

# PSYCHO-SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC FACTORS INFLUENCING FALLING ETHICAL STANDARD IN THE HIGHER INSTITUTIONS OF LEARNING IN NIGERIA.

By

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A paper presented at the Social Science Academy of Nigeria, 13<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, with the theme “Ethics in Higher Education in Nigeria “ At Pioneer Hotel, Wuse Zone 4, Abuja between 23-25<sup>th</sup> July, 2003.

## Abstract

This paper examines psycho-social and economic factors influencing falling ethical standard in the nation's higher educational system. It explains the causes and consequences of this problem to the individual and the society at large.

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### Introduction

The Nigerian higher education dates back to 1934 when the Yaba Higher College was established in Lagos to train Nigerians to occupy middle level positions in the British colonial government. The College however failed to address the needs of Nigerians for higher education for the ultimate goal of self-governance. In 1948, a University College was established in Ibadan to offer degree programs from the University of London. After independence, four regional autonomous universities were established at Nsukka, Zaria and Ile-Ife and another federal university was established in Lagos. The University College at Ibadan became autonomous in 1962.

Since Nigeria's independence from colonial rule, its education system has been characterised by periods of rapid expansion and neglect. During mid '70s and early '80s, Nigeria experienced relative economic prosperity as a result of the oil boom. Consequently, one of its major priorities was to expand its productive base by producing the high level manpower required to staff the expanded economy. During this period alone, the Nigerian Government established seven new universities (1975 to 1977) and also took over the four regional universities in 1975. The period also witnessed the development of the National Policy on Education, a document, which set out the overall objectives of education in Nigeria and outlined strategies to achieve them. The overriding objective of this period was to produce as many university graduates as possible. From the 1980s onward, to the end of the 1990s, the Nigerian University education system suffered from severe economic decline and consecutive military regimes. With sharp decrease in funding, the university education system has been unable to provide adequate school infrastructure or necessary staff training and

development. Accordingly, learning outcomes and overall quality of education was compromised.

Alongside these institutions were the colleges of education and polytechnics which over the years have suffered the same gradual decline in quality as universities have. For example, pre-service and in-service teacher training have been found to be insufficient and thus teachers are unable to teach students basic reading and writing skills. Training is often theoretical, with very little practical training. The National Policy on Education as well as the Universal Basic Education documents identify literacy improvement as the principle objective for primary education. The Monitoring of Learning Achievement (MLA) evaluation conducted in 1996 revealed a mean score of only 25% on the literacy test. In the case of universities, quality level as measured in 1998 by the Nigerian Universities Commission revealed less than half of Nigerian universities meeting minimum quality standard.

The recent political commitment by president Obasanjo to place education high on his list of priorities for national development provides a much-needed opportunity for system reform. Nigerians everywhere are hopeful given this new prospect, and seek to contribute to the development of Nigeria in a meaningful way. Working to reform and re-build Nigerian education systems will not be an easy task. Nigerian educators, professionals, students and others who are interested in African issues must therefore be engaged in an on-going dialogue. Today, the issues surrounding education in Nigeria are much more complex than they were at independence and go beyond promoting economic development, democracy and good governance. It is a reality that higher educational standard in the Nigerian universities has falling below expectation. One finds a total collapse of university ethical standard across universities, polytechnics and colleges of education. Up till early '70s, the ethical standard of university, popularly known as the citadel of learning was highly competitive and respected. Comparatively with other higher institutions in Europe, America and Asia.

Today, one finds very disturbing and unacademic behaviours of both lecturers and students. Statistics have showed that a good number of lecturers have been disciplined, reprimanded, retired and dismissed for compromising or destroying the standards of education for personal enrichment. Every year, a lot of lecturers are been sent out of the



university for various offences ranging, from inflating marks, exhorting money from students, academic fraud, diverting research grant and aiding and abetting examination malpractice among others. However, various reasons have been advanced for the rising decline of ethical standard in the higher education in Nigeria. Ijomah (2000) revealed that the falling ethical standard is attributed to government failure to fund higher education, proliferation of universities, educational policies, military incursion into university education, poor infrastructures, delay in the payment of salaries among other factors.

In every human environment, certain rules, regulation and standards are promulgated to regulate the human interaction among the inhabitants or people in that community. These standards and law serve as checks and balances on both leaders and governed. Universities, polytechnics and colleges of Education also have established ethical standard to regulate the behavior of authority, lecturers, non-academic staff and students in the university community. The purpose of these ethical standards is to promote academic excellence and moral behaviour of all stakeholders of the university system. To keep and sustained ethical standard in the university, certain pre-conditioned must be maintained. Ojumogbe (1999) showed that ethical standards are likely to break down if the necessary conditions are not satisfied

## **CAUSES OF FALLING OF ETHICAL STANDARD IN THE UNIVERSITY SYSTEM.**

Akinmade (1998) reported that certain personality factors cannot be ruled out of individuals with deviant behaviours will not conform to laid down ethical standard in human setting. This group of people will always disobey constituted authority whether in the university or industry. Psychological studies have revealed that individuals with antisocial behaviours, or psychopathic tendencies will definitely compromise standards wherever they found themselves. These groups of lecturers will be corrupt, collect money and gifts from students for self-gratification and satisfaction. Psychological researches have confirmed that individuals with these peculiar characteristics dispose them to breaking rules, regulation and undermine standard in their behaviours for personal benefits. Though, these numbers are not sufficient to account for the massive

breakdown of ethical standards in the nation's higher institutions today, it shows positive significant influence in the decline of standards in the ivory tower.

## **STUDENT POPULATION EXPLOSION**

The uncontrolled explosion in the population of students in both undergraduate and post graduate studies the face of dwindling financial resources of university management led to the admission of unqualified students into the university, for this to enable the university source for truanies to pay salaries and carry out of the university. This unprecedented upsurge of students enrollment without a corresponding teaching staff and facilities to cope with the increasing student population in teaching and learning. Many students were not ready to enter university gained admission to the ivory tower courses put pressure on the lecturers to pass them.

In some state universities and few federally controlled ones, over forty thousand students population with less than five hundred teaching staff pulling both financial and social pressure on teachers to pass and graduate from the school. Many lecturers have been found to falling into this trap of compromising and lowering standard to favour students. Ojefoh (1999) reported that several universities with less than the recommended five credits with a view to cope with financial demands of running the university.

## **INFRASTRUCTURAL COLLAPSE/DECAY**

Throughout the country, stating from the first generation universities to recently established ones, most of the infrastructural damage and decay classroom building had collapsed, or were collapsing, linking roof, reading chairs and tables were either destroyed, damaged, lost or broken. Window louvers were since shattered, majority of teaching and non teaching staff have no befitting offices, or in most cases two to three lecturers share one little space office. There are reported cases where teaching staff buy their teaching materials like chalk, dusters, projectors and other teaching aids. These extra burden of the lecturers has been found to dispose greater percentage of lecturers to engage in financial extortion from students and other users of their services in compensation of higher marks or economic favour in return. Akhenta (1996 disclosed



that many academic staff see teaching profession as non lucrative job due to financial frustration, slow growth rate with higher input and little output.

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### DELAYED SALARIES PAYMENT TO STAFF

Employers of university staff have been attributed to the high brain drain, destruction, and decline in academic standards in all levels of education in Nigeria. Omole (2000) explained that with the increase in the number of state and federal owned universities without the same increase in financial commitment contributed tremendously to the falling ethical standards in the universities. Academic and non teaching staff of university across the country have been denied of legitimate salaries for several months spanning between four to six minimum. This group of Nigerians have wives, children and other commitments to settle either in the home or domestic, school or there are documented reports indicating that lecturers where denied salaries for several months sought alternative means of livelihoods including charging students or engaging duties outside their primary responsibilities of teaching, research and community services. Statistics have shown that many state governments could not pay salaries promptly to university staff leading to illegitimate means of feeding their families. Oho (1990) reported that the falling standard of education in higher institutions of learning in Nigeria. Today, the same issue of delay or non-payment of salaries still pervades the university education system. Omolade (2001) emphasised that the delay or non-payment of salaries to university staff would lead to severe decline of academic standard or quality and final collapse of educational system in the nearest future.

### POOR FUNDING OF UNIVERSITIES

All over the world, universities are funded by owners who set them up in collaboration with private sector participation and agencies to provide academic excellence and social services to the community. Most of the schools in Nigeria are in dilapidating states. This shows that Nigeria has a weird value system. It is a society where priorities are tuned to their heads. For instance, the salaries of the less educated local government counselors are higher than that of a university professor, it is a place where well known rouge, a 419 person is applauded. The Nigeria's higher education institutions are in dire need of

proper funding. The recent statistics show that government is still in the habit of allocating less money to the educational sector. The table below shows federal government allocation to education compared with that of other less affluent countries in Africa.

Year	Allocation (%)
1995	7.2
1996	12.32
1997	17.59
1998	10.27
1999	11.12
2000	8.36
2001	7.00

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Table Two: Spending on education (%GNP) for some African countries as compared to Nigeria.

Country	Spending on education (%GNP)
Angola	4.9
Cote d'Ivoire	5.0
Ghana	4.4
Kenya	6.5
Malawi	5.4
Mozambique	4.1
Nigeria	0.76
South Africa	7.9
Tanzania	3.4
Uganda	2.6

Source for tables A and B, extracted from: The African Department Reported by Jubilee 2000, Alifa Daniel; Intrigues in ASUU – FG.

The problem of financing university education has become increasing acute since the end of the second democratic rule in Nigeria, especially in the year 1986 at the wake of Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP). In the mid 1970s no 1974, there was oil boom. The period the government had enough funds to spend. The economy was very



buoyant up till the end of 1979. From the beginning of 1980, the economic situation of Nigeria worsened seriously. The per capital income fell considerably and wage employment declined (Niger Reports 1993). As a result of this situation, there was a decline in government financial project and in compliance with the conditionalities proposed by International Monetary Fund (IMF), the federal military government withdrew subsidies on social services such as health, education and transportation among others. University education has been seriously incapacitated by the various policies implemented by various governments. This lack of proper and adequate funding to universities facilitated the falling standard or ethical reduction in the ivory tower across the country. Many lecturers started looking for survival means of alleviating the financial constraint arising from non-payment of salaries poor funding and the gradual collapse of the university system.

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### SOCIETAL CHANGING VALUES

The wind of corruption has also blown into the university system. The wave of get rich syndrome, the value of monetisation that command respect and honour is pervading the ivory tower. Statistics have shown that few lecturers especially at the junior folk compromising and lower ethical standards in teaching quality, academic values and aiding and abetting examination malpractice. The growing spirit of materialism, the possession of wealth and materials at the detriment of academic training, building people for national growth and economic development. Jegede (2001) argued that since lecturers and other academic staff are integral part of the Nigerian society, so, it is difficult to isolate this set of individuals from the national academic problem of corruption and academic backwardness. Various reports reveal that lecturers have been indicated or disciplined for compromising ethical standards in the university system. Last year (2002) over fifteen lecturers of different cadres were sacked while several others were disciplined on various offences connecting to lowering ethical standard.

### MILITARY RULE

Before the advent of the present democratic political order on the 29<sup>th</sup> May 1999, Nigerian university administration was under the military rule. The university education



and the entire education sector was not supported adequately under the military. There is sufficient evidence from the budgetary allocation. Ekpo (1996) revealed that universities suffered a severe set back, military administrators were sent to manage universities, unions were banned, unbanned several occasions. Agreements reached with staff were not honoured. University education became a dumping ground, brain-drain was in the highest peak, closures were common features and academic excellence were relegated to the background. Lecturers lost the university clamour, sought alternative sources of living. Excellence was thrown into the dustbin, handouts became the order of the day, marks were sold to the highest bidder among staff, and the university education was in a state of despair. Reasonably, that period witnessed a time of total collapse of academic standards in all levels of education in the country.

### **CONSEQUENCES OF FALLING STANDARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION**

One of the immediate consequences of the falling standard of university education in Nigeria is the rejection of our certificate worldwide. Today, university certificates are not recognised within and outside the country. Ayodele (2002) reported that Nigerian graduates are required to undergo serious and rigorous scrutiny among peers abroad. Many of them are rejected or asked to go back for lower class in foreign universities. Nigeria and Nigerians have suffered severe damage to our image internationally as a country whose educational system is questionable.

Also, a good number of researches conducted in this country are not accepted with peers in international community. This is due largely to the break down of academic ethical standard in the nation's educational system. Omole (1998) disclosed that lecturers and researchers in this country made extra efforts to convince colleagues internationally on the need to understand the peculiar nature of nation's university system.

The second consequence of university falling ethical standard is the high level of professionals and students seeking greener pasture and alternative schooling abroad. Laide (2000) disclosed that between 1996 – 1999, over one thousand, two hundred doctors have left Nigeria, and each department in the university loses two lecturers every semester. The breakdown is as follows:

Medical	1,110
Social Sciences	1,450
Engineering	660
Sciences	310
Agriculture	215
Environmental	186
Arts	882

**Source – Laide (2000) brain drain in universities. ASUU - FG**

The problem of brain drain has seriously affected the problem of academic quality and standard of education in Nigeria. It is pertinent to mention here that the problem of professionals leaving for abroad for intellectual development will remain unabated due to inconsistent and hand of government and university administrators in the country.

Another consequence is the weak labour force in the country. Today, statistics has shown that 60% of our graduates are not academically prepared to effectively match their qualification on the job. One finds a disturbing trend where youth corpsers or graduates are rejected from their job because they could not perform on the job. Abike (1998) in her paper “falling quality and standard of education: the future predicament” revealed that high rate of unemployment, lack of self-initiative, are all fallout of poor academic background and reduced ethical standard in the university system. This also affects the development level of the country. Abike pointed out that there is a positive relationship between lower ethical standards and underdevelopment. A situation where students attained marks with matched academic competence will definitely affect job performance and development.

## **SOLUTION**

The role of higher education in development of a society has been vastly documented in academic research. To adequately solve these multifarious problems with start from taking wholistic approach t o address the ills of ethical standards in university education. the first step is to hold educational submit by all stakeholders to address all the problems bedeviling the higher education. Educational policies t hat will strengthen government,



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