

# FRAUD AND FRAUD PREVENTION IN NIGERIA EDUCATION SYSTEM

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## **Abstract**

*Fraud in the nation's educational institutions has seriously impacted on the output of the educational system. It has adversely affected the inputs, processes and ultimately, the output of the system and cast doubts on the standards of teaching and learning. This paper takes an indepth look into the incidence of fraud in educational institutions and makes recommendations on the way out of the ill.*

Every year, millions of cases of deceit, extortion, inflated contracts and so on are reported in our educational institutions. There are cases of students seeking admission into our tertiary institutions falling prey to admission aid scams. There are also cases of students being given false or counterfeit receipts for payments made into wrong hands.

Apart from these, there are various cases of academic cheatings committed by both students and lecturers. All these are geared towards deliberately misrepresenting what is true with the sole aim of deceiving the other to make money or take undue advantage of situations. This is fraud which Albrecht (2003) defines as a representation about a material fact which is false and intentionally or recklessly so, which is believed and acted upon by the victim, to the victim's damage. It is deliberate misrepresentation, which causes another person to suffer damages, usually monetary losses.

Fraud can be committed by the

- a. Employee against his employing organization;
- b. Management using financial statements to defraud lenders and others who rely on these statements,
- c. Individuals who tick their victims into putting their money in false ventures,
- d. Customers who tick business organizations into giving them something they should not have, and

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e. Internet and electronic transaction (Albrecht, 203) fraud is a crime and costs millions of naira a year in damages and affects a lot of people.

Why people commit fraud

People engage in fraud for a number of reasons just like any other crime. Three important elements guide the people's desire to engage in crime. These include:

- a. Means → where one commits a fraud to benefit oneself. Personal reasons could include financial pressures, and work related pressures.
- b. Means → where fraud is committed using the internet, the telephone, computers and other simple means.
- c. Opportunity → lack of adequate internal control provides good opportunity for people to perpetrate fraud. Similarly, failure to punish perpetrators of fraud encourages fraud.

Because of the grievous nature of fraud on both the victims and the nation as whole, the Government of Nigeria has frowned at the spate of corruption and fraud. Hence, the enactment of the Advanced fee fraud and other fraud related offences (1995 No. 13, 2005 No. 26). Apart from this act, the Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Act – 2003, no. 6 has also been enacted and passed with the sole aim of checkmating fraud and fraudulent practices.

Olakanmi (2010) saw any person who by false pretence, and with the intent to defraud, induces any other person or confer a benefit to him as guilty of an offence under the Act.

The Acts see any person who by false pretence and with intent to defraud as guilty of fraud. Consequently the enactments see any act to induce any other person by doing or permitting a thing to be done on the understanding that the benefits has been or will be paid for as fraudulent and the perpetrator guilty.

False pretence according to the Corrupt practices and other Related Ofences Act refers to any representation made by words, writing or conduct of a matter of fact, which representative is false in fact and which the person making it knows to be or does not believe to be true.

Schaefer (2006) wrote about the widely accepted fraud theory called the Fraud triangle". According to her, fraud has three factors propelling it and each a leg of a triangle which, when combined, lead people to commit fraud.

One of the legs is the individuals financial problem or need, the second leg is the individual's perception that there exists at the place of business an opportunity to resolve the financial problem without getting caught, while the third leg is the individual's ability to rationalize or justify the intended illegal action. The three legs are thus:

**PRESSURE + PERCEIVED OPPORTUNITY + RATIONALIZATION = FRAUD**

### **Fraud in the Educational System**

It does not matter where fraud is committed; the important fact is that it is a crime. In the educational system, fraud comes in different forms. If it is not admission

scam, it is mismanagement of financial resources by management and what is today known as Academic Fraud (Academic dishonesty or misconduct).

Governments all over the world are disturbed by the spate of unfair practices in their educational institutions. This prompted the Indian Government to propose a Bill – the prohibition of unfair practices in Technical Educational Institutions, medical Educational Institutions and Universities Bill, 2010 (Dhar, 2011). This Bill prohibits certain unfair practices in academic Institutions in India and protects students from such sharp practice as:

- Acceptance of admission fee and other charge without receipts; and
- Granting admission without conducting specified test; it also sought to mandate the institutions to
- Avoid issuing or publishing any advertorial which induces students to take admission into the institutions, falsely claiming to be recognized by the appropriate statutory authority.

This Bill was with a view to avoiding admission scam that is now the order of the day. Today, students are lured into taking admission into sham or fly-by-night educational institutions (both local and foreign) through catchy advertisements in newspapers, and claims that are better imagined. All these are geared towards reaping the unsuspecting public of their hard earned monies.

Although the case reported here has to do with India, the fact remains that such practices are common place in Nigeria. Today in our tertiary institutions, fees are often collected without being properly receipted. Where receipts are given, most of them are fake receipts produced by a cabal in the schools.

In fact, academic fraud is no doubt, the most popular of frauds committed in the educational system in Nigeria and world over, and affects all levels of schools on a daily basis. Students in all areas and levels of studies commit academic fraud at various times of the schooling period. With the quest for paper qualification today and competition among schools, cheating is looking like a better option to get extra boost ([wtp.quazen.com/kids-andteens/collegelife/academic-fraud/#ixzz/e2p15GuO](http://wtp.quazen.com/kids-andteens/collegelife/academic-fraud/#ixzz/e2p15GuO)).

With advancements in technology, a great variety of ways to cheat has been perfected, and the methods get more complex as simpler ways are discovered and checkmated. What then is academic fraud?

Academic fraud is any type of cheating that occurs in relation to formal academic exercises (Wikipedia). It is any form of cheating that gives a student an unfair advantage over others. Larson (2006) saw academic fraud as falsifying, Fabrication, plagiarism and other serious breaches of academic practice carried out with intent or with gross negligence in the planning, carrying out or reporting of research.

It should however be noted that academic fraud is not a new phenomenon here in Nigeria or elsewhere. Bushway and Nash (1977), Simmons in Buranem and Roy

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(1999) reported that academic dishonesty dates back to the first set for civil service examinations in China thousands of years ago, and the period when there were no set rules on how to properly cite quotations from other peoples' writings. This ill became widespread in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries all over the world, such that today, parents and guardians encourage their children and wards to participate actively in academic dishonesty.

It should be noted that students are not the only ones who cheat in an academic setting. Jacob & Levitt (2003) reported that a study among North Carolina School teachers found some 35% of the teachers agreeing that had seen their colleagues cheating in one form or another. This is equally true of teachers in Nigeria.

The question now may be – How do teachers cheat? Before getting into this, it may be pertinent to take a look into the various types of academic dishonesty committed in the education system.

Prominent among them is plagiarism, which is seen by the BBC English Dictionary (1992) as the practice of using or copying someone else's idea or work and pretending that you thought of it or created it. The random House Compact Unabridged Dictionary quoted in Stepchyshyn & Nelson (2007) saw it as the use or close imitation of the language and thoughts of another author and the representation of them as one's original work.

In academic, it is seen as the adoption or reproduction of original intellectual creations (ideas, concepts, methods etc) of another author (persons, organization etc) without due acknowledgement, in contents where originality is acknowledgement and rewarded (Cosima, 2010). Plagiarism can range from borrowing without attribution, a particularly apt phrase, to someone else's original ideas without citation etc. the question we ask ourselves here is, how often have we done this? Both as students and teachers? The modern concept of plagiarism is that it is an immoral virtue while originality is ideal.

Another academic fraud committed in the schools is fabrication which is the falsification of data. Information etc. in any academic exercise. Sometimes, questions are invented or citations made up to achieve a purpose. At times students are forced to fabricate references especially when a stated number of references are required for a particular paper. Fabrication of data is more dominant in natural sciences where students and sometimes teachers falsify data to ensure that their experiments work. This is done to deliberately mislead.

There is yet deception in which false information is provided to the teacher regarding an academic exercise. Sometimes students come up with flimsy excuses regarding academic jobs given to them asking for extension of deadlines or falsely claiming to have turned in jobs given to them or to have sat for particular examinations when, in fact they have not. Through this misconduct is lighter than cheating, it is nonetheless academic dishonesty.

One must have witnessed situations where pages of library books are cut off or where students willfully disrupt the practical works of others. This practice is more prevalent where there is stiff competitions especially in elite schools where class rankings are highly prized. This bad behaviour is common in our schools. This is sabotage and academic misconduct.

There is yet the case of professional misconduct committed by teachers. This is most manifest in the way students scripts are improperly graded deliberately with a view to cheat or assist in cheating. Personal bias towards a particular student can lead a teachers to indulge in this. Desire to receive bribe or to improve the teacher's own perceived performance by increasing the passing rate may also be a propelling force here. This is also occasionally done to procure sexual favours.

It is common in educational institutions to find students enter examination halls with crib notes or looking over someone's shoulder during examinations. In recent years, elaborate methods have been devised by students to cheat in schools. They now store vital information in cell phones, calculators, shirt sleeves, under-pants and so on. Students also hire people to sit for examinations for them for a pay (Bushway & Nash, 1977).

Many dishonest academic have found themselves neck deep in research fraud, throw away the ethics of research to the dusts. Most research reports today do not conform to the moral values of society such that confidence in research results are no more there. Reports have shown that most biomedical research reports are full of fraudulent claims, which have far-reaching consequences on health care. It is a known fact that publications (such as those we are going to present in this conference) function as systems of merit, but the pressure to publish at all cannot explain why researchers deliberately choose to indulge in research fraud by fabricating data.

### **Incentives to Commit Academic Fraud**

So many factors push people to indulge in academic fraud studies have looked into the correlation of academic dishonesty to personal characteristics, demographics and contextual issues. It has been posited that there are students who have a pathological urge to cheat just as many scholars now commit plagiarism the way kleptomania to Fass (1986), there is the possibility that business scandals in the real world make students to believe dishonesty is an acceptable method for achieved success in contemporary society. Hence, academic fraud would be part of the real world. But there is no clear link between academic dishonesty and academic success. Most students who cheat in examinations may still to achieve the expected success, even when they are given the free hand to cheat.

A study of demographic variables has also shown that no one is born to cheat. (West Ravenscroft and Shrader,2004). However, the nature of academic achievement and parental education are variables that may affect cheating behaviour in students. Students who perform poorly in academics tend to cheat more than students who do well

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(McCabe & Trevino, 1993). Similarly, parental education has a positive link with student cheating. Students whose parents are educated are more likely to cheat than are students whose parents are not educated.

From all indications, academic fraud is more easily traceable to academic and social environment of the students. The belief that teachers can assist to stop this crime can only make little difference in the cheating behaviour of students. For instance, spacing of students during examinations has little effect on academic misconduct just as threatening students with expulsion if they cheat in examinations will only promote the behaviour (Kerkvliet & Sigmund, 1999). This is so because as teachers come up with more elaborate methods of deterring cheating, students come up with even more elaborate methods of cheating.

One should be mindful of the fact that some cases of academic fraud among students are fuelled by the activities students engage in. Such activities include watching television, playing cards and having drinks with friends.

### **Effects of Academic Fraud**

Academic fraud affects both the students, the teachers, the institutions and the education system as a whole in different ways.

1. A student who cheats despite personal disapproval of cheating is more likely to engage in cheating in the future culminating in a life of dishonesty. Anderson & Midgley (2004) were of the opinion that students who are dishonest in class are more likely to engage in fraud and theft on the job when they enter the work place. It is true the honest and dishonest students will graduate with the same certificate, but the certificate will not be a true representation of their depth of knowledge and ability. In fact, not all graduates with the same degree do the same work or have the same skills.
2. It creates problems for teachers also. It causes emotional distress of the teacher and many of them see it as personal slight against them or a violation of their trust.
3. Good reputation is one of the greatest assets of any academic institution. An educational institution that is plagued with cheating scandal will automatically become less attractive to potential students, donors and even prospective employers of the graduates. Low levels of academic dishonesty uplift the image and reputation of schools and attract students and employers.
4. The basic mission of education is the transfer of knowledge. When students are allowed to graduate from school without having to master the knowledge, then this mission is defeated. An atmosphere of academic dishonesty in schools is not conducive to the learning process and diversely affects the ambition of honest students. When honest students see dishonest ones go undetected, they are discouraged.
5. The negative implication of academic fraud for national development are too numerous to mention and one can see it from the overall effect on the different sections of the system.

6. On the medical sector, medical students who graduate as medical doctors eventually end up as medical murderers. This is because their certificates were acquired through fraud and cheating.
7. In our educational institutions of learning, since one cannot give what one does not have, teachers give out wrong information to the students and thus produce ill-prepared and less knowledgeable and skilled students.
8. Cases abound where holders of Masters Degrees today find it difficult to express themselves in simple correct English. This is a big slap on the face of our nation.
9. In a nutshell, people who claim to be this or that find it difficult to defend their claim when the need arises. All these give rise to the decay of manners and the battering of the image of the nation internally and externally.

### **Preventing Academic Fraud**

One of the most plausible way of preventing academic fraud is by adopting the Indian system of passing a Bill prohibiting false advertisements that would deceive potential students into parting with their hard earned money. Clause 12 of the Indian Bill states that anyone who publishes any advertisement that provides untrue statement, or falsely describes a fact or is misleading shall be liable for prosecution (Dhar, 2011). With such a legislation, the advert companies will be reluctant to accept such false adverts for publication.

In the area of research and research reporting, effects should be directed towards educating students especially graduate students on the dangers of fabrication in research reports. They should be cautioned against miscalculating data intentionally. Put simply, ethics training is compulsory for all graduate students.

If data presented in research reports are checked at random (i.e research audit), it will help stem academic fraud. Although this may be difficult, but the knowledge that one's research reports may be audited would send a signal that one should take one's research seriously and get it right (Murray,2002).

Journal editors can also help to stem the tide of academic fraud. This they can do by setting out guidelines on type of data that will and will not be accepted in a study. This will help prevent errors and misunderstandings on the part of researchers. When the research report is turned in, journal editors may also check the raw data contained therein. We should be willing to share our data with anyone who wishes to verify it

Punishment for academic fraud differs according to the level of education. The most common punishment for cheating in secondary schools is fail grade. At tertiary level, it could be expulsion. However, in as much as it is good to make rigid set of rules for cheating, one may want to say that students who broke the rules may suffer the punishment but not be expelled. Such students should be given the chance to reform their ways before being expelled.

## Conclusion

Fraud in educational institutions has been and is still a problem as it was years ago. This phenomenon has been on the increase over the years. With the advent of and popularization of the internet, academic fraud has grown greatly. Today, there are web sites that assist students to complete assignments given to them for a fee.

In ancient China, academic cheats were subjected to death penalty. Today, penalty for academic fraud has been made light. It is either you fail the examination, assignment or project, or you are suspended or expelled from school (if you are a student). If one is an academician, the punishment is often resignation, denial of professional benefits among others.

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