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Ethical Imperativeness for Quality Higher Education: How Well We Do in Mass Communication Departments- Mirroring Nigerian's Educational Landscape

By

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Abstract

This study investigates the applications of ethical principles in tertiary institutions in Nigeria with a specific focus on the departments of Mass Communication in selected tertiary institutions. Understudying this phenomenon, the researcher adopts a survey research approach using a questionnaire administered through an online platform (Google Form) to elicit responses from respondents (students) and interview lecturers with the hope to find out the level of applications of ethics and the impacts on staff and students in the department of Mass Communication in Nigerian tertiary institutions. To actualize the objectives, the researcher proposed the following research questions to guide the proper execution of the study which include: i. are staff and students aware of ethical issues in Higher Education? ii. What are the sources of information regarding ethical issues in Higher Education? iii. What is the frequency of information dissemination on ethical issues to students in the Department? iv. What is the level of acceptance of the ethical principles among staff and students of the Department? v. Which ethical issue (sex for a grade, forgery, tribal consideration/favouritism, cultism, and examination malpractice) is considered common in the Department of Mass Communication? The study is further structured into an introduction that bears the reason for the research; a statement of the problem which framed the envisaged problems that prompted the research. The literature review takes a critical look at the extant literature relating to the higher education system in Nigeria, knowledge of ethics in higher education, and application of ethics at the Departmental level and is anchored on rule utilitarianism theory. Methodology and data presentation, this subsection presents the method employed in this research, the data gathered, and how they were analyzed and presented. The findings of this study showed that, despite the repeated efforts by lecturers to educate the students on the need to uphold good moral conduct (ethical values) generally and particularly during an examination, examination malpractice persists as the commonest ethical problem ravaging department of mass communication. The researcher recommended that ethical orientation particularly on examination misconduct should start at the primary school level. Ethics should be enshrined in all levels of the educational curriculum.

Keywords: Ethics, Higher Education, Nigerian, Mass Communication.

Introduction

Nigeria is a well-known country in the African continent with a large population, estimated at 217,261,624 million as of Wednesday, September 7, 2022, representing 2.64% of the world population according to Worldometer of the United Nations data. Has the population is increasing by the day so is the estimated population seeking formal Western education increases. The estimated number of students in the tertiary education system increases astronomically, in 2019 about 1.8 million seek full-time undergraduate programmes in universities (Statista, 2022). To cater to the ever-growing educational needs of the people (millions of Nigerians), the government at State and Federal Levels is saddled with the task of providing higher education services to Nigerians. Under the Ministry of Education are about 217 Universities, 64 Polytechnics, and 152 Colleges of Education nationwide which are classified as tertiary institutions or higher education in Nigeria. Notably, most of the Universities and Polytechnics in Nigeria offer Mass Communication but historically, the first Mass Communication Department started at the first indigenous university, the University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

In 1961 Late Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe founded the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN) and also flouted the first Department of Mass Communication with much interest in journalism, public relations, and advertising. He then named the Department after a very popular journalist, Payne Jackson whose son, Horatio Jackson became the first Head of the Department. As part of the training tools for the Department, *The Records* newspaper was established. The Department became a force to reckon with in training high manpower in the area of

journalism study. It is believed that the University of Nigeria, Nsukka's College of Journalism sets the ball rolling in the professional training of journalists. Guanah (2019) journalists in Nigeria were trained through apprenticeship and on the jobs by their friends who were editors, and senior colleagues and also through observation long before the UNN started Journalism as a course

The Department under Jackson College of Journalism graduated her first set of students in 1964 and in 1965 10 students bagged their first degree in Journalism, in 1966, 12 graduates of journalism were produced by the Department, and in 1967, Nigerian-Biafra Civil war struck, preventing the initial progress of the Department. Today, several Nigerian Universities and Polytechnics have Mass Communication as a course of study. Some of the well-known Universities and Polytechnics in Nigeria with a Department of Mass Communication or Communication Arts include but are not limited to the University of Nigeria, Nsukka(UNN); University of Ibadan(UI); Bayaro University, Kano (BUK); Ahmadu Bello University, Zaira (ABU Zaira); University of Abuja (UniAbuja); Edo State University, Uzairue (EDSU); Enugu State University, Enugu (ESUT); Rivers State University, Port Harcourt (RSU); Caritas University, Enugu(CUE); Federal Polytechnic, Nekede, Owerri and Federal Polytechnic, Auchi. Others are the University of Ilorin (UniIlorin); Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Akwa (UniZik); University of Benin (Uniben); University of Lagos (UniLag); Pan Atlantic University, Lagos(PAU); Delta State University, Abraka (DELSU); Akwa Ibom State University(AKSU); Covenant University, Otta (CU), and Federal Polytechnic, Oko(Okopoly) among others.

The growing quest for higher education (degree) has pushed so many young Nigerians to seek admission into the Department of Mass Communication on one hand and the other hand, the proliferation of media outlets in Nigeria has also contributed to high demands to study Mass Communication. The glamour to appear on air as a broadcaster, the joy of being treated as a journalist or member of the fourth estate of the realm, the euphoria of receiving special attention as a gentleman of the press in an event, the fun of carrying a camera and taking pictures of people at an occasion and the excitement of being honoured with an invite as Master of Ceremony in important government and top social functions have been also attributed to high demands for the study of Mass Communication. Other pundits believe that the admission requirements for the study of Mass Communication in Nigerian Universities and Polytechnics are not as stringent as that of Law, Engineering, and Medical Sciences programmes. These factors may also account for the increased number of female students subscriptions and generally, high subscriptions to Mass Communication. Going by National Universities Commission Benchmark for admission into Mass Communication, a candidate is expected to have 5 O'Level Credit grades in English Language and any other four Arts or Commercial subjects. This, therefore, opens a large window for candidates to seek admission into the Departments unhindered, the majority of which are female candidates.

No doubt, the subscription to Mass Communication by students has implications for the Departments. It is no longer news that there is a serious infrastructural decade in Nigerian Universities in which Mass Communication Departments are not left out. As Guanah (2019) rightly puts it, it is "pathetic" that in several higher institutions where mass communication is being taught, lectures do not have well-equipped offices, Mass Communication lecturers like their counterparts in other Departments still use a chalkboard in the era of PowerPoint and projector as well as other hi-tech interactive media in temperature-controlled classrooms to teach mass communication courses. Lecturers do not also have a steady power supply" forcing lecturers to power their offices and studios with a personal generator. Not only that the infrastructure is decayed or non-existence, but Nigerian Mass Communication Lecturers also suffer from a lack of regular promotion, adequate funding for research, and professional training in technical areas such as editing, graphics, photojournalism, cinematography, live radio and television presentations and most pitifully lack of pay by their employers. Records have shown that Mass Communication Lecturers have suffered at the hands of the Federal and State government due to demands for a pay rise which the government turned down the request severally, culminating in industrial actions by the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU). A brief chat of the industrial actions by ASUU since the return of democracy in 1999 till date, shows that lecturers have constantly lockdown the classrooms for 63 months without lectures which also affected mass communication programme in the affected universities. The breakdown of the industrial actions further showed that in 1999, the ASUU strike lasted for 5 months; in 2000 the Union's strike lived for 3 months; in 2002 ASUU strike lasted for 2 weeks; in 2003 the strike continued and lasted for 6 months while in 2005 it was brief and lasted for just 2 weeks; in 2006 and 2007 ASUU strike lasted for 3 days and 3 months respectively. In 2008, Nigerian lecturers grumbled again because of poor pay and shut down the university system for one week as a warning strike. 2009 did not also provide a hitch-free university education system for the teeming Nigerian youth as the lecturers abandoned the students due to strike actions that lasted for four months. In 2010 ASUU strike lasted for another 5 months. In 2011 ASUU resumed strike again due to Government insincerity about

the agreement earlier reached concerning their pay rise. This time the strike lasted for 59 days approximately 2 months. In 2013 ASUU called the attention of the government to their plight and immediately resumed a strike that lasted for 5 months. In 2017 ASUU went on strike again which lasted for one month. In 2018 the government could not meet ASUU demands leading to another strike action that lasted for 3 months. In 2019 another strike surfaced which lasted for a few weeks and was called off a few days before the general elections. In 2020, ASUU went on strike amidst the COVID-19 Global pandemic and the strike lasted for 9 months. In 2021 the umbrella body of Nigerian lecturers suffocated heavily under a new salary regime (the controversial IPPI) that remove some lecturers' names from the payroll while some earned half of their monthly salary. This controversial pay system extended into 2022 which propelled ASUU to embark on strike from March 2022 to September 2022 still 'counting'. This pitiable situation triggered the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) solidarity protest. This seems to be the worst case for Nigerian lecturers. Despite these factors, several other variables militate against the good standard of education in Nigeria. According to Olujuwon, Oshinowo, and Udofia (2020,p.444) Nigerian educational system as well as the nation is suffering from social degeneracy, confusion in governance, moral decadence, corruption, and corrupt practices, un-wanton destruction of lives and properties by Boko Haram insurgency, nefarious acts of Fulani herdsmen and kidnapping for ransom which has its untold effect on teaching and learning". According to these scholars, this ugly development has a degrading impact on the dominant core values, which have been trampled upon in the educational sector and Nigerian society.

The review above gave us insight into why Nigerian universities are faced with a severe ethical dilemma. A hungry lecturer is an angry lecturer. His or her disposition to her responsibility will not be the same when compared to a satisfied lecturer whose pay and working conditions are a top priority of his/her employer. The question is, do Nigerian lecturers know that taking money from a student whose script is on his/her table is a comprised to the integrity of his or her job? Do Nigerian lecturers know that it is his/her moral obligation to teach the students to understand the nitty-gritty of the course other than to tell the students to go look for materials and then set examination questions that students cannot attempt in the examination? What then are the ethics of Nigerian lecturers and students in the Department of Mass Communication in the face of challenges they encountered in the discharge of their responsibilities? And what importance does ethics holds in the Department of Mass Communication? These are the questions that agitate the mind of the researcher and prompt the investigation of the problem, "ethical imperativeness for quality higher education: how well we do in mass communication departments-mirroring Nigerian's educational landscape." However, to ascertain how well ethical principles are observed in the Department of Mass Communication the researcher raised the following objectives which were later translated into research questions: i. are staff and students aware of ethical issues in Higher Education? ii. What are the sources of information regarding ethical issues in Higher Education? iii. What is the frequency of information dissemination on ethical issues to staff and students in the Department? iv. What is the level of acceptance of the ethical principles among staff and students of the Department? v. Which ethical issue (sex for a grade, forgery, tribal consideration/favouritism, cultism, and examination malpractice) is common in the Department of Mass Communication?

Ethics and Higher Education

The ethics of any given profession prescribe the moral standards every professional is expected to observe in the practice of his/her profession. The study of ethics allows scholars to define ethics from different perspectives. For instance, Nwabueze, Oragwu, and Diara (2018) define ethics as moral principles and practices that guide a person's behavior and a as means of conducting his activity. While Ukala and Nwabueze (2016) define ethics as the branch of knowledge that deals with moral principles that affect how people make decisions and live their lives. Kayode and Adeyinka (2009), define ethics as a set of customary principles and practices embodying some sort of normative codes (behaviour or values) that ought to be adhered to by every member of a given society or body. Omisore and Adeleke (2015) assert that ethics is a discipline dealing with the study of what is good and bad, right and wrong, and with moral duty and obligation to the individual and organization. According to Hoy (2005), ethics is a branch of philosophy that involves systematizing, defending, and recommending concepts of right and wrong conduct within an organization and society at large. According to Ukala and Nwabueze (2016), ethics can be seen as the actions and attitudes of people (who we are to people, how we treat people, and who we are when no one seems to be looking at us). Anyaogu (2008) defines it as, the science that places value on human conduct. It is a set of principles that guide people's attitudes, choices, and actions. These principles determine the purpose, destiny, and course of people's lives. This collaborates with Parrish-Sprowl(2000,p.204) who asserts that "ethical considerations reside in nearly every human activity, be it thought, word or deeds". Adedara and Bewaji (2017,p.179) see ethics as a moral philosophy that concerns itself with the "norms of behaviour; right and wrong, good and evil, approbation and

reprobation” Wimmer and Dominic (2003) state that ethical behaviour is the "proper thing to do". These researchers assume that someone who behaves ethically will be convinced that he has acted in a "morally appropriate manner." Ethics reinforces sustainable human development, and promotes democracy, human dignity, freedom, solidarity, and the common good in society (Egbujor, 2019). Olujuwon et.al (2020, pp.444-445) further assert that ethics may cover the way individuals live good lives, individuals' rights and responsibilities, the language of right and wrong, as well as moral decisions. Kayode and Adeyinka (2009) inform that ethics is concerned about human behaviours and ways of thinking, especially in situations whereby the choices made can affect the dignity and well-being of others. Casmir, Izueke, and Nzekwe (2014) regard ethics as a set of moral principles that define right or wrong for a person or group. It could be the study of what is right or wrong. Academic ethics according to them could be seen as an idea that depends on the help of both faculty members and students who together, understand the need to live decently and take action when necessary to uphold the academic integrity of their institutions. Thus, it is a moral code that guides the behaviour of academics in any given academic setting. Academic ethics could be seen as an idea that depends on the help of both faculty members and students who together, understand the need to live decently and take action when necessary to uphold the academic integrity of their institutions. Ike (2017, p.1), “tertiary education system that is not rooted in ethical principles cannot serve the 21st-century global society". He then sees education in the 21st Century as a process that must prime the students to inculcate discipline, free from social vices and become responsible members of society, develop their thinking ability, improves on their innovative endowment, creating and decide their destiny while the teacher's responsibility in this new order is to "guide the student to know how to acquire knowledge that is not mere information but the knowledge that is reflected, offering essential insights needed for effective living"(Ike, 2019,p.1). Ike's position on what 21st Century education ought to be, takes us closer to the utilitarianism theory of ethics developed by Jeremy Bentham(1748-1832); Richard Cumberland(1631-1718), Earl Shaftesbury(1671-1713); Francis Hutcheson(1694-1746); and John Gay(1699-1745). Rooted in the theological belief system of these earliest classical approach proponents who were also theologians, believe that human being is under a moral obligation to bestow happiness unto man by also perceiving the natural consequences of their actions, Schofield (2006). This theory hinges on morality and advocacy of happiness and pleasure against harm. The theory further argues that what is beneficial to a greater proportion of society is ethical and what is beneficial to one person and not to a large population or group of persons is most likely to be unethical. In the light of the above tenets of this theory, the researcher firmly believes that actions such as examination malpractices, sex for a grade, forgery, tribal consideration/favouritism, and cultism are parochial and self-centered actions in nature, harmful to a group of persons or a system, only meant to benefit the perpetrator and undermine the interest of the greater population. Rule utilitarianism, a branch of utilitarianism, adopted for this study takes into consideration law and fairness. Rule utilitarianism believes that for whatever reason an action is taken by an individual it should go through the fairest and just means possible. Rule utilitarianism values justice, equity, and beneficence.

Ethical Issues in Nigerian Higher Education

The Nigerian educational system is gradually decaying due to a lack of ethical standards orchestrated by negligence by the major stakeholders. Nigerian universities hardly make it to the first 1000 top universities in the world due to a decline in standards, deterioration of facilities, examination malpractices, and mass production syndrome (Ikechi & Akanwa, 2012). Ironically, the “National Policy on Education (2015 as revised) has stated that teaching in Nigeria shall attain the highest standard possible since no education can rise above the quality of its teachers” Musa (2018, p.1). Ikechi and Akanwa (2012, p.451) in their study also observed that “unethical practices have affected the fortunes of the educational system in Nigeria”, alleging that Nigerians can no longer take pride in their tertiary educational system particularly, the university system, as a citadel of learning and centre of academic excellence, due to the erosion of core ethical values.

The erosion of ethical values has been attributed to many factors, among key factors is the teacher/lecturer factor. The teacher is seen as the engine room for the custodian of ethical values in the tertiary education system. Teacher efficiency is key to the survival of the educational system. Teacher effectiveness has a great impact on student performance and serves as a source of inspiration to students. The teacher is a life-wire of the educational system because the teacher stands at the interface of the communication of knowledge, skills, and values. (Rasmi Ranjan Puhan, Lakshmipriya Malla, Santosh Kumar Behera, 2005; Bray, 2003 cited in Musa, 2018). This implies that the teacher should have a full grasp of the subject assigned to him, be conversant with the ever-changing classroom situations, have the creative and analytical ability, and general pedagogical skills, and also understand the ethical demands in classroom and after-classroom situations.

Teachers' worth is therefore imperative to the quality of education in general and students' learning outcomes in particular. Olujuwon, et.al (2020,p.446) noted that the Teachers' Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN) Code of Conduct 2013 edition in an attempt to correct the maladies confronting teachers had listed the following as unethical practices by teachers: aiding, abetting or assessor to examination malpractice, taking advantage of students or teachers, the negligence to duty by not going to classes as at when due, unauthorized absenteeism, habitual lateness to school, sexual harassment, sex for marks, irregular or unauthorized award of marks, loss of interest in teaching, unnecessary exploitation of the students and system, voluntary absenteeism from programmes and workshops that would develop their efficiency and proficiency in classrooms.

The students are not also left out in these ethical lapses in the Nigerian educational sector as this study is focused on teacher-student responsibilities in maintaining high ethical standards in our tertiary institutions. Ikechi and Akanwa, (2012, p.451) decried the widespread decay of the educational system in Nigeria and averred that "the rot has permeated every facet of the education sector. It cuts across all ages, parents, teachers, government and the society at large". Nigerian students for certain reasons have contributed to the decay of the educational system in Nigeria as we take a look at the four ethical issues that define the scope of this study.

Sex for a Grade

Sex for grade has become a common practice in the Nigerian educational sector. Olujuwon et.al (2020, p.335) assert that harassment occurs as sexual and physical harassment, and the use of abusive language. Ikechi and Akanwa (2012, p.345) allege that "many academics especially the young ones ask for sex in exchange for marks". This act usually leads to sexual harassment. Lack of commitment to studies on the part of the students, greed, transparency in the awards of marks, high cost of living and poor pay, and sometimes lack of pay to lecturers are among the variables that trigger sexual harassment. Nidibe as cited in Ikechi and Akanwa (2012), labelled some degrees obtained in Nigerian universities as " Sexually Transmitted Degrees", particularly higher degrees gotten by working class such as bankers, engineers, lawyers, accountants, and others in well-paid jobs who seek for higher degrees for promotion and possibly preparing for elective and or political appointment are prompted to sex for grade syndrome.

Forgery

The picture in the larger Nigerian society with several cases of forgery is a reflection of the higher education system. Our educational system is marred with cases of forgery from students to lecturers. In the case of students, they could forge lecturers' signatures to sign a late registration form and forge school fees receipt to enable such a student to sit for exams. Some students even forge statements of results for the National Youth Service Corp (NYSC) programme, and forge the NYSC certificate as well as forge the university certificate. Lecturers are not left out of this crime. They also present several forged documents during recruitment and promotion interviews.

Tribal Consideration/Favouritism

Tribal and ethnicity or ethnic consideration have become ethical cancer in the Nigerian educational landscape. This usually starts with the recruitment processes of teachers and none teachers into our tertiary institutions. Based on these faulty recruitment processes the recruited staff see it as a seen of duty to help their tribal students to scale through the hurdles of getting a certificate in higher education in their respective institutions. Olujuwon, et.al (2020, pp.335) capture it thus, "poor grading and bad computation of results (direct or indirect demand for gratification, favouritism based on ethnicity, religion or sex," affect the educational system in Nigeria.

Cultism

Ofojebe (2018) in his research study of the ethical issues in Nigerian education: influence on effective management of colleges of education in Delta state, examined 23 unethical issues that influence the effective management of Colleges of Education in Delta State and found that cultism and gangsterism are among the top 20 unethical practices in the Nigerian educational system. Cultism in Nigerian higher education takes many forms. It could be a cult of personality, a notorious outing for intimidation, stealing, killing and victimization, and raping of female students. Sad enough, some lecturers were cultists in their school days so they directly or indirectly support cult activities.

Examination Malpractice

Examination malpractice is the act of cheating in the examination hall. Egielewa and Adejumo(2021) define examination as an assessment given to students to ascertain their level of comprehension of a given subject; to validate knowledge and capacity in a given subject to obtain a qualification and or for assessing students for the prerequisite award of a certificate, diploma or a degree. Examination malpractice seems to be the leading unethical practice in Nigerian higher education. This act may be attributed to the high demand for certificates rather than skills in the labour sector of the Nigerian economy. Examination malpractice has eaten

deep into the body polity of the Nigerian educational system such that students and lecturers are both culprits in this exercise. Ikechi and Akanwa(2012,p.458) noted that “examination malpractices are the massive and unprecedented abuse of rules and regulations about internal and public examinations”. Egielewa and Adejumo's (2021) study that was carried in 2021 showed that 2 out of 4 Nigerian students who sat for the West African Examination Council (WAEC) and National Examination Council (NECO) to pay a cooperation fee, a fee that automatically allows a student free access to cheat in examination. In Nigeria, examination malpractice could be in the form of bringing in forbidden materials such as handouts, textbooks, prepared materials into the examination hall, impersonation, assistance by lecturers or invigilators by way of supplying answers or materials that aid them to discover answers, or turn their attention away from the students to enable have free access to cheat in the examination. Another way the students and teachers are involved in examination malpractice is by sneaking out of question papers to enable the preferred candidates to write their examination in their comfort with textbooks. With the age of electronic gadgets, some students beat the invigilators' to the game and enter the examination hall with electronics that help them cheat in the examination, this is called electronically assisted malpractice. Collusion, this practice is common, particularly where the examination venue is large and give room for the candidate to choose for themselves their seats. The candidate simply agreed to sit together so that they can copy from each other. Olujuwon, et.al (2020, p.335) also see examinations as leakages of questions, and improper invigilation”. These acts are often exhibited by lecturers for favouaritism purposes or money making.

Ofogbe(2018) examined 23 unethical issues and found that extortion and exploitation, forceful sales of textbooks, fraud and greed, cultism and gangsterism, sexual harassment and molestation, plagiarism, drug abuse, sexual promiscuity, indecent dressing, assault and slander, examination malpractices and misconduct, impersonation, irregular attendance to class to class by lecturers, staff kidnapping, bribery and corruption, theft and stealing, gossip, indiscipline and dishonesty, victimization of staff and students are among the top unethical behavior exhibited among staff and student in the college of education. His results indicated that the above-listed practices scored an acceptable mean score of 3.00 and above showing strong positive responses and agreement with the statements by the academic staff concerning types of unethical practices highly influencing the management of colleges of education (CEOs) in Delta State.

Methodology

This study adopts a quantitative survey method using an online questionnaire as a data collection instrument administered on Google Forms and share with respondents (students) in the selected higher institutions in Edo State and Enugu State respectively on their Whatsapp platforms through their lecturers. The choice of this online administration of instrument was to enable the researcher to break the barrier of distance and reach the students in real time. The study was restricted to undergraduate students and teachers of mass communication because some of the selected institutions do not run the post-graduate programme. The four schools were also randomly selected from the pool of 10 government-approved universities and polytechnics in the two selected states of the South-South and South-Eastern region of Nigeria.

The selected schools and their Departments' staff-students population were, Auchi Polytechnic, Auchi, Edo State, Nigeria; -1,633 students and 44 teachers; Edo State University, Uzairue- 137 students and 8 teachers; the Enugu State University of Science and Technology-694 students and 12 teachers; Caritas University, Amorji Nike, Enugu-174 students, and 9 teachers. The four selected schools have a total population of 2,711 which stood as the actual population of this study. The researcher used a sample size of 462. Going by Taro Yamane's sample size table, a population that falls within the range of 2000 can use a sample size of 476 at an error margin of ($\pm 4\%$) and 333 at an error margin of ($\pm 5\%$). This implies that the sample size of 462 used in this study is quite suitable for the study given the population of 2,711. Two lecturers were interviewed from each institution.

Data Presentation/ Analysis and Discussion of Findings

- i. Are staff and students aware of ethical issues in Higher Education?

Table 1: Measuring Respondents' Level of Awareness of Ethics

Are you aware of ethical issues in your institution

462 responses

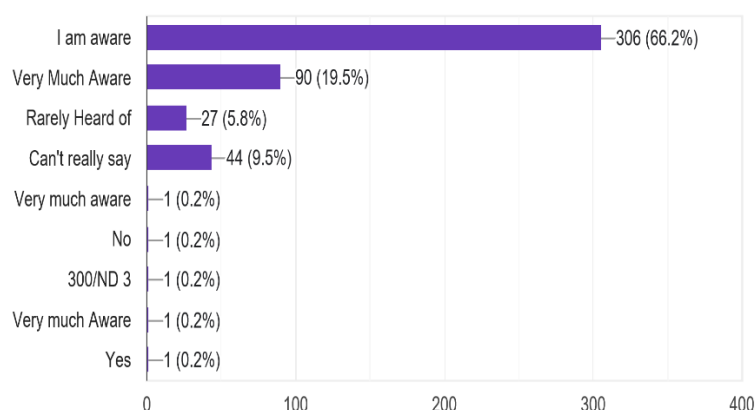


Table 1, above shows the respondents' views about the level of awareness of ethics in their institutions. 396 respondents representing (85.7% of the students) are aware of ethics in their institutions while 66 respondents (14.3% of the students) said that is not aware of ethics.

Descriptive data from the interview are presented below:

i. How much do you believe in ethics in your department?

Respondent 1

"I believe there are ethics in the department because all the staff have demonstrated this in the discharge of their duties, in relating with students, in supervision, in marking and consideration of results"

Respondent 2

"Academic ethics are very vital if any department wants to get the best from its students. Ethics are guiding principles that are moral standards that every department must up to high esteem. As for me I believe in ethical values and hold them with top priority."

Respondent 3

"To a large extent"

Respondent 4

"I believe so much in academic ethics in my department because it goes a long way to determine the quality of students the department would be turning out as graduates."

Respondent 5

"I believe so much in it"

Respondent 6

"To a great extent, I strongly believe in academic ethics in my department"

Respondent 7

"Lecturing is a calling for those who understand it, there are ethics, rules, or sets of moral conducts that are set out to guide our daily operations with students. Sometimes, these rules may not be written but are presented to us during orientation. They are also set out as university regulations and also in the department handbooks. Such roles include not collecting money from students, mutilation of results, and exposing examination questions before the examination. As a teacher, you are told all these things. I believe in them and I also believe that as teachers we can be better if we keep to what we teach our students."

Respondents' views of sources of information about ethical issues in their department

Figure 1

I know about Ethics through

462 responses

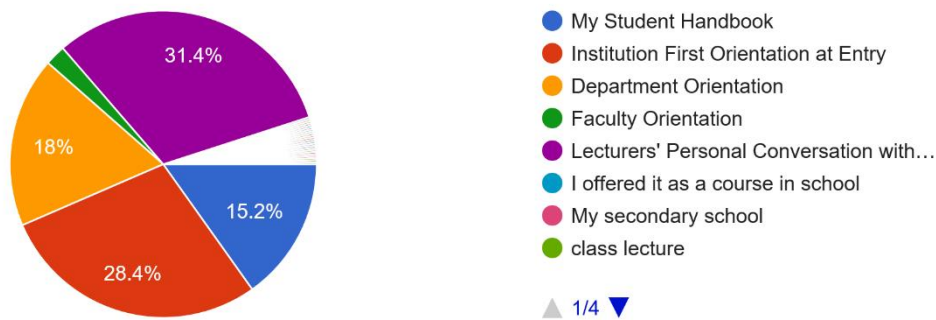


Figure 1 above presents the findings on sources of information on ethical issues for students. The findings further showed that there are several means of information dissemination on ethical values to students. However, four means were prominently identified among these: lecturers' **conversation with students during classes (31.4%)**; institution first orientation (28.4%); departmental orientation (18%), and student handbook (15.2%).

Descriptive data from the interview are presented below:

Respondent 1

“Students’ orientation at the beginning of the session. The medium has always been verbal communication primarily and also the students’ handbook produced by the university.

Respondent 2

“I always prefer lecture time because students would listen with attention.”

Respondents 3:

“Lecture time and interpersonal communication”

Respondent 4

“I do take out time during my class schedules to consciously address my students about ethics in the department.”

Respondent 5

“Lecture time”

Respondent 6

“Lecture time”

Respondent 7

“I do, sometimes I take five minutes of my class time to talk about their previous conduct and also talk about what I want them to do and not to do such as the need for them to do their assignment, not to copy people’s work, the need to be in school on time, or why they should not engage in examination malpractices. It also boils down to level advising. As a level adviser, you are a role model, your attitude should preach these ethical issues to your students. You should be the one that asks them out for sex and other unethical practices.”

Respondents’ views about the frequency of ethical information received

Figure 2

How often do you receive counselling on Ethical Conduct in your Department

462 responses



Figure 2 above shows that, students received counselling in ethics between 1-3 times. The data showed that 35.5% of the students received ethical counselling once (at first-year orientation) and twice (at first-year orientation and pre-examination time and during classes).

Descriptive data from the interview are presented below:

Respondent 1:

“I consciously talk to my students on ethical issues but not often. Basically during first-year orientation”.

Respondent 2

“I consciously and often talk to my students about ethical issues during classes.”

Respondents 3:

“I often talk to my students on ethical issues during classes”

Respondent 4:

“I consciously and often talk to my students on ethical imperativeness in mass communication during classes”

Respondent 5:

“I often educate the students on ethical issues during classes.”

Respondent 6:

“Yes! I always talk to my students about ethical issues consciously and unconsciously”

Respondent 7:

"Yes! I take out time to talk to students about ethical issues. Sometimes I spent five minutes talking to them."

Respondents' views of the level of acceptance (influence) of the ethical principles shared in the department

Figure 3

Have you been influenced by the ethical counselling in your Department and to what extent?

462 responses



Figure 3 above shows the level of influence ethical counselling has on the students. The findings revealed that 35% of the students have been influenced to a large extent while 18.2% said the counselling has minimal

effects, others could not ascertain the effects on them, meaning the counselling of the students on ethics has no great positive impacts since 65% of the students are within this category.

Descriptive data from the interview are presented below:

Respondent 1

“My talk on ethics to students has positive impacts on them because our students' behavior is above board in several areas such as cheating, fighting, and bullying”.

Respondent 2

“Some students abide by the ethical principles while some do not”.

Respondents 3:

"Despite my efforts to instill in them these moral principles, it has not reflected positively in their daily activities they keep doing the same thing."

Respondent 4:

“Yes! These talks have impacted or reflected in their daily activities as some have come to acknowledge the importance of my talks about moral discipline (ethics). Some of the students even refer their friends to me for counselling”

Respondent 5:

"Yes! To some extent, it has reflected in students' daily activities"

Respondent 6:

"Yes! To a great extent it does. For example, in the area of dressing, manners of approach, examination conducts, general conduct in classroom-like sweeping the classroom every morning, not picking calls during classes, not making noise during classes and fighting in classes and after classes.”

Respondent 7:

“Yes! It has reflected in their daily activities. It may not be total, because you still have some students who will never obey what you say, whom I may termed as laggards”

Figure 4

Which of these unethical behaviour is most

462 responses

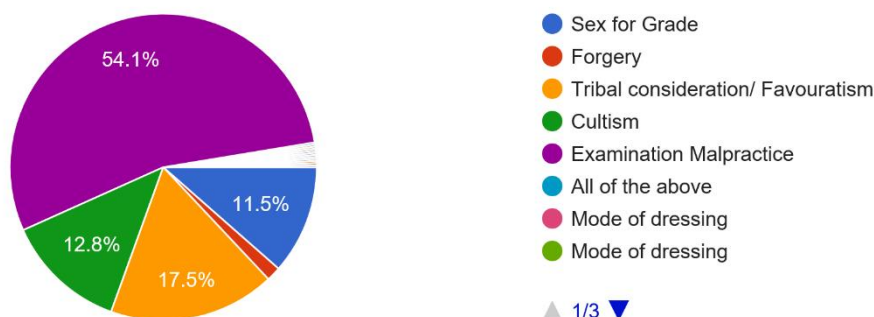


Figure 4 above showed data on the most prevalent unethical behavior in mass communication department. The findings showed that examination malpractice is the most prevalent unethical practice in the department of mass communication in Nigeria has affirmed by 54.1% respondents. Second most prevalent unethical behavior revealed in this study is tribal consideration /favouratism (17.5%) and followed by sex for grade unethical behavior.

Descriptive data from the interview are presented below:

Respondent 1:

“Actually in my Department none but we emphasized on these three, cheating, fighting and bullying.”

Respondents 2:

“To the best of my knowledge the issue of sex for marks and examination malpractice are not in existence in my department because of high moral standards of our school.”

Respondents 3:

“Examination malpractice and plagiarism are the two worrisome ethical issues in my department”

Respondents 4:

“The ethical issues in my department is mostly examination misconduct”

Respondent 5:

Examination malpractice

Respondent 6:

“Examination malpractice”

Respondent 7:

“We are still battling with few ethical problems in our department. Examination malpractice is still very high. Sometimes some lecturers or invigilators especial female invigilators weep up sentiments crying for undeserved pardon for the culprits. Other unethical issues are, extortion, sexual harassment-though often times remain unreported and forceful buying of textbooks”

Discussion of Findings

The findings of these study were discussed in line with the five research questions framed to guide the execution of this study.

1. Are staff and students aware of ethical issues in Higher Education?

The findings showed that staff and students are very much aware of ethics in their departments. The empirical data that were obtained from the students (respondents) showed that 396 respondents representing (85.7% of the students) are aware of ethics. The seven lecturers (100%) who participated in the interview agreed that they are aware and believed in ethics in tertiary institutions.

ii. What are the sources of information regarding ethical issues in Higher Education?

The findings from the qualitative data showed that students (respondents) learn more about ethics through their lecturers during classes. The data showed that 146 (31.4%) respondents agreed that they learn more about ethics through personal conversation with lecturers during classes. The qualitative that obtained from lecturers through interview also collaborate with the qualitative data. Six (86%) out of seven lecturers who participated in the interview said that they do engage their students on ethical issues during classes.

iii. What is the frequency of information dissemination on ethical issues to students in the Department?

Figure 2 above provides answer to this question. The data showed that, students received counselling in ethics between 1-3 times. The data showed that 35.5% of the students received ethical counselling once (at first year orientation). The qualitative data obtained from lecturers through interview also collaborate with the qualitative data. Six (86%) out of seven lecturers who participated in the interview said that they often engage their students on ethical issues during classes. However, the effects of these tutoring are minimal on students also indicating a missing gap that needs to be traced and dealt with.

iv. What is the level of acceptance of the ethical principles among staff and students of the Department?

Empirical data showed that the level of acceptance is insignificant. The findings revealed that 35% of the students have been influenced to a large extent while 18.2% said the counselling has minimal effects, leaving a large proportion of students, 216 (46.8%) in the valley of indecision as to whether ethical counselling has positive impacts on them. The qualitative data obtained from lecturers through interview also collaborate with the quantitative data. 5 (71.4%) out of seven lecturers who participated in the interview agreed that counselling of students on ethical issues had no significant impacts but rather partial or minimal effects. This is the reason why examination malpractices are still very common.

v. Which ethical issue (sex for a grade, forgery, tribal consideration/favouritism, cultism, and examination malpractice) is considered common in the Department of Mass Communication?

The findings on figure 4 showed that examination malpractice is the most prevalent unethical practice in the department of mass communication in Nigeria has affirmed by 54.1% respondents. Second most prevalent unethical behavior revealed in this study is tribal consideration /favouratism (17.5%) and followed by sex for grade unethical behavior. The qualitative data also support the quantitative data obtained from questionnaire administered to students. The researcher found out from 5 (71.4%) lecturers interviewed out of 7 who participated in the interview said that examination malpractice is prevalent in the department of mass communication.

Summary/ Conclusion

The researcher employed a survey research method to conduct this study and obtained data using questionnaire and interviews. The questionnaire instrument was used to obtain data from the category ‘A’ respondents (students) and interviews for category ‘B’ respondents (lecturers). It was found that, in spite of the repeated efforts by lecturers to educate the students on the need to uphold good moral conduct generally and particularly during examination, examination malpractice still persists as the commonest ethical problem ravaging department of mass communication in the tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Since the findings also showed that, lecturers take out time during the classes to counsel the students on ethical issues including conduct of

examination, the researcher therefore perceived in a gap in this regard. It therefore means that, there is a foundational problem which should be traced to their early school. On this note, the researcher feels that, Egielewa and Adejumo study of 2021 which showed that 2 out of 4 Nigerian students who sat for WAEC and NECO pay a certain amount of money as cooperation fee to enable them cheat in examination is the foundational problem of examination misconduct in the tertiary institution and until this problem is uprooted tertiary institutions will not be free from examination malpractice. The research findings also showed that ethical lessons given to the students by lecturers have minimal effects.

Recommendations

The researcher recommended that ethical orientation particularly on examination misconduct should start at the primary school level. Ethics should be enshrined into all levels of the educational curricular. Government and school proprietors should also organize frequent seminars on ethical issues to but staff and students.

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