

## **PERSONALITY AND ETHNICITY AS PSYCHOSOCIAL FACTORS IN UNDERSTANDING CORRUPTION IN NIGERIA**

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### **Abstract**

*Corruption has caused a lot of devastation to the entire economic developments in Nigeria. The situation in the country has moved from bad to worse and most of the solutions proffered to douse the situation have not been quit productive. Utilizing the social learning paradigm this present paper explored the important psychosocial factors (personality and ethnicity) and implores what this theoretical assumption predicts about their relationship with emergent of corruption.*

**Keywords:** *Personality, Psychosocial, Ethnicity, Corruption, Nigeria.*

### **Introduction**

Nigeria is a multiethnic society and the various ethnic groups try to maximize the socio- economic and political benefits and assets that accrues to the ethnic group they identify with. This multi ethnicity has produce numerous consequences which can be describes as aberrations in the Nigerian nation, anomalies such as: prejudice, fraud, nepotism, profiteering, malfeasance stereotyping, discrimination, ethnocentrism, breach of trust among others. These aberrations in behavior which forms peoples personality in various ethnic groups in Nigeria are what influence corruptive acts which are the evil that has eaten deep into the fabric of the Nigerian nation (Adebayo, 2010).

Corruption has been broadly defined as a perversion or a change from good to bad. Corruption or corrupt practices have been said to involve the violation of established rules for personal gain and profit (Sen, 1999). Nye (1967) defined corruption as “behaviour which deviates from the formal duties of a public role, because of private gains regarding personal, close family, private clique, pecuniary or status gains” (p.418). It is a behavior which violates rules against the exercise of certain types of duties for private gains regarding influence. Corruption is a cankerworm that introduces arbitrariness and discrimination in decision makings so that rules, regulations and procedure are circumvented within a course of action for selfish gains. Corruption is a concept, a harmful phenomenon to personal growth and the economic development of a nation.



### **Causes of Corruption**

Many reasons have been put forward as probable causes for the prevalence of corruption in Nigeria. It ranges from non-conformity to religious tenets, imparted values and ideas and ideas alien to our culture, ethnicity which encourages favoritism and nepotism, a weak legal system that is taken advantage of by the rich and powerful. The political bureau in its report mentioned such causes as excessive materialism generated by our individual capitalist order which emphasize personal wealth without regard to the collective interest and welfare of the larger society. Other causes includes: poverty, illiteracy, get-rich-mania, statism, and wrong attitude to public property, absence of a welfare scheme which cushions effect of unemployment, retirement, large families, and quest for power, double standards and low level of patriotism. However, it does appear that poverty is the most important single factor that promotes the wide spread of giving and taking bribes or illegal financial inducements in the country.

Corruption is a learned behaviour which an individual inculcate as a result of observing other individual whether they belong to his or her ethnic group in Nigeria or not.

Corrupt behaviours in Nigeria include:

- Bribery
- Misappropriation,
- Nepotism,
- Fraud
- Embezzlement
- Extortion
- Favoritism
- Rigging of elections and falsification of voters' register
- Over-invoicing
- Money laundering
- Examination malpractices

The present day cultism (most especially among college students)

Personality means different things to different people, even psychologists do not have a generally acceptable opinion as to its meaning. Most of them however agree that it is usually expressed by the behaviour of an individual via internal and external environmental mechanism, which subsumes one's ethnic affiliations (Allport 1937; Echono 2012; Lahey 2002). For example, Allport (1937) defines personality as a relatively stable system of determining tendencies within the individual; these tendencies are aroused by suitable stimuli which then shape the individual's reactions to events. Lahey (2002) explains that personality refers to

the sum total of all the ways a person act, thinks and feel that are typical for just that person and makes that person different from all other persons. Lahey's definition is closely related to that of Echono (2012) which states that personality is the collection of emotional and behavioural traits that characterize a person. The position of Wallace & Goldstein (1997) is that personality is determined by both external events and internal traits which influence the behaviours of individuals.

Hence, from these various definitions of personality, it can be presupposed that the personality of an individual in an ethnic group is influences an individual's tendency to be corrupt, this because personality of an individual predisposes such individual to exhibit either corruptive behaviour or non-corruptive behaviour. Factors like upbringing, life experiences, observational or formal learning, cultural identity, individual beliefs and perceptions or interpretation of the world and societal or environmental events influence or shape the personality of a person and can influence corruptive acts in an individual member of an ethnic group, (Adebayo, 2001). The position of this paper however is that personality attributes being the combination of both the laws, norms and values an individual belong to as well as the various biological traits of an individual could be speculate to be one the reasons corruption has eaten deep into the fabric of the Nigerian nation.

Corruption Perception Index  
Nigeria Corruption Rank

PERIOD/AVERAGE	YEAR	RANK
Most Current Year	2017	148 of 175 Countries
Averaged Rank	1996 to 2017	120.45
Worst Year	2005	152 of 175 Countries
Best Year	1997	52 of 175 Countries

Comprehensive review of the years 1996 to 2017 (Transparency International, 2017).

### Statement of the problem

Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa with over 180 million inhabitants. Nigeria ranks as the seventh highest oil exporting country in the world. Oil exports constitute 90% of her foreign earnings; nevertheless, pervasive poverty continues to be a bane in Nigerian economic development and Nigeria has been



struggling to reduce unemployment, income inequality and its dependence on oil (Ogunleye, & Adebayo, 2012). Therefore, an axiom that Nigeria is richly endowed by providence with human and material resources critical for national development and advancement is toothless. This is because, it is widely accepted that the misappropriation of public funds and asset by corrupt elites has been a major cause of Nigeria's underdevelopment. Corruption in Nigeria manifest itself in different ways, both on a micro and macro level, and it occurs at all levels of society (Martini, 2014). According to the report (Amundsen, 2010) the types of corruption in Nigeria are; rent-seeking, embezzlement, conflict of interest, bribes and kickbacks, nepotism and cronyism, corruption in provision of services, political patronage, and electoral corruption, among others.

Many researchers have been able to view corruption as a whole and not at the individual level. It is therefore imperative to ask, can corruption be as a result of human personality which is borne out of the various values, norms and belief of various ethnic groups in Nigeria, and if yes, is there need for reorientation and restructuring of individual personality. All these and many others are the problems which this paper is set to bridge the gap in literature.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Social Learning perspective**

Bandura (1977) influenced by Hull and Skinner's social learning experiences, propounded the Observational/Social Learning Theory. According to the theory, the majority of the habits we form during our lifetimes are acquired by observing and imitating other people. According to Bandura, much complex behaviour could never be learned unless people are exposed to some other humans who modeled them. Thus, observational learning permits human to acquire many new responses in settings where their 'models' are simply pursuing their own interests and are not trying to teach anyone anything.

In Bandura's attempt to explain the dynamics of imitative learning where a 'model' is no longer present and yet component responses involved in an act are acquired, he contends that the acquisition of modeled behaviour is governed by four interrelated processes of: attention, retention, motoric reproduction and motivation. Bandura explained that a child, for example, attends carefully to a model to learn by observation and the child also commit the model's behaviour to memory; if the child must have to reproduce the responses later, when the model is no longer present to serve as a guide, reproducing such responses, apparently, requires some symbolic coding activities of either verbalizations or images, so that, translation of symbolized images and verbal codes into action can become less cumbersome.

Thus, a child who is able to effectively translate symbolic representations or a modeled sequence into action is said to have imitated the model's behaviour. Now, the question that arises is: how does Bandura's observational learning theory explain the prevalence of corruption in Nigeria? The answer to the question is very simple and near. There is no gain saying that many Nigerians, even on a daily basis, witness cases of corruption everywhere. In both public and private organization, employees are daily stared in the face with the realities of 'kick backs' from contracts awarded. We often see public servants who, by every standard, live above their salaries and cruise around town in sleekly and expensive cars, live in palatable mansions of their own, and send their wards to highly expensive schools.

These individuals are revered and 'worshipped' as the high and mighty. As such and most importantly because humans are essentially hedonistic, we tend to learn and internalize behaviours of people who live in affluence and opulence and they, invariably, serve as our models'. This phenomenon is most apparent where, even, persons that have been indicted of corrupt practices are celebrated rather than punished. For example, many of the second republic politicians who were found guilty of corrupt practices, and even a host of the past military leaders who were accused of corruption, are today in the corridors of power in Nigeria.

Because corrupt government officials and public servants are not 'really punished' for their corrupt practices but are rather celebrated and even awarded Chieftaincy titles as rewards, therefore some other persons learn corruption, internalize the act and subsequently reproduce such acts at the opportunities to do so. Thus, virtually all Nigerians become corrupt and corruption is prevalent in Nigeria.

### **Need theorist perspective**

Abraham Maslow is one of the prominent need theorists who propounded the hierarchy of needs theory in 1954. The main tenet of the theory is that humans are motivated to behave in certain ways that are instrumental, or could lead, to the gratification of their needs. Maslow argued that human needs are in hierarchy starting from physiological needs at the base of the hierarchy through safety needs, love and belongingness needs, esteem needs, and up to self-actualization needs.

Maslow went further to argue that the satisfaction of a lower order need propels movement to efforts at satisfying the next higher need on the hierarchy. That is, that it is only when an individual's physiological needs (clothing, shelter, hunger,



thirst and even sex) have been satisfactorily met that he aspires to satisfy his safety needs. Several analysts and Nigeria scholars have reasoned that Nigerians are influenced by the search to satisfy physiological needs (e.g Orji, 2003; Igbuzor, 2002) and this drive to gratify our physiological needs is largely responsible for the nation's loss of social values because corruption. Fear of employability and future insecurity may contribute on how Nigerians view corruption as the best way to safeguard against their economic insecurity. Nigeria economy seem not to be growing in real economic terms. Extrapolating from above therefore, it seems appropriate to argue that corruption, in Nigeria, is propelled by Nigerian's desire to gratify their varied lower level functional needs.

### **Objective of the research**

The main objective of the research is to explain how people's personality and their ethnic behaviour propel corruptive acts in the Nigerian society.

### **Methods**

The scope of this research is within Nigeria a diverse nation with heterogeneous and distinctive ethnic groups. For decades the "giant" of Africa has been the informal name given to Nigeria, perhaps due to her population size which is the largest in Africa, leadership roles and her oil wealth, amongst other factors. The whole essence of Nigeria being the scope is to suggest some possible solutions to the challenges facing Nigeria. Such Challenges included: security issues, leadership incompetence, corruption, economic stagnation, ethnic crisis, religious division and fundamentalism, inter-communal violence, militancy, and terrorism in places like Jos, Kano, and part of the country as whole. The intent of this paper is to make suggestions and proffer some solutions to the various problems. Secondary data obtained from relevant monograph, Journals, textbooks, seminar papers, magazines, internet material were used for this research work. The design adopted for this research work is the qualitative design, this a design used when a research is interested in observing and describing or explaining the behaviour of the participants without influencing it in any way (Karl, 2014).

### **Discussion and way forward**

No doubt personality of individuals which are being built as a result of the values passed to individuals from the various ethnic groups in Nigeria is one of the several reasons many Nigerian citizens celebrate, condone and participate in corruptive acts. Personality restructuring and ethnic group transformation is an enormous task that encompasses tackling issues of human socio-cultural reorientation, resource and environmental management. Nigeria is currently

entangled in a large and disturbing web of challenges like corruption, environmental issues, security crisis, militancy, leadership ineptitude, sabotage, poverty, infrastructural decadences, ethnic crisis, power struggles, weak state institutions, injustice, election rigging, and group agitation to mention just a few. However, these challenges or developmental agents if addressed and managed befittingly can bring about national transformation, a boosted international image and more effective foreign policy. The following are put forward as suggestions:

First, charity they say begins at home, individual parent should learn to inculcate good moral values into the other members of the family, because children learn by observing the activities of their parents. So, therefore parents should see it as their most important responsibility to inculcate good values into their offspring's so as to help build good personality in them.

Second, leaders of each ethnic group in Nigeria should be honest and inculcate personal integrity; be responsible stewards of our cultural heritage, by articulating intangible attributes of their ethnic group - by extension the Nigerian society at large -to inherit an enriching particularities and characteristics from past generations, that are maintained in the present and preserved for the benefit of future generations. The wealth of the ethnic group should be diverted towards national transformation. Opportunities to serve in leadership positions should not be taken as opportunities to get their own share of the national cake for themselves, their family and other acquaintances but for seeking the general welfare of the populace.

Third, a trait of fearlessness and discipline should be imbibed. Offenders should be brought to book despite their social status and the rule of law should be upheld. This paper believes that many ethnic groups in Nigeria have a way of check mating the activities and the excesses of their leader and as such the check and balances processes should be sustained so as to instill discipline in the heart of their various leaders.

Finally, various ethnic groups in Nigeria should reorientate their members to learn to accept members of other ethnic groups in other to foster peace and unity in the various communities and the nation at large.

### **Conclusion**

This paper is of the view that personality of individuals which are reflections of features like upbringing, life experiences, observational or formal learning, cultural identity, individual beliefs and perceptions or interpretation of the



world and societal or environmental events influence can shape the personality of a person and can influence corruptive acts in an individual member of an ethnic group. Consequently, these various values, norms and beliefs gotten from the peculiarities of one's ethnic groups can indeed affect an individual's tendency to exhibit corruptive acts in Nigeria; as such, this qualitative exploration establishes the synergy that exist between personality, ethnicity and corruption in Nigeria.

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