits is common among primary and secondary schools teachers in this country. While at tertiary level of education, many staff members have converted their cars to mobile shops moving round their colleagues' offices to sell kitchen utensils, fabric materials, shoes, honey, etc. Some other academic staff members see a good venture in the production of substandard textbooks/handbooks to exploit students financially. As said earlier, many plagiarised works have been commercialised by such hunger stricken lecturers. What an academic theft indeed! To this end, Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria (2013) advises that teachers at all levels should refrain from copyright violation.

Forgery of academic and non-academic documents remains another unprofessional behaviour that is quite alarming in Nigerian tertiary institutions, particularly among the teaching members of staff. This usually happens

due to various reasons such as elongation of years of service, promotion and internal politics. In civil service, forgery of any kind is an offence that does attract severe punishment, especially dismissal from work. Nwosu illustrates this in *Dog in Ivory Towers* (2004). As reported in a news flash on pages 166 and 167, tampering with official documents, false declaration of age, sexual harassment and forging of documents are part of many offences leading to removal from office of several Vice Chancellors and Rectors by Federal Military Government.

Moreover, in relation to vying for positions among high ranking academic officers, Ike breaks his silence in *The Naked Gods* (2015). To occupy positions such as Vice Chancellor, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Dean, Head of Department, Rector, Provost and Deputy Provost, many top academic officers do go diabolical. To them, there is no fair play in the game of politics whatsoever. To achieve their ambition, such lecturers often seek spiritual fortification for self-protection and defeat of their opponents. Chukwuemeka Ike depicts how Nigerian institutions of higher learning have been turned to battle fields. Many academic officers see their fellow colleagues as archenemies as a result of appointments. This explains why many of them have continued to remain with obsolete ideas as they dedicate time for irrelevant non-academic activities for self-aggrandizement. Dr Okoro is presented in *The Naked Gods* (2015) as a typical example of such diabolical and power-drunk high ranking academic staff. He planted charm at Prof. Ikins' door handle to eliminate him so that he himself could become the first indigenous Vice Chancellor of the University of Songhai.

Effects of Unethical Behaviours among Nigerian Tertiary Educators

Human actions and inactions are not usually devoid of consequences, especially the unsuitable ones. Students, society and the higher institution lecturers themselves are normally recipients of consequences of various gross misconducts taking place in Nigerian tertiary schools. Some of these effects are as follows:

- Many female and male students do have their future dreams shattered by some of their heartless lecturers who see deliberate failure as

deserving punishment for students who are unable to yield to their sexual or financial request. Hence, many students have decided to forfeit academic certificate to retain their social dignity.

- Many female students have lost their lives while attempting to abort unwanted pregnancies emanating from rape or sexual harassment by their lecturers or fellow male students.
- Majority of tertiary education students who are fond of trading sex, money and valuable materials for marks and grades in continuous assessment and examinations do not usually dedicate adequate time for serious academic activities. Therefore, such students usually become unemployable after graduating from school, thereby becoming social and economic liabilities in the society.
- Just like Prof. Lurie in *Disgrace* (2010) and Dr. Komolafe in *Trafficked* (2014), many tertiary institutions of learning lecturers caught in unprofessional conducts discussed in this paper and many others do have their appointment terminated thereby ruining their professional careers. As a result of this, their dependants such as children, spouses and aged parents are usually let down.
- Another consequence is professional setback as many of the lecturers found guilty of unethical behaviour do at times receive demotion as punishment in place of termination of appointment. Certainly, every demoted staff member can never meet up with his promotion mates at work thereby making him a junior to them automatically.
- Unethical behaviours could also lead to premature death. In most cases, many affected academic staff members found wanting of one gross misconduct or the other do attempt suicide just to cover up their shame.
- Unethical behaviours do lead to loss of respect before students. This is because such students are usually disappointed in any lecturer engaging in any of the unprofessional conducts discussed earlier, instead of remaining as a role model to them.
- Unprofessional conducts such as examination malpractices, sale of grades and marks do water down the level of education of any country. This is because it is always difficult

for students who graduate with unmerited classes of grades to defend their certificates and their worth in the labour market. Such do end up becoming quacks in their various professions.

Conclusion

This paper has clearly indicated the level at which some tertiary schools in Nigeria have been converted to abodes of immoralities and all sorts of sorcery practices. This phenomenon calls for a serious concern considering the place of tertiary education in the socio-economic life of every country. Today, many tertiary schools in Africa, particularly in Nigeria, survive on past glory as their academic standard has almost been eroded. Hence, this paper emphasizes the urgent need to restore such good old time academic memories back in various higher institutions in this country. This is achievable if integrity would be made a priority not only among the academic staff but among the non-teaching staff members as well. The fight against moral decadence across tertiary schools in Nigeria should be a collective one.

Way Forward

The following are recommended as the ways of combating unprofessional conducts in various tertiary schools in Nigeria:

- i. Family remains the integral part of the society. Thus, this paper recommends thorough moral and religious upbringing of children by their parents, especially right from childhood. That is, charity begins at home.
- ii. Bad company corrupts good manner. Higher institutions students should be very sensitive in terms of who to keep as friends. Ill-mannered ones should always be avoided.
- iii. Many tertiary institution students are seriously dying in silence. Therefore, students should not hesitate to report every form of injustice and humiliation being experienced from fellow students, academic and non-academic staff to the appropriate authorities. In fact, some human right organisations could also be contacted to seek redress.

- iv. The paper recommends regular orientation programmes for both staff and students of tertiary schools in Nigeria to acquaint them with guiding principles expected of them. In fact, this could be in form of seminar, where resource persons would be invited to speak on several issues like examination malpractices, rape, cultism, extortion, hate-speech, etc. Offices of the Public Relations Officer (PRO) and the Dean of Students' Affairs could realise this via collaborated efforts.
- v. To restore high academic standard in Nigerian higher institutions, discipline among both staff and students must be exalted. Hence, plagiarism and forgery of any type must be discouraged and possibly eliminated. For this to happen, committees should be set up in various departments, schools and faculties to oversee students' projects/thesis, staff promotion documents and publications should be more proactive. In this regard, plagiarism test should always be conducted.
- vi. The jail term proposal of 14 years in prison, with a minimum of five years, without an option of fine for any educator who commits sexual offences in tertiary institution by Senator Ovie Omo-Agege in 2019 should be made to become a law.
- vii. The paper recommends rehabilitation for every female students abused sexually by male lecturers. The counseling unit should be saddled with such responsibility. This is necessary to enable the affected student(s) overcome shame, trauma and subjugation sustained from such unsocial act.
- viii. Sanity has to be restored in various higher institutions regarding issuances of academics results and certificates to undeserving students who are morally deficient.

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