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HOW INVOLVED ARE TEACHERS IN ACADEMIC DISHONESTY?: A STUDY IN SCHOOL EFFECTIVENESS IN NIGERIA.

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the perception of secondary school students in Nigeria on the extent of teacher's involvement in academic dishonesty. Subjects were 4,818 secondary school students in Nigeria. The study reveals that a greater proportion of the students view their teachers as being involved very often in dishonest practices academically. The study also indicates that inflation of continuous assessment/examination scores tops the lists in the eyes of students' the ways that teachers contribute to academic dishonesty. This is followed with conspiracy of teachers with both students and security officials during examination, exchange of answers for money, and teachers impersonating students in that order.

INTRODUCTION

One of the descriptions of school effectiveness according to Scheerens (1992) is having high achievement among all classes of students. There are other indications of school effectiveness such as having high students and staff attendance; having high staff and students' satisfaction, and lastly, having high public confidence in the school. In order to have high achievement among all student groups, and high

public confidence in schools, there must be an acceptable method of measuring the achievement of students, which is capable of promoting public confidence in the school (Adewale, 2004). Many people do not have confidence in the school system today due to many reasons. One has to do with how students' perform in public examinations. Another reason has to do with the moral standard (on academic matters) of students, teachers, head teachers, parents and the community in which the school is located. The concern is that if students are not able to perform well in their school subjects; they should fail honourably without any form of educational fraud or academic dishonesty. The term "academic dishonesty" according to the Guidelines for Academic Conduct from University of Saskatchewan Council (2003) includes both plagiarism and other forms of cheating, such as taking notes into an exam or lying about admission qualifications. In this paper however, these three concepts (educational fraud, academic dishonesty or examination malpractice) are used interchangeably, although, educational fraud and academic dishonesty are wider in scope than examination malpractice). There was a media report that has to do with the cancellation of examination papers of West African Examination Council's May/June examination this year (2005). Eleven papers in six subjects were cancelled, the papers were: Geography I, Physics I and II, Mathematics, Chemistry I and II, Literature I, II and III and Christian Religious Study I and II. This cast some doubts on the honesty and integrity of the examination body, teachers and students.

Teachers are important in the school setting (FGN, 2004). They constitute the principal agents that can ensure honesty and integrity in schools. In their ten Principles of Academic Integrity, Donald, Cabe and Pavela (2003) explain that teachers have primary responsibility for designing and cultivating the educational environment and experience. They must clarify their expectations in advance regarding honesty in academic work, including the nature and scope of student collaboration. Most students want such guidance, and welcome it in course syllabi, carefully reviewed by their teachers in class. Furthermore, with proper guidance by the teachers, students can be given significant responsibility to help protect and promote the highest standards of academic integrity. A high proportion of students want to work in settings, where competition is fair, integrity is respected, and cheating is punished. The Guidelines for Academic Conduct from University of Saskatchewan Council in 2003 give the following description of honest behaviour at the university:

Perform your own work unless specifically instructed

otherwise. Use your own work to complete assignments and exams. Cite the source when quoting or paraphrasing someone else's work. Follow examination rules. Be truthful on all university forms. Discuss with your professor if you are using the same material for assignments in two different courses. Discuss with your professor if you have any questions about whether sources require citation. Use the same standard of honesty with fellow students, laboratory instructors, teaching assistants, seasonal instructors and administrative staff as you do with faculty. <http://www.usask.ca/honesty>.

Moreover, some students from the University of Saskatchewan made suggestions on ways to encourage academic honesty. Some of their suggestions for encouraging academic honesty are:

Explain assignments clearly; Allot time for questions; Take more time to prepare students for exams; more review before mid-terms and exams; Follow the study guidelines and don't surprise students on exams; More in-class work and interactive testing (i.e., in tutorials) instead of papers or take-home tests; Reduce class size; Slow down the pace of delivering course material; Allow a reasonable amount of time to study for exams and prepare assignments; Less emphasis on grades and more pass/fail marking; Use other methods of evaluation besides exams; Give more assistance on where to find appropriate information, give examples of proper footnoting and quoting, and demonstrate what is considered plagiarism and what is not; Publicly expose cheaters. <http://www.usask.ca/honesty>.

As important as academic integrity is in any educational system, there are some elements that encourage academic dishonesty in our educational system. It has been said that teachers play important role in making a school effective and a school cannot be said to be effective if it encourages academic dishonesty. Therefore, there was a need to find out the extent in the perceptions of students to which teachers are involved in academically dishonest practices. Furthermore, there was need to find out the various ways that teachers in the eyes of students are involved in acts that inject stain on school effectiveness in Nigeria.

This study sought to provide data on the views of secondary school students on the extent and dimensions of teacher's involvement in academic dishonesty in Nigeria. Specifically, data are provided to the following research questions:

METHODOLOGY

Subjects: The target population in this study involved secondary school students in Nigeria. Therefore, the present assessment was conducted as a sample survey covering all thirty-six states and Abuja (Federal Capital Territory) and consequently a good proportion of the 774 Local Government Areas in Nigeria participated in the study. The Federal Office of Statistics provided expertise on the sample design, on agreed sample size, and on the procedure for sample selection. A multi-stage stratified sampling design was adopted. The survey design provided a basis for valid generalizations at national level and reasonable estimates at State level. The sample size used for this study was 4,818 secondary school students.

Instrumentation: The questionnaire was intended to generate data for analysis on contextual variables including pupil, school and home related factors that impact on academic dishonesty. The questionnaire comprised items on background information like gender; school type; frequency and various ways of teachers' involvement in academic dishonesty in Nigeria. To ensure reliability of the questionnaires, the draft instruments were subjected to pilot testing in 6 states selected on the basis of one from each of the six geo-political zones: Kaduna, Niger, Bauchi, Abia, Edo and Akwa Ibom. Administration of instruments was carried out in 2 Local Government Areas, 1 rural and 1 urban in each state. Eight secondary schools including 4 public and 4 private schools were sampled. Twelve students completed the questionnaire. Based on the findings from the pilot study, the questionnaires were reviewed for increased reliability and validity. The questionnaires were administered in June/July 2003, about three weeks to the end of the 2002/2003-school session. The instruments were administered on JSS2 and SS2 students.

RESULTS

Research Question One

How often do secondary school teachers get involved in academic dishonesty in Nigeria, as perceived by students?

The responses of the three stakeholders used in this study are presented in the following table.

Table 1: Frequency of Teachers' Participation in Academic dishonesty in Nigeria.

| Responses | Frequency | Percentage |
|------------|-----------|------------|
| Very often | 1542 | 32.0 |
| Often | 1142 | 23.7 |
| Occasional | 1575 | 32.7 |
| Never | 559 | 11.6 |

As is shown in table 1, 32% and 23.7% respectively of the students see their teachers as being very often and often involved in academic dishonesty. A relatively small proportion (32.7%) see them involving occasionally. However, a negligible proportion (11.6%) does not see teachers involving themselves in academic dishonesty. When very often and often are collapsed, one gets a picture as presented in figure 1.

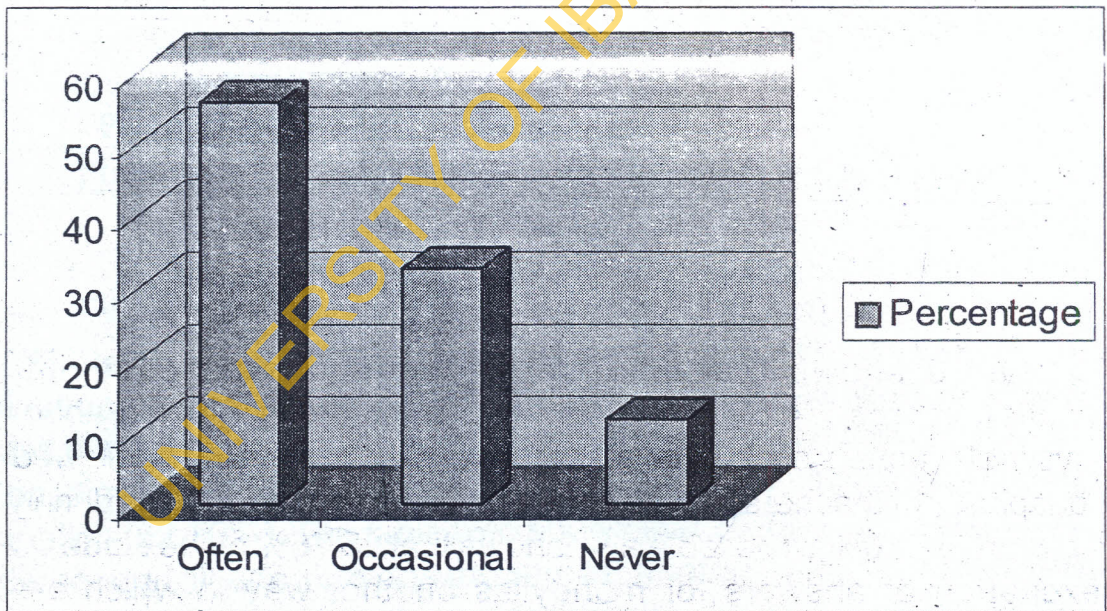


Figure 1: Bar chart showing the frequency of teachers' involvement in academic dishonesty.

Research Question Two

What proportion of students perceives teachers as being dishonest or corrupt as examination supervisors and invigilators?

In response to this question, majority (53.6%) of the students were of the opinion that their teachers were always dishonest, while serving as supervisors or invigilators. The likelihood is that some teachers always demand for material gains from students before they could be passed or helped in solving their problems.

Research Question Three

In what ways do teachers involve themselves in academic dishonesty in Nigeria?

Table 3: Various ways Teachers involve themselves Academic dishonesty.

| S/N | Teachers' Roles | Frequency | Percentage |
|-----|--|-----------|------------|
| 1. | Conspiracy with students during examinations | 3021 | 62.70% |
| 2. | Conspiracy with security officials during examinations | 3021 | 62.70% |
| 3. | Inflation of continuous assessment /examination scores | 3612 | 74.87% |
| 4. | Exchange of answers for money | 1241 | 25.76% |
| 5. | Impersonating students | 9032 | 18.75% |

Table 3 shows that inflation of continuous assessment/examination scores (74.87%) tops the lists of students' opinion about the ways that teachers contribute to academic dishonesty. This is followed with conspiracy of teachers with both students and security officials during examination (62.70%). The table also shows that 25.76% of the students see exchange of answers for money as another way in which are themselves involved in academic dishonesty. A good number of the students (18.75%) indicated that teachers do get involved by impersonating students.

DISCUSSION

There was an argument in a class (philosophy of Education) in 1985 when the author was an undergraduate student on teacher professionalism. It was argued that most people would like to be called

doctors, pharmacists, engineers, architects, barrister, and so on as titles after their profession, but nobody will be willing to be called teacher Adewale (for example). This implies that many people do not want to be called teachers because of the way society sees a teacher. The teachers themselves are not helping matters; they cheapen themselves by involving themselves in such degrading practices like aiding and abetting, dishonest practices during examinations because of transient reward.

With respect to the issue of teachers being corrupt, earlier study had indicated that some teachers (supervisors and invigilators) are corrupt. In the study of Makoju, Adewale, Nwargwu and Shuaibu (2004) they concluded that one of the social menaces the present administration is fighting is the issue of corruption. Some people who have one thing or the other with examination are corrupt. They take bribe from students or harass female students sexually before they could allow them pass. Furthermore, the finding that invigilators conspire with both students and security officials during examinations to perpetuate cheating tend to corroborate findings of previous studies (Onuka and Obialo, 2004).

The research findings also revealed that most teachers tend to inflate continuous assessment and examination scores. This is in agreement with the findings of STAN, (2001), who reported in a National survey that teachers (and other school personnel involved with examination score) unduly inflate examination scores. The results relating to teachers impersonating students also tend to agree with the research the previous reports (e.g. Adewale, 2004). For instance, a candidate registers with his/her names but submits the photograph of another person (the mercenary which could be a teacher) with whom arrangement has been made to take the examination on his/her behalf. In this arrangement, the candidate may enter another arrangement with the invigilator to replace the mercenary's photographs with his/her own or the mercenary submits a poorly taken photograph, which will fade within a few months of production. When they fade and replacement is demanded, those of the original candidate are now submitted. These results do not seem to augur well with the school system, especially when viewed from the point of view of the fact that teachers are expected to be character molders.

Parents are not helping in promoting teachers' integrity, even when some teachers are not willing to compromise their stand; some parents lure them to do what they do not want to do. There is a specific case, in which due to the craze for paper qualification, a parent bought JAMB result for his son to read medicine, however, he bought a wrong

combination. He went with his son to show the result to a professor in one of the leading universities in Nigeria and the Professor said, "Your child won't be able to read medicine because of wrong combination in his subjects". The son interjected by saying "but I told you that you shouldn't buy result for Economics but Physics" (Makoju, et al, 2004). Until less emphasis is laid on paper qualification and people come to place emphasis on the skills acquired in order to function well in the society, the issue of academic dishonesty will continue to persist. The craze for paper qualification is the off-shoot of policy implementation when emphasis is gradually been removed from proper acquisition of demonstrable skills and academic excellence, to possession of paper qualification, which is not backed up with marketable skill to show for it (Nwahunanya, 2004).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

One of the limitations of this study is that its scope is on academic dishonesty in which teachers are indicted. Since the study did not gather information on teacher integrity, it will be wrong to conclude that teachers do not have integrity. In addition, it is not all the stakeholders in education who are involved in this study; it is possible to have some varying amount of opinions on the information already collected. However, in order to reduce involvement of teachers in academic dishonesty, the following suggestions are recommended. Teachers should spend more time in preparing students for examinations. If they do it, is likely that teachers would not be intimidated by parents to do what they would not naturally want to do. Secondly, teachers should be contented with what they have because if you are not contented with what you have, you may not likely be contented with whatever you want. If they are contented, they would not participate in aiding and abetting and colluding with students to cheat because of a transient material gains they may receive from the students or their parents. Teachers should learn to be proud of their profession. The Teacher Registration Council (TRC) of Nigeria is making effort to make teaching a profession in Nigeria and it is hoped that one of the functions of the Council is to teach teachers some ethics of the profession. It is hoped that when and if this is done, most teachers will know what to do when faced with such challenges as being bribed by parents in order to have their children/ward pass; helping students to change marks and sexually harassing female students.

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