

## ISSUES OF BUREAUCRATIC CORRUPTION IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES

**Osumah, O. Augustine**

Department of Public Administration, Faculty of  
Management Sciences, Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma,  
Nigeria  
National Museum, King Square, Benin City, Edo State  
[osumahaugustine@yahoo.com](mailto:osumahaugustine@yahoo.com)

&

**Oyakhire Samuel**

Department of Public Administration, Faculty of  
Social Sciences, University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria  
[soyakhire2013@gmail.com](mailto:soyakhire2013@gmail.com)

### **Abstract**

*Corruption is no doubt an age long canker that is nakedly tearing down many bureaucratic organizations in the entire world. In this paper, a concise portrait of bureaucratic corruption in Nigerian universities is painted. Specifically, the ideal bureaucracy is thrashed out side by side with bureaucratic corruption in order to clearly bring to light the differences between the latter and the former. To shore up the discourse, bureaucratic organization theory is adopted as a frame of reference. This paper relied on data gathered from the secondary source to analyze some of the implications of bureaucratic corruption in Nigerian universities. It was recommended that the rules and procedures which are decided for every work in all Nigerian universities should be rightly applied since adherence to fixed rules will possibly keep the behaviour of employees in check and propel them to work in the formally approved manner.*

**Keywords:** Bureaucracy, corruption, bureaucratic corruption, and universities.

### **Introduction**

Corruption is somewhat an incontestable global phenomenon. Even the so called corruption-free enclaves all over the world still experience varied incidences of corruption in their institutions time-and-again. The appellations frequently used in describing corrupt practices vary from place to place. They include but are not limited to kickback, bribe, carrot, backhand, ten-percent, candy, blocking, sweetener, brown envelope and cooperation-fee. In Nigeria, corruption has no doubt permeated many bureaucratic organizations. This phenomenon is one of the challenges the universities are set up to tackle head-on. Oyedepo (as cited in Ajaja 2014) maintained that universities do not just exist to teach and graduate students, but rather to provide a platform for rigorous intellectual expositions that intends to proffer solutions to communal problems such as corruption and to identify moral values and encourage research. But the disturbing paradox is that many Nigerian universities, which are charged with the task of carrying out research on how to solve societal problems such as corruption, have as well become protective coverings where multiplicities of corrupt practices are copiously incubated, hatched, and hibernated.

The apparent narrow-mindedness of the hue-and-cry about corrupt practices in the university circles calls for attention. Over the years, public denigration has been unleashed on a number of university employees who engage in the corrupt act of constraining clients to tender petty inducement before they render the same services for which they are being remunerated from time to time. This phenomenon is commonly known as bribery and extortion. While this fraud is criticized with deafening shouts, other multifarious fraudulent deals perpetrated and perpetuated overtly and covertly within the university systems seem to be growing perpetually without

stern condemnation. This attitude undoubtedly reveals the double-standards which are demonstrated in the combat against bureaucratic corruption in the multifarious universities in Nigeria.

In this paper, the searchlight is beamed on the Nigerian university systems in a bid to uncover the varieties of corrupt practices that are ubiquitous among the employees. Besides the foregoing introduction, this paper as well contains some other sub-themes namely conceptual clarifications; theoretical construction; description of bureaucracy and bureaucratic corruption; the veritable universities; salient functions of the Nigerian universities; instances of bureaucratic corruption in the Nigerian universities; socio-economic implications of bureaucratic corruption in the Nigerian universities; and conclusion. Lastly, some recommendations were submitted.

### **Conceptual Clarifications**

Bureaucratic corruption and socio-economic development have shades of meanings. To avoid imprecision, their operational definitions are put forward the way they are used in this discourse.

**Bureaucratic Corruption:** Bureaucratic corruption means all acts of dishonesty such as embezzlement, kickback, bribery and any acts that negate the laid down rules and regulations in the public service. Some of these other acts include inadequate enforcement of rules which encapsulates incorrect implementation of public service laws due to self-seeking clandestine motives best known to the bureaucrats. Another one is personalization of offices which is the deliberate mishandling of public offices by the bureaucrats for their selfish interests. Last of all is the abuse of authority which entails the misuse of official authority and discretionary power that bureaucrats are permitted to exercise in the office they occupy in the public service.

**Socio-Economic Development:** Socio-economic development is a turn of phrase which is used in describing the comprehensive improvement in the various social and economic indices of a given country over a period of time. In this discourse, the major indicators of socio-economic development encapsulate advancement in sectors such as education, skills, and industry.

### **Theoretical Construction**

The bureaucratic organization theory is adopted as a frame of reference in this paper. Max Weber, Arthur Richard, Panagiotis Grigoriou and Marshal Dimock are among the theorists that expounded the salient principles of bureaucracy which have endured in managing organizations till date (Azelama, 2004; Grigoriou, 2013). The foremost principle is division of labour which promotes the allocation of tasks and a balance between power and responsibilities. The second one is chain of command that encompasses organizational hierarchy constructed in a manner that makes information related to decisions and works to flow successfully from top to bottom. The third is consistent and complete rules which comprises appropriate rules and regulations that are equally applicable to every member of the organization. The fourth is impersonal relationship whereby the selection of employees is strictly based on qualifications like skills and experience which is not influenced by personal relations and inducement. The implication of the foregoing is that full adherence to fixed rules keeps employees' behaviour in check and makes the public organizations to function well. The observance of impersonal relationship in public organization enables public officers to properly discharge their responsibilities without fear or favour. And the appropriate utilization of authority especially by the superior in their relationship with the entire subordinates and members of the public enhances the correct discharge of assigned duties for the realization of organizational objectives (Azelama, 2004; Grigoriou, 2013).

The above mentioned principles of bureaucracy aptly describe the organization and management of the university system. Correct application of rules and procedures which are decided for every work in the university helps in actualizing consistency in employees' behaviour which in turn facilitates the achievement of set goals. But the corrupt practice of improper application of rules somewhat hinders the realization of university's goals. In addition, the impersonal relationship and hierarchy that clearly define the duties and responsibilities of all units in the university cancel the question of conflicting job duties plus oppressive bottlenecks. While the corrupt act of personalizing office and misusing authority for personal gains exacerbates poor implementation of university's policies and programmes. The overall implication of the bureaucratic organization theory is that the appropriate or inappropriate manner, in which its principles are observed and maintained as may be the case, either leads to a corrupt or a corruption-free bureaucracy.

### **Bureaucracy and Bureaucratic Corruption**

The place of bureaucracy in realizing set goals in public organizations is tremendous. This can be garnered from the central place it occupies in the formulation and implementation of policies designed for the welfare of the entire public. "Bureaucracy" as a concept stems from the word "bureau", used from the early 18th century in Western Europe to refer to an administrative centre where officials worked. The original French meaning of the word bureau was the "baize" used to cover desks. Bureaucracy as a term came into use shortly before the French Revolution of 1789 before spreading to other countries (Grigoriou, 2013). This implies that bureaucracy is an old administrative system. Arthur (as cited in Azelama, 2004) explained that bureaucracy is "an integrated hierarchy of specialized offices defined by systematic rules, an impersonal routinized structure wherein legitimized authority rests on the office and not in the person of the incumbent". In the same vein, Dimock (as cited in Grigoriou, 2013) stated that bureaucracy is

the “administrative structure and set of regulations put in place to control, rationalize, render effective and professionalize activities, usually in large organizations and government”.

The ideal bureaucracy was propounded by Max Weber. And it comprises salient principles which include division of labour, specialization of functions, adherence to fixed rules, hierarchy of authority, and impersonal relationship (Weber Bureaucracy, 1864-1920). Division of labour implies that there should be fixed sharing out of work and a balance between authority and official duties. This means that the tasks in the organization should be shared among the various employees so that they can properly and adequately discharge the responsibilities in which they have commensurate skills. This division of labour in turn breeds specialization of functions which is the by-product of repeated performance of similar or the same assignments. Adherence to consistent and complete rules implies that there should be proper rules and regulations for running the organization. These rules ought to be equally applicable to every member of the organization. The disciplinary measures entrenched in the rules must take its course whenever any staff whether superior or subordinate violates the organizational rules and regulations. The organizational hierarchy of authority is usually constructed in a way so that information related to decisions and works can flow effectively from top to bottom. The chain of command is not meant to be an instrument for oppression or empire building. Impersonal relationship is about the selection and promotion of workers which ought to be based on qualifications like skills, and experience. And rendering of services to the public should not be influenced by personal affiliations such as tribe and family ties (Weber Bureaucracy, 1864-1920; Azelama, 2004). In spite of its advantageous principles, bureaucracy has conspicuous inadequacies.

According to Tobi and Lawal (2006), the role of bureaucracy has come under severe criticisms within the context of the gap that exists between its anticipated role and its actual output in

guiding the society along the course leading to the desired goal of bringing about efficiency and effectiveness in running the organization for overall societal development. They stress that the failure of the public bureaucracy to deliver the expected output to the society informed the series of reforms that have come to form the policy thrust of successive Nigerian governments since the 1980s. They sufficed it to say that the hallmark of such reform has been on the need to have efficient and responsive public sector that has the capacity to meet the challenges posed by the domestic and external environments. Their overall submission is that the efforts of the Nigerian government have not yielded the much expected results due to the problem of corruption which has eaten deep into the fabric of the Nigerian society particularly the public bureaucracy. Haque, Bose and Blackburn (2004) posited that a useful working description of public sector corruption is the abuse of authority by public officials to make personal gains. This implies that corruption covers the whole activities that contravene organizational rules and regulations.

The aggregation of the diverse fraudulent activities in a bureaucratic organization is described as bureaucratic corruption. From this viewpoint, Mashal (2011) described bureaucratic corruption as the shady acts of the appointed bureaucrats in their dealings with either their superior (the political elite) or with the public. He emphasized that in its most common form, usually known as petty corruption, the public may be required to bribe bureaucrats either to receive a service to which they are entitled or to speed up a bureaucratic procedure. Correspondingly, Haque, Bose and Blackburn (2004) affirmed that one manifestation of bureaucratic corruption is when civil servants, or bureaucrats, exploit their powers of discretion, delegated to them by the government; to further their own interests by indulging in illegal or unauthorized activities. They added that the incentives to engage in the corrupt deeds cut across the hierarchy of public organizations. These fraudulent activities can take various forms, including bribery,

embezzlement, extortion, scam, and perversion of due process or inadequate enforcement of rules, abuse of authority plus personalization of offices for a number of several other underhanded motives.

Notwithstanding the aforementioned, the entire employees in bureaucratic organizations are entrusted with public resources. That is the reason why the general public usually looks up to the bureaucrats for collective welfare. Personnel in bureaucratic organizations are thus expected to work uncompromisingly for the interests of all and sundry. Different bureaucratic organizations abound in Nigeria but the centre of attention in this exposition is the universities.

### **The Veritable Universities**

The universities are citadels of learning and research but the fact is that they as well preserve the connection between knowledge and the zest of life, by uniting the young and the old in the imaginative consideration of learning (Alfred, 1967). This condensed description endorses capacity building as the concrete underpinning of the veritable universities. More to the point, Lucas and Boulton (2008) asserted that universities are of academic and practical utility in the sense that they deal with the universality of knowledge which include the natural, intellectual, emotional, social, cultural and economic organizations as well as interactions of human beings. In substantiation, Alfred (1967) specifically claimed that the main function of universities is to produce people with a greater passion for business. This shows that the universities guarantee socio-economic development by continuously enhancing the business know-how of the people. It is perceptible that the above mentioned functions of universities can only be performed if an enabling ambience is fashioned out to that effect. In view of that, Fujia (n.d.) opined that the operational system of universities should be one under which the schools can be run freely by educationists so as to enjoy the autonomous rights of independent thinking and free expression within the framework

of the national constitution and laws. This implies that the most important constitutional functions, rights and privileges of the universities ought to be properly spelt out in order to make way for effective administration. Umaru (2006) maintained that the University of Lagos declaration which was made public in 1967 is a very good example of legal instrument which emphasized the most momentous functions of the Nigerian universities.

### **Salient Functions of Nigerian Universities**

Umaru (2006); Imafidon and Arowoshegbe (2017) both stated in unison that every statutory university in Nigeria is established on purpose to:

- Encourage the advancement of learning and to hand out to all persons without distinction of race, creed, sex or political conviction the opportunity of acquiring their desired level of higher education.
- Provide courses of instruction and other facilities for the pursuit of learning in all its branches, and to make these facilities available on proper terms to such persons as are equipped to benefit from them.
- Duly encourage, promote and conduct scholarly research in all the fields of learning and human endeavour.
- Undertake any other activities appropriate for a university in order to meet the highest standard in learning and character.
- Develop manpower to meet distinguished needs of the economy.

The extents to which the aforementioned functions have been achieved are evidently on a low scale. Adamolekun (as cited in Akinnaso, 2017) claimed that most Nigerian universities have declined greatly. This is the state of affairs because there are lots of uncivil activities and corrupt transactions taking place in the Nigerian university systems. Below are some of the instances.

### **Instances of Bureaucratic Corruption in Nigerian Universities**

The Independent Corrupt Practices and other related Offences Commission (ICPC) affirmed that based on intelligence, petitions, complaints and public comments against the University system in Nigeria, ICPC invoked its statutory mandate derived from Section 6 (b-d) of its enabling law to undertake a comprehensive systems study and review of the Nigerian universities systems. This is one of the activities fundamentally designed to actualize the preventive mandate of the Commission. Subsequent to this exercise, a number of corrupt practices which were discovered in Nigerian universities and painstakingly enumerated by ICPC include:

Non-adherence to the carrying capacity of the National Universities Commission (NUC); non-adherence to rules and regulations guiding admission; political interference in the admission process of the University; over enrolment of students; sale of examination questions and other examination information; gratification and inducement to manipulate award of marks and grades; swapping of grades; writing of examination by proxy; direct cheating in examination; delay in the release of results; delaying students from graduating due to poor record keeping and deliberate victimization by officials; manipulation of internal examination processes; delay in take-off of lectures and non-completion of syllabus by lecturers; non-adherence to students and lecturer ratio; lack of commitment to work by the lecturers; continued defiance by institutions of the ban on satellite programmes and campuses by NUC; sales of lecture note and hand-outs; non-provision of adequate and appropriate practical apparatus; late opening and early closing of library; stealing and mutilation of library books; inadequate and irrelevant (outdated) textbooks; inadequate reading tables and chairs; corruption in the allocation of official bed spaces in student hostels by the managers; and sexual harassment.

### **Implications of Bureaucratic Corruption in Nigerian Universities**

Haque, Bose and Blackburn (2004) argued that public officials (bureaucrats) hold distinctive positions of power and responsibility, the abuse of which can cause major and long-lasting damage to many aspects of socio-economic development. According to them, all dishonest behaviour at one level in public office is often contagious and often supported by dishonest behaviour at other levels. They submitted that these and other reasons have made public sector corruption to be viewed as harmful, pervasive and difficult to fight. The socio-economic implications of bureaucratic corruption in Nigerian universities are analyzed underside.

**Drought of Learning Infrastructure:** The onus is on the government to provide funds for education. But Umaru (2006); Imafidon and Arowoshegbe (2017) affirmed that the university's authority is to provide courses of instruction and other facilities for the pursuit of learning in all its branches, and to make these facilities available on proper terms to such persons as are equipped to benefit from them. It then follows that for learning to be successful on campus, the university's management ought to pay attention to the construction and renovation of lecture halls and hostels; upgrading and updating of libraries; building of modern laboratories; establishment of durable internet facilities; building of sports facilities; and the provision of teaching aids such as tables, chairs, boards, projectors, and public address system. But on the contrary, a number of universities in Nigeria are experiencing shortage of the aforementioned facilities while the available ones are in pitiable conditions owing to obvious poor maintenance. Okoh (2009) categorically stated that misappropriation or embezzlement of funds meant for education makes the level of development and advancement of education to drop drastically. To authenticate this claim, Onyeji (2017) disclosed a range of instances where top officials in the Nigerian universities abused their positions of authority by embezzling or mismanaging some intervention

funds meant for infrastructural development on campuses. Table 1 captures some of such instances which suggest that there is a manifest association between bureaucratic corruption in Nigerian universities and drought of learning infrastructure.

**Table 1: Cases of Embezzlement in Nigerian Universities**

<b>Names of Universities</b>	<b>Missing Money</b>	<b>Date</b>
Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta (FUNAAB)	N800million	Nov., 2016
Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU), Ife	N1.4billion	Dec., 2016
Federal University of Technology Akure (FUTA)	N24million	Feb., 2017

*Source: Onyeji Ebuka, Premium Times, March 19, 2017.*

**Deterioration of Research Standard:** Osazuwa (2009) testified that corrupt practices orchestrated by political officers and civil servants have contributed to the rot in the Nigerian education sector. Some examples of such corrupt activities enumerated by ICPC (2013) include non-adherence to rules and regulations guiding admission; political interference in the admission process of the University; and engagement of the universities in over enrolment of students in order to get IGR to run the Institution. The misapplication of fixed rules in admission and politicization of admission process apparently provide room for a lot of incompetent students to matriculate every year. Such inept students subsequently find it difficult to cope with the rigors of carrying out scholarly research. This claim has been plainly verified by the findings in a survey of some selected universities in Ogun State which revealed that many students in most Nigerian universities that write academic papers no longer boast of originality. The corrupt act of plagiarizing other people's research work is now a rampant resort because even the incompetent students want to graduate by all means (Jerome,

Christopher and Osinulu, 2016). That is observably why the Nigerian universities' function to encourage, promote and conduct standard research in all fields of learning and human endeavour has been grossly impeded. It can thus be inferred from the aforesaid that there is an apparent association between bureaucratic corruption in Nigerian universities and deterioration of standard research.

**Proliferation of Half-Baked Graduates:** Alfred (1967) argued that in the modern complex social organism, the adventure of life cannot be disjoined from intellectual adventure. In a corresponding manner, Umaru (2006); Imafidon and Arowoshegbe (2017) held that one of the functions of Nigerian universities is to encourage the advancement of learning and hand out to all persons the opportunity of acquiring sound higher education. However, sound learning is encumbered in many Nigerian universities by a number of corrupt dealings.

They comprise the sale of examination questions and some other examination-related information; gratification and inducement to manipulate award of marks and grades; swapping of grades; writing of examination by proxy; and direct cheating in examination (ICPC, 2013). According to Osazuwa (2009), the spill-over effect includes scholastic ineptness which is manifested by many graduates in terms of inability to defend their certificates by way of excellent discharge of assigned tasks in their chosen professions. Foreseeing the danger in this aberration, Akpabio (2009) warned that “a student studying architecture and who bribes his way through and obtains his certificate, will a day cause the nation to pick up the bill of his evil ways in collapsed infrastructure designed by him”. This prediction has been validated repeatedly by the past and contemporary incidences of collapsed buildings across Nigeria, which Nwachukwu (2017) attributed largely to the quackery of most architects. The abovementioned confirmed that there is an obvious association between bureaucratic corruption in Nigerian universities and proliferation of half-baked graduates.

**Production of Unskilled Workforce:** Umaru (2006); Imafidon and Arowoshegbe (2017) explained that universities are set up to develop manpower to meet notable needs of the economy [particularly entrepreneurial skills]. In order to properly actualize this goal, educational structure, principles and practices ought to be significantly tailored towards entrepreneurship. Israel (2009) maintained that “when a nation gets her educational structure and ideology wrong, then she has indeed got herself into a mess because every other structure she will put in place whether political, economic or social structure will amount to building on rubble”. Sad but true, some gaps have existed in the curricula of Nigerian universities which encumbered entrepreneurship. Edet (2011) attested that the National Universities Commission (NUC) organized a workshop on entrepreneurship for Nigerian universities on July 4th, 2004 and produced a draft curriculum on entrepreneurial studies to reduce curricula inadequacies. But the outcome has not matched the expectation. Ekpoh and Edet (2011) vividly investigated entrepreneurship education and career intentions of tertiary education students in Nigeria. A total of 500 final year students in the Departments of Economics, Business Administration, Accounting and Finance in 2008/2009 academic session were drawn from the universities in Akwa Ibom and Cross River States of Nigeria. These category of students were chosen for the reason that they were about to face their professional career choice. The results showed that most undergraduates who are supposed to be self-employed still preferred to be in the employment of others owing to their lack of know-how in trade and investment even after their years of training in school. Delay in take-off of lectures; non-completion of syllabus; and lack of commitment to work by many lecturers in numerous Nigerian universities were outlined as the possible causative factors of the abovementioned (ICPC, 2013). This discovery implies that there is a noticeable association between bureaucratic corruption in Nigerian universities and production of unskilled workforce.

**Propagation of Moral Decadence:** David (as cited in Amarachi, 2014) asserted that the greatest thing a people or nation can bequeath to the succeeding generation is education which is the bedrock of development in any society. He stresses that there is no alternative to education which is concerned with the act or process of acquiring general knowledge, developing the powers of reasoning and judgment in preparing oneself or others for greater good. According to him, education cures all societal ills including but are not limited to violence, avarice, corruption, terrorism, prostitution and kidnapping since a well educated man craves for a better society for everybody to live in peace and harmony. But the burning ironical concern is that most Nigerian universities instituted to bequeath sound morals to students have as well become havens of moral depravity orchestrated by multifarious corrupt practices allowed by bureaucrats. Imuesi (2009) averred that it is now a common practice to see female students involving in sexual activities with their lecturers in order to get unmerited grades. To further substantiate this claim, ICPC (2013) affirmed that sexual harassment seems to rank extremely high among corrupt practices uncovered in Nigerian universities. Staff of universities who indulge in sexual harassment cannot productively play their role of molding students' character for fear that it will become a case of pot complaining that kettle is black. The foregoing reveals that there is a clear association between bureaucratic corruption in Nigerian universities and propagation of moral decadence.

Despite the criticism trailing it; bureaucratic corruption is still widespread to a large extent in many Nigerian universities. According to Aluko (2018), the Federal Government issued queries to forty two (42) universities in Nigeria for allegedly charging more than the #2,000 instructed by the Federal Ministry of Education for the conduct of 2017 Post-Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examinations. This unwholesome appetite to extort clients is an apparent attestation to the fact that bureaucratic corruption in Nigerian universities has become a virulent syndrome.

### **Conclusion**

It was clearly revealed in this paper that there is a conspicuous connection between bureaucratic corruption in Nigerian universities and drought of learning infrastructure; deterioration of research standard; proliferation of half-baked graduates; production of unskilled workforce; and propagation of moral decadence, which consequently impede socio-economic development in Nigeria. The misapplications of the bureaucratic principles put forward in the theoretical framework correctly explain the disorganization and improper management of the Nigerian university system. Incorrect application of rules and procedures which are decided for every work in the university is inhibiting consistency in employees' behaviour as well as making the management process to be crowded with corrupt practices such as embezzlement. Furthermore, personalization of offices makes the universities' procedures for rendering services to the public to be fraught with fraudulent practices such as bribery. Lastly, oppressive bottlenecks which permeate the universities' hierarchy do force people to induce the staff so as to receive a service or to quicken bureaucratic processes. The question at this point is has bureaucratic corruption become a dreaded monster that cannot be fought with, wiped out, and done away with from the Nigerian university systems? The answer is an obvious 'no'. But drastic actions are imperative in order to first of all cut back, and in the long run eliminate the corrupt state of affairs in many Nigerian universities and its ensuing harmful effects on socio-economic development. On this note, the following recommendations are submitted.

### **Recommendations**

- I. The rules and procedures, which are decided for every work in Nigerian universities should be rightly applied. Adherence to fixed rules will possibly keep employees' behaviour in check. And consistency in employees' behaviour will in turn ensure a corruption-free management process in Nigerian universities.

- II. The observance of impersonal relationships in Nigerian universities will enable the staff to discharge their responsibilities without preferential treatment. Offices and relationships in Nigerian universities should therefore be impersonal so that the procedures for rendering services to the public will be devoid of favoritism and other fraudulent practices such as bribery.
- III. There should be proper utilization of authority in Nigerian universities especially by the superior in their relationship with the subordinates and members of the public. Oppressive bottlenecks which permeate the universities' hierarchy ought to be jettisoned so that people will not be required to quicken any bureaucratic process by inducing any university employees before receiving a service which they duly deserve.
- IV. Lastly, any bureaucrats involved in bureaucratic corrupt practices in Nigerian universities should be prosecuted. The Nigerian Public Service Rules (2008) stipulate demotion, suspension, and sack as disciplinary measures for the erring civil servants. Therefore, these rules should be implemented in both letter and spirit without fear or favour.

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