

## **SOCIOLOGICAL INQUIRY ON PATTERNS, CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF GRADE BUYING (SORTING) IN NNAMDI AZIKIWE UNIVERSITY, AWKA, ANAMBRA STATE, NIGERIA**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study investigated the patterns, causes, and consequences of grade buying (sorting) in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The study adopted a cross-sectional survey design with a sample of 20 students and 2 lecturers. Data were collected using questionnaires and in-depth interviews. The findings revealed that 90% of respondents were aware of grade buying, with direct cash payments (80%) and intermediary-facilitated transactions (70%) being the most prevalent forms. Pressure for high classifications (85%) and fear of failure (75%) were major student-related causes, while poor lecturer remuneration (80%) was the key lecturer-related factor. Production of incompetent graduates (90%) and demoralization of honest students (85%) were the most severe consequences. Consistent application of sanctions (90%) and strengthening enforcement (85%) were considered the most effective measures. The study concluded that grade buying is prevalent in the department and driven by structural pressures on both students and lecturers. It recommended strengthening enforcement mechanisms, improving lecturer conditions of service, and establishing integrity campaigns to curb the practice.

**Keywords:** Grade buying, sorting, academic corruption, Nnamdi Azikiwe University

### **INTRODUCTION**

The contemporary world of the 21st century has witnessed significant transformations in educational systems across the globe. University education, regarded as the citadel of learning and the fountain of intellectual development, has come a long way from the era where academic excellence was solely determined by merit and hard work. In recent years, the increasing competition for grades and credentials has opened possibilities for corrupt practices to emerge within university systems, including the phenomenon of grade buying (Agwu, Orjiakor, Odii, Onalu, Nzeadibe, Roy, Onwujekwe & Okoye, 2022).

In Nigeria, university education was first introduced in 1948 with the establishment of the University College, Ibadan. However, in the 1990s, grade buying began to emerge as a noticeable phenomenon within tertiary institutions. It is one of the new waves of academic corruption in Nigerian and other universities. Grade buying has enabled students to acquire

undeserved grades through financial transactions and other inducements; it offers shortcuts for academic advancement without corresponding intellectual effort (Agwu et al., 2022).

The concept of grade buying is any illicit transaction where students provide money, sexual favours, or other inducements to lecturers or university officials in exchange for grades that have not been earned through demonstrated academic performance. For the case of this study, the two concepts, grade buying and sorting are used interchangeably.

Odo and Odo (2022) investigated the extent of involvement in examination malpractice among students in tertiary institutions in Enugu State, Nigeria. Their findings showed that students of higher institutions are involved in various forms of academic fraud. The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC, 2022) stated that most academic fraud in Nigeria was committed by students between the ages of twenty and thirty-five years in the Southern part of Nigeria, with Nnamdi Azikiwe University being one of the institutions where such practices have been documented.

In 2023, Nnamdi Azikiwe University dismissed two lecturers for gross misconduct, including one from the History and International Relations Department who was found guilty of falsifying results and grades in favour of a student (Ripples Nigeria, 2023). Additionally, three lecturers from the Faculty of Education were suspended for obtaining money from students in exchange for unmerited scores (The Source, 2023). Despite documented cases of lecturers dismissed for result falsification and students suspended for serving as intermediaries in grade-selling networks, the phenomenon appears to persist (Ripples Nigeria, 2023; The Source, 2023). Yet, there is a gap in knowledge on the theme of this study as the scholarly understanding of grade buying at the university remains remarkably underdeveloped. The patterns of participation, causes, and consequences have not been systematically documented. This knowledge deficit hampers both scholarly understanding and practical intervention. It is against this backdrop that this study investigated the patterns, causes, and consequences of grade buying (sorting) in Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria.

## **STUDY OBJECTIVES**

This study broadly examined the patterns, causes, and consequences of grade buying (sorting) in NnamdiAzikiwe University, Awka. Specifically, the study objectives include:

- a. To find out the various patterns of grade buying (sorting) that is prevalent at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.
- b. To examine the causes of grade buying (sorting) in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.
- c. To ascertain the consequences of grade buying (sorting) on the students and academic stability of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.
- d. To identify measures that could reduce the incidence of grade buying (sorting) in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Concept of Grade Buying and Types/Forms

Nigeria's National Universities Commission (2023) defined grade buying as any corrupt act committed using academic positions, grading authority or institutional connections with the sole aim of gaining financial or other personal benefits at the detriment of academic integrity. For Allen, Jivani and Eaton (2025), grade manipulation refers to the practice of bribery and corruption in academic grading systems, focusing on how stakeholders influence grading outcomes through financial incentives, gifts, and other forms of coercion. The term 'sorting' is a colloquial term also used in Nigerian universities to refer to grade buying.

Grade buying may be manifested through many forms like direct cash payments, sexual favours, material inducements, or other forms of bribery directed at influencing grading decisions. Eze and Nwankwo (2024) listed other forms of grade buying ranging from direct cash payments to result falsification, grade inflation, and certificate forgery. Also, students are coerced into providing sexual favours to lecturers in exchange for good grades, with Arinze (2024) noting that sexual harassment and extortion have become rampant in Nigerian universities. Intermediary-facilitated grade buying operates through student 'runners' or class representatives who collect money and facilitate transactions (The Source, 2023).

### The Concept of Academic Integrity

Academic integrity refers to commitment to honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility in education. According to Allen, Jivani and Eaton (2025), academic integrity is the foundational principle upon which the entire educational enterprise rests. The concept

encompasses honesty in academic work; trust that grades reflect actual performance, fairness in assessment, respect among community members, and responsibility in upholding standards (National Universities Commission, 2023).

When grade buying occurs, all dimensions are violated. Students who purchase grades are dishonest, lecturers who sell grades betray trust, and the assessment process becomes unfair to honest students (Ogunleye & Fasasi, 2023). The erosion of academic integrity has far-reaching consequences: qualifications cease to be reliable, employers cannot trust degrees, and society loses confidence in educational institutions (Allen, Jivani & Eaton, 2025). Strengthening frameworks requires clear policies, consistent enforcement, and education programmes (Chukwuemeka & Okeke, 2024).

### **Patterns and Magnitude of Grade Buying**

Allen, Jivani and Eaton (2025) found that bribery emerges as a common thread across grade manipulation scandals globally, with financial incentives, gifts, and coercion influencing grading decisions. Arinze (2024) found practices such as selling continuous assessment grades and sorting examination grades in Nigerian universities. Okunlegbe (2025) showed patterns including direct cash payments (67%), intermediary-facilitated transactions (58%), and material inducements (43%). Tade and Adewumi (2022) found that 72% of respondents identified the role of "runners" or intermediaries who collect money and facilitate transactions.

Many cases of grade buying are perpetrated by Nigerian undergraduates and lecturers (Ogunleye & Fasasi, 2023). A global survey on educational corruption by UNESCO (2023) puts the annual cost of academic fraud to national development at an alarming rate. A recent study by the African Union (2024) indicated that academic corruption manifests in various forms across different educational systems in Africa. Chukwuemeka and Okeke (2024) noted that the ubiquity of social media platforms has further aggravated the extent of grade buying involvement among undergraduates in Nigeria. The National Universities Commission (2023) contends that a significant percentage of academic fraud perpetrators in Nigeria are students in various institutions. Nwachukwu and Adeyemi (2023) submitted that the rate at which Nigerian students are involving in academic corruption calls for urgent concern.

### **Causes of Grade Buying**

Students and lecturers are the primary actors in grade buying (Ogunleye & Fasasi, 2023), representing both demand and supply sides. Students seek grades, while lecturers control grading outcomes, creating a dynamic where both become essential participants (Okpala, 2021; National Universities Commission, 2023). The university environment brings them together in a relationship defined by power imbalance, with lecturers possessing authority over assessment, placing students in a dependent position (Ogunleye & Fasasi, 2023). Both parties face challenges that predispose them to grade buying. Students contend with inadequate funding, overcrowded classrooms, and uncertain employment prospects (Adeleke, 2021). Lecturers on their part face poor remuneration, irregular salary payments, and inadequate research funding (Adebayo & Oyewole, 2023). Students who purchase grades emerge as incompetent graduates (Okeshola & Adeta, 2021), while lecturers involved face disciplinary action including dismissal (Mohammed & Bello, 2023).

Mohammed and Bello (2023) found that 78% agreed fear of failure is a causal factor, 72% viewed pressure for high classifications as a major cause, and 81% opined peer influence is a cause. Eze and Nwankwo (2024) found that 74% of students indicated financial pressure motivates grade buying, while 68% of lecturers indicated poor remuneration contributes to grade selling. Adebayo and Oyewole (2023) found 62% claimed unemployment causes involvement, 58% chose peer pressure, and 54% chose poverty. Ogunleye and Fasasi (2023) indicated 71% pointed to perceived unfairness in assessment as a major cause.

### **Consequences of Grade Buying**

Grade buying threatens academic advancement and national development (Olumoye, 2021). In their separate researches, Mshana (2021) found that 86% of respondents indicated grade buying produces incompetent graduates, while 82% contended that it erodes public confidence in university degrees, and 79% indicated it devalues legitimate academic achievements. On their part, Nwachukwu and Adeyemi (2023) found that 76% indicated production of unqualified graduates, 71% associated it with erosion of academic standards, and 68% identified demoralization of honest students. Okeshola and Adeta (2021) found that 88% viewed grade buying as tarnishing the country's international reputation, and 79% indicated it leads to employment of unqualified persons in critical sectors.

### **Measures to Curb Grade Buying**

Chukwuemeka and Okeke (2024) found that 74% suggested strengthening institutional enforcement, 69% opined improving lecturer remuneration, and 65% opted for computer-based testing. Okunlegbe (2025) found 81% agreed on computer-based testing, 77% agreed on regular orientation programmes, and 68% supported whistleblower protection. Nwachukwu and Adeyemi (2023) found 76% agreed consistent enforcement is essential, and 72% agreed creating a culture of academic integrity through education is vital. The National Universities Commission (2023) proposed strengthening enforcement, improving remuneration, implementing technology-based assessment, and establishing confidential reporting mechanisms.

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Merton's Strain Theory is adopted as the theoretical framework for this study. Merton developed Strain Theory to explain deviance resulting from gaps between culturally approved goals and legitimized means to achieve them (Spiegel, 2006). In education, the goal is academic success through good grades, while means include attending lectures and studying diligently. When students find these means blocked due to poor teaching or perceived unfairness, they may seek illegitimate means like grade buying (Merton, 1938).

Merton identified five adaptations: conformity (accepting goals and means), innovation (accepting goals but using illegitimate means), ritualism (abandoning goals but clinging to means), retreatism (rejecting both), and rebellion (seeking replacement). Innovation is most relevant to grade buying; students desire academic success but pursue it through illicit transactions (Merton, 1938; Acharya & Taylor, 2012). The theory suggests grade buying results from structural conditions creating pressures toward deviance. Students facing blocked legitimate opportunities turn to innovation, while lecturers experiencing strain from poor remuneration may resort to grade selling (Merton, 1938).

In contemporary Nigerian society, great importance is attached to academic achievement and credential acquisition, while little importance is attached to diligent study and genuine learning. This creates normlessness or anomie where deviance is encouraged. Strain Theory posits that deviance occurs when there is a disjunction between culturally prescribed goals and institutionalized means available to achieve those goals (Merton, 1938; Spiegel, 2006).

In Nigerian higher education, the culturally prescribed goal is academic success measured by good grades. The institutionalized means include attending lectures and studying diligently. When students find these legitimate means blocked due to poor teaching, overcrowded classrooms, or perceived unfairness, they experience strain and may turn to deviant adaptations. Among Merton's five modes of adaptation, innovation is most relevant to grade buying. Students who buy grades accept academic success goals but use illicit transactions rather than legitimate effort (Merton, 1938; Murphy & Robison, 2008). Lecturers who sell grades accept the goal of financial security but pursue it through illegitimate means rather than relying on their salaries. When lecturers face poor remuneration and blocked legitimate means, they experience strain and may resort to grade selling.

Strain Theory thus explains grade buying as a product of structural conditions rather than individual moral failure, suggesting that controlling the practice requires strengthening legitimate pathways to success for both students and lecturers (Merton, 1938; Acharya & Taylor, 2012; Eze & Nwankwo, 2024). However, strain theory is limited in explaining why privileged students with adequate means still engage in grade buying, and it does not fully account for lecturers as initiators of transactions (Acharya & Taylor, 2012).

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The study adopted a cross-sectional survey method. This method was considered appropriate because it enabled the research team to gather information on a population from a selected sample at a given point in time, making it both cost-effective and efficient for examining the theme (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Thematically, the study focuses on three main areas: patterns, causes, and consequences of grade buying.

The study area is Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, located at Awka South LGA, Anambra State, South Eastern Nigeria. The university was established in 1991 and taken over by the Federal Government in 1992. The university has approximately 40,000 students including 25,000 undergraduates and 15,000 postgraduates. The university comprises 17 faculties with many accredited courses (UNIZIK, 2025). However, the study specifically focused on the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, located within the Faculty of Social Sciences. The delimitation to a single department was necessitated by time constraints, financial limitations, and the need for in-depth investigation. This focused approach allows for manageable data collection and richer qualitative insights (Patton, 2015).

The target population for this study comprises both students and academic staff (lecturers) in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka main campus. Both parties are key actors. For students, the study targets those in 300 and 400 levels, as they have spent sufficient time in the university system to have observed or experienced the phenomenon under study. For lecturers, the study targeted those with at least five years of teaching experience at the department, as they are presumed to have adequate institutional knowledge and experience with the grading system.

The target population, constituting of students in 300 and 400 levels in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology stood at 350 with about 35 academic staff members. A sample size of 20 respondents, purposively determined considering the departmental focus, time and financial constraints was used for the study. This represents approximately 6% of the population and is adequate for a departmental-level study (Neuman, 2014).

This study adopted probability and non-probability sampling techniques. First, non-probability sampling technique was used to select university and department of focus. However, stratified random sampling was used for students' selection. The student population was stratified by level of study, where for 300 and 400 levels were purposively selected. From each stratum, students were randomly selected from the class register using simple random sampling. To ensure equal representation, ten students were selected from each level, making a total of 20 students.

For In-Depth Interviews (IDI), purposive sampling was used to select 2 lecturers with a minimum of five years teaching experience at the department, who were willing to participate; and were perceived as knowledgeable on the phenomenon based on experience.

The quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection were used. The questionnaire was close-ended, divided into five sections covering socio-demographic characteristics, patterns, causes, consequences, and measures for reducing grade buying. The In-Depth Interview Guide contained open-ended questions to elicit detailed information from lecturers. The instruments were subjected to face and content validation by experts in sociology from Nnamdi Azikiwe University.

The researchers adopted self administration method questionnaire distribution given the literacy level of respondents. The researcher achieved a 100% return rate. The two in-depth interview sessions were held in the lecturers' offices and lasted 30-45 minutes. Interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent.

The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyse quantitative data. Descriptive statistics such as simple percentages and frequency distributions were used to present findings in tables. Manual content analysis was used for qualitative data from In-Depth Interviews. The process involved transcription, coding, categorization, and interpretation using narrative quotes from participants.

On ethical grounds, informed consent was obtained from all participants. Participation was voluntary, and respondents could withdraw at any point. Anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed; names and identifying information were not collected.

## RESULTS/FINDINGS

This section presents the analysis and interpretation of data collected from the field using questionnaire administered to 20 students and in-depth interviews conducted with 2 lecturers from the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, NnamdiAzikiwe University, Awka.

### Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

**Table 1: Distribution of Respondents by Gender**

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	9	45.0
Female	11	55.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Table1 shows that out of 20 respondents, 9 (45.0%) were male while 11 (55.0%) were female. This indicates that female students were slightly more represented in the sample.

**Table 2: Distribution of Respondents by Age**

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage (%)
16-20 years	4	20.0
21-25 years	14	70.0
26-30 years	2	10.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Table 2 reveals that the majority of respondents (70.0%) were aged 21-25 years, which is consistent with the typical age range of undergraduate students in Nigerian universities.

**Table 3: Distribution of Respondents by Level of Study**

Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
300 Level	10	50.0
400 Level	10	50.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Table 3 shows equal representation, with 10 respondents (50.0%) from 300 level and 10 respondents (50.0%) from 400 levels.

**Table 3.4: Distribution of Respondents by Estimated Family Background**

Family Background	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Low income	6	30.0
Middle income	12	60.0
High income	2	20.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Table 4 indicates that the majority of respondents (60.0%) came from middle-income families, while 30.0% came from low-income families, and 10.0% from high-income families.

### Analysis of Study Objectives

#### Objective 1: Patterns of Grade Buying

**Table 5: Awareness of Grade Buying**

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	18	90.0
No	1	5.0
Not sure	1	5.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Table 5 shows that the vast majority of respondents (90.0%) were aware of grade buying in their department, indicating that the phenomenon is widely recognized.

**Table 6: Perceived Prevalence of Grade Buying**

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Very common	5	25.0
Common	11	55.0
Rare	3	15.0
Very rare	1	5.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Table 6 reveals that 80.0% of respondents (combining “very common” and “common”) considered grade buying a prevalent issue in the department.

**Table 7: Forms of Grade Buying (Multiple Responses)**

Forms	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Direct cash payments	16	80.0
Transactions through intermediary	14	70.0
Result falsification	12	60.0
Material inducements	10	50.0
Sex for grades	8	40.0

Table 7 indicates that direct cash payments were the most commonly known form (80.0%), followed by transactions through intermediaries (70.0%) and result falsification (60.0%).

**Table 8: Stage of Grade Buying Transactions (Multiple Responses)**

Stage	Frequency	Percentage (%)
After exams before results	14	70.0
After results for upgrades	12	60.0
Before examinations	6	30.0
During supplementary	4	20.0

Table 8 shows that transactions most commonly occur after examinations but before results are released (70.0%).

**Qualitative Findings:** One lecturer noted: “Some students approach classmates known to have connections. These intermediaries collect money and approach the lecturer on their behalf.” (Lecturer 1, male, 12 years)

## Study Objective 2: Causes of Grade Buying

**Table 9: Reasons Students Engage in Grade Buying (Multiple Responses)**

Reasons	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Pressure for high classifications	17	85.0
Fear of failure	15	75.0
Perceived unfairness in assessment	14	70.0
Peer influence	13	65.0
Unemployment concerns	12	60.0

Table 9 reveals that pressure to achieve high classifications was the most cited reason (85.0%), followed by fear of failure (75.0%).

**Table 10: Factors Motivating Lecturers (Multiple Responses)**

Factors	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Poor remuneration	16	80
Irregular salary payments	14	70
Weak institutional enforcement	13	65
Poor conditions of service	12	60

Table 10 shows that poor remuneration (80.0%) was identified as the primary factor motivating lecturers to engage in grade selling.

**Table 11: Most Important Cause of Grade Buying**

Cause	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Pressure for high classifications	8	40.0
Fear of failure	4	20.0
Peer influence	3	15.0
Others	5	25
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Qualitative Findings:** One lecturer explained: “The pressure on students today is immense. Parents expect first class or second class upper. This pressure, combined with economic challenges, creates a perfect storm for corruption.” (Lecturer 1, Male, 12 years)

**Study Objective 3: Consequences of Grade Buying**

**Table 12: Consequences of Grade Buying (Multiple Responses)**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Production of incompetent graduates	18	90.0
Demoralization of honest students	17	85.0
Erosion of public confidence in degrees	16	80.0
Perpetuation of corruption in society	15	75.0

Table 12 reveals that “production of incompetent graduates” was the most recognized consequence (90.0%).

**Table 13: Most Severe Consequence**

<b>Consequence</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Production of incompetent graduates	10	50.0
Demoralization of honest students	4	20.0
Perpetuation of corruption in society	4	20.0
Others	2	10.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table 14: Effect on Non-Participating Students**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Yes, very much	12	60.0
Yes, somewhat	6	30.0
No	1	5.0
Not sure	1	5.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Qualitative Findings:** One lecturer noted: “We are producing graduates who cannot perform. I have seen students who bought their way through university and now cannot construct a simple research proposal.” (Lecturer 1, male, 12 years)

**Study Objective 4: Measures for Reducing Grade Buying**

**Table 15: Effective Measures (Multiple Responses)**

<b>Measures</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Consistent application of sanctions	18	90.0
Strengthening enforcement mechanisms	17	85.0
Improving lecturer remuneration	16	80.0
Regular orientation programmes	15	75.0

**Table 16: Perceived Most Effective Measure to Curb Grade Buying**

Measure	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Consistent application of sanctions	8	40.0
Strengthening enforcement	6	30.0
Improving lecturer remuneration	3	15.0
Others	3	15.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table 17: Effectiveness of Current Departmental Efforts**

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Very effective	1	5.0
Effective	4	20.0
Not effective	12	60.0
Not sure	3	15.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>100</b>

**Qualitative Findings:** One lecturer emphasized: “The University must demonstrate consequences. When lecturers know they can be dismissed, when students know they can be expelled, people will think twice.” (Lecturer 1, Male, 12 years)

**SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

The analysis of data collected from 20 student respondents and 2 lecturers revealed the following key findings:

- a. Awareness and Prevalence: Up to 90.0% of respondents were aware of grade buying, with 80.0% perceiving it as common or very common.
- b. Patterns: Direct cash payments (80.0%) and intermediary-facilitated transactions (70.0%) were the most prevalent forms. Fellow students and class representatives served as key intermediaries. Transactions occurred after examinations but before results were released.
- c. Causes: Pressure for high classifications (85.0%), fear of failure (75.0%), and perceived unfairness in assessment (70.0%) were major student-related causes. Poor

lecturer remuneration (80.0%) and irregular salary (70.0%) were major lecturer-related factors.

- d. Consequences: Production of incompetent graduates (90.0%) and demoralization of honest students (85.0%) were the most recognized consequences, with half of respondents identifying incompetent graduates as the most severe.
- e. Measures: Consistent application of sanctions (90.0%) and strengthening enforcement (85.0%) were considered most effective. Current departmental efforts were perceived as ineffective by 60.0% of respondents.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study concludes that multiple forms of grade buying with multifaceted causes and consequences are prevalent and has become embedded in many student peer networks at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. Efforts to strengthen the quality of university education and maintain culture of academic integrity will not achieve desired results except departmental/university efforts to address grade buying are strictly enforced.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are made:

- a. Strengthen Enforcement Mechanisms: The department should establish a clear, transparent, and consistently applied disciplinary process for cases of grade buying. Students and lecturers should be informed of the consequences, and sanctions should be applied uniformly.
- b. Implement Anonymous Reporting Systems: The department should establish confidential reporting mechanisms that allow students and staff to report suspected cases without fear of retaliation, such as anonymous suggestion boxes or dedicated email addresses.
- c. Enhance Assessment Transparency: To address perceptions of unfairness, the department should ensure that grading criteria are clearly communicated and provide mechanisms for grade appeals.

- d. **Improve Lecturer Conditions of Service:** The university should prioritize improving lecturer remuneration, ensuring regular salary payments, and providing adequate research funding to reduce economic pressures toward grade selling.
- e. **Implement Technology-Based Assessment:** The university should expand the use of computer-based testing and automated marking systems to reduce opportunities for human manipulation.
- f. **Establish University-Wide Integrity Campaigns:** The university should conduct regular orientation programmes and workshops on academic integrity for both students and lecturers.
- g. **Lecturers and students should cultivate a Culture of Integrity:** Students should value genuine learning over credential acquisition. Lecturers should model ethical behaviour and mentor students on academic integrity.
- h. **Report Suspicious Activities:** Students and lecturers should utilize available reporting mechanisms to help dismantle the networks that sustain academic corruption.

### **CONTRIBUTIONS TO KNOWLEDGE**

Theoretically, this study has added value to sociology of education by expanding knowledge on the patterns, causes, and consequences of grade buying in tertiary institutions. It proved the adequacy of the application of strain theory to the understanding of grade buying in the Nigerian higher education context. The concept of ‘institutional anomie’ will be particularly relevant for understanding how grade buying becomes normalised despite official prohibition.

Practically, the study has enlightened university administrators at Nnamdi Azikiwe University by providing empirical data that can be used in formulating policies and disciplinary mechanisms to curb grade buying. The government and National Universities Commission will also benefit from evidence-based recommendations for strengthening quality assurance frameworks. Furthermore, this educates students on the negative consequences of grade buying to their intellectual development and long-term career prospects. To lecturers, the study has offered insights into institutional conditions that may pressure colleagues toward corruption while documenting the severe consequences of participation.

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