

PSYCHOLOGICAL STRATEGIES FOR CURBING CORRUPTION IN NIGERIAN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

This paper looked at the phenomenon of corruption in Nigeria particularly in institutions of learning. It x-rayed its manifestation and devastating effects on the youths in particular and the nation at large. It suggested psychological approaches to combating corruption in Nigeria in order to forestall youth underdevelopment or impoverishment.

INTRODUCTION

A critical look at the Nigerian society would reveal an increase in various types of social ills such as armed robbery, prostitution, thuggery, secret cult menace, human and drug trafficking, bribery and corruption and so on. These social ills are prevalent in all strata and sectors of the society including institutions of learning. Prominent and pervasive among these abhor-able acts is corruption.

Corruption as defined by the Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary (200 I) "is illegal or dishonest behaviour especially on the part of people in authority". It could be conceptualized as a situation where people in constituted authority use their positions for personal socio-economic and political enrichment at the expense of the larger public interest. Akambi (2004), reported that the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund defined corruption as the misuse of entrusted power for private benefits. The benefits could be money, power or status. Microsoft ® Student (2007) sees corruption as wrong doing by those in special position of trust. It is commonly applied to self-benefiting conduct by public officials and others dedicated to public service. Thus the corrupt person is selfish, has no interest in the welfare of neither his victim nor the society. What is paramount is personal aggrandizement and satisfaction. This cankerworm that is eating deep into the nation's fabric manifests in the form of kick-backs, ghost workers syndrome, embezzlement of public funds, award of and payment for non-existing contracts/projects, extortion and all other acts that yield dividends unjustly, and that perpetuates mediocrity in public and private sectors. All corrupt practices revolve around money and what money could buy. These un-wholeness behaviours are exhibited in many segments of the Nigerian socio-political and economic institutions including institutions of learning that are supposed to be places of character formation, development and excellence.

Dynamics of Corruption in Institutions of Learning

The institution of learning has many levels, namely, Pre-primary schools (day-care centres, nursery and kindergarten), primary and secondary schools and tertiary institutions. These institutions are established for the purpose of educating the child, enabling him/her to acquire skills and knowledge that can empower him or her to cope with life and its difficulties as well as earn a living. Recent events in these institutions seem to negate these laudable objectives of establishing educational institutions.

Corruption in Pre-Primary Schools

The pre-primary schools include day-care centres, nursery and kindergarten. These institutions thrive in our society today because of the economic demands of the family upkeep. The traditional role-delegation of economic upkeep of the family to fathers and child-bearing and upbringing to mothers has been overtaken by recent events. Both parents are now involved in activities that yield income in order to keep their family financially stable and satisfy the socio-economic, health and educational demands of themselves and their children, wards and dependent relatives. Since both men and women have moved into labour force, the most attractive option for children upbringing are daycare centres, nursery, and kindergarten schools. In these schools, parents have their children taken care of on daily basis except on weekends. Corrupt practices abound in these institutions beginning from the time of admission into the school to the period of graduation. For instance, in some of these centres/schools, the degree of attention and care paid to any child is dependent upon the amount of money/gift a parent is willing to part after paying the approved fees. Some of the proprietors and the "aunties" receive bribe from parents in order to pay special attention to their children during and after school. It goes a long way also to determine whether the child will pass his or her examinations, be punished if he or she misbehaves and cared for after school in case the parents fail to come on time to take away their child or children from school. Thus, the child of the parents that give bribe to the proprietor/teachers receives adequate care and attention (e.g. change of napkin, feeding times, etc.) while the others are treated in a general manner.

Corruption in Primary and Secondary Schools

In primary and secondary schools, some teachers are known to encourage examination malpractice by aiding and abating bribery and corruption. In these institutions, students are made to pay in order to get the question papers for examination before the date or time scheduled for the examination. This happens with both internal and external examinations. During external examinations, the money 'collected from the candidates are used to buy over the invigilators from the examination board like Common Entrance Examinations, West African Examinations Council, National Examinations Council, National Board for Technical Education, etc. In internal examinations, students use money and gifts to influence their grades. Some teachers inflate the scores of students that pay a certain amount of money especially in examinations that have impact on the external ones e.g. Mock examinations are presumed to account for 40 of the external examinations - WAEC / NECD / JSSE. This assistance is given only to the students that meet up with the financial requirements while those that refuse to pay are left on their own. Not only they don't have access to question papers beforehand, they write their examinations under strict invigilation. This is to make sure that they do not enjoy the same 'advantage' with those that paid. Some schools are popular for this kind of group behaviour of cheating and that explains the large number of students who usually register and write their examination in such schools. As would be expected, students from such schools come out in "flying colours" even though they acquired little or no knowledge to match the results.

Corruption in Tertiary Institutions

Corruption in tertiary institutions starts with their mode of admission. The percentage of students admitted into higher institutions of learning on merit seems very infinitesimal. Majority of the students come into the institutions based on "god-fatherism" (*ima mmadu / ima ndi anyi bu* i.e. who you know / do you know who we are) and the highest bidder syndrome. In recent times particularly in this political era, once a candidate is politically connected, his/her admission is assured. This admission procedure provides opportunity for ill-equipped and unqualified candidates to come into the universities to study. Some of these candidates cannot write their names correctly because their WAEC and JAMB

examinations results were bought by their parents either by hiring somebody to write the examinations for them or by influencing their grades through the workers in these examination bodies. This is why one comes across students who made A grades in their WAEC and NECO examinations and score 250 and above in JAMB examinations but could not score beyond 50% in the Post-JAMB screening tests/examinations recently introduced by some tertiary institutions. When these people are admitted to study, they resort to what they call SORTING which entails using money to the desired grade. According to a third-year student (who wished to remain anonymous) in one of the institutions of learning, some prize-tags for each grade in examinations. The amount ranges from N 1000, 00 for D or E grades. through N 1500.00 for C; N2000.00 for Band N2,500 and N3,000.00 for A grade depending on the level of difficulty involved in scaling through such course(s).

Moreover, some lecturers collect money from students for textbooks and other reading materials and fail to make the materials available to the students. Rather, they convert the money into in-course assessment scores. Also, some lecturers extort money from their supervisee students before they read through their projects. It is also alleged that some departments collect money for computation and class of degree. This is why some students that never did well in their earlier years in the universe come out with good results. Those expected to come out with 3rd class grade, end up with 2nd class and above and vice versa. Igbinovia (2004) noted that examination malpractices in schools and colleges have become endemic in Nigerian society Reports speak of violence, kidnapping, assaults and murder at examination centres and offices. Indeed, our schools and colleges have for long lost their sacred character as formation centres and have become breeding grounds for thieves, thugs, secret cults, gangsters, rapists and prostitutes. We hear these days of school children beating up their teachers, sacking their principals or vice-chancellors, and kill people and bum buildings in order to succeed in graduating from such institutions because they see those people as stumbling blocks to their ambition.

This kind of situation ultimately leaves the children uneducated and underdeveloped. These corrupt acts, portend economic, political and psychological doom for the individual as well as the society.

Corruption and Youth Underdevelopment

Institutions of learning are established for the purpose of educating the child. It is a place of training, skill acquisition and human resources development. People are exposed to different courses of instruction that identify and develop their talents. This is to equip the individuals with the skills and knowledge that will enable them earn a living as well as cope with life and its difficulties. Educational institution is a place for total intellectual, emotional, physical, psychological and moral development of the personality. It is expected that anybody who S:IW the four walls of educational institution especially the tertiary institutions should be sound in character and, emancipated from the shackles of ignorance besides acquisition of professional competence. But today, the outcome of formal education negates these objectives. Institutions of learning seem to have metamorphosed into a place of underdevelopment and personality impoverishment. Excellence appears to have been is thrown overboard while mediocrity and corruption enshrined in those institutions. Institutions of learning now produce graduates with "excellent certificates" but "empty brains". Corruption in these places has eroded everything good, everything desirable 01 educational institution and the effect is manifest in the society where all kinds of criminal behaviours arc exhibited and all segments of the society where all adversely affected. Ibrahim (2003) noted that the effect of corruption on the Nigerian society are so devastating that even the political structures have significantly lost their capacity to perform their functions. This explains why graduates of a university cannot make or write a correct sentence in English Language. Oputa (2004) contends that there was a boy who said he had First Class in oil industry but could not write application when he was asked to do so. What the boy wrote had many mistakes both in syntax and grammar.

Looking at the Nigerian youths, it would appear that many of them are really intellectually and psychologically impoverished. The satisfaction that usually accompanied task accomplishment is now a thing of the past. The youths are no longer interested in skill acquisition, acquiring knowledge or in what to produce. Rather, the interest is on how to grab from what others have produced. That is why 419 business, armed (pen) robbery, drug and human trafficking, political thuggery, violence, prostitution and such businesses thrive very well today. This is because: such businesses yield the kind of money the youth's desire. As a consequence of corruption, many students no longer read their books to gain knowledge. Even the few students who try to study hard to acquire knowledge and make good grades are discouraged when results are published because the people who never attended lectures, who never carried out assignments but had money to "Sort" their results make better grades. With this kind of situation, how can you convince anybody that hard-work pay? A cursory look at the institutions will convince anybody that they are now places notorious for moral decadence. The youths are characterized by lack of skill and knowledge, personality impoverishment, feeling of inadequacy and incompetence and amoral conducts. Ajayi (2003) noted that universities have lost their integrity and professionalism. Ayandele (2001) posits that it is now a charnel house that are ramshackle, decrepit, self-immolating and the laughing stock of world universities.

Since some of the Nigerian institutions of learning produce half-baked graduates who are supposed to be the bedrock of the economics of any nation, the question is: which is the way out? In the next 15 years, when majority of the adults would have retired and tired out of the labour force, what becomes of the nation? A nation dominated by uncultured and ill-educated youths indeed has a very bleak future. The present situation portends danger of dearth of manpower or reliance on foreign expertise and assistance for economic and political survival. In other words, Nigeria is heading towards "recolonization" and enslavement if corruption is not put under check especially in our citadels of learning.

Psychological Approaches to Combating Corruption in the Nigerian Institutions of Learning

The devastating consequences of corruption are such that the Federal Government of Nigeria has put in place all kinds of machinery to combat it. Such machineries are Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) and Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC). Their impact is yet to be felt hence Lame and Odekunle (2001) suggested thus "government should re-screen its current political and public office holders/appointees to rid itself of persons perceived as discredited or are of questionable character and in order to enhance the credibility of its anti-corruption crusade. In other words, it could be deduced that anticorruption strategies/machineries that have been put in place leave much to be desired, hence psychological approaches are proposed.

From the psychological point of view, corruption could be conceptualized as a human behaviour that is pathological. It is a human behaviour that deviates from the social norm, hence it is giving concern to even the government. This abnormal behaviour has many factors in its etiology and could be explained using many theories of human behaviour. Some of the relevant theories include social learning, behavioural and cognitive. Each theoretical orientation tries to explain how corrupt behaviours are acquired, sustained and could be eliminated. Thus a critical look at the aforementioned theories would help one to understand the dynamics of corruption and how to combat it especially in our institutions of learning.

The Social Learning Theory

The social learning theory posits that human behaviour is acquired through imitation and modeling. According to Bandura (1977), it is a process of acquiring new responses by imitating the behaviour of another person. This process of imitation/modeling, connotes social cognition phenomenon, which explains the factors that influence the way people perceive themselves and others and form judgments

about the causes of behaviour. The theory contends that people are indirectly rewarded by watching others engage in a particular behaviour and seeing them being rewarded or punished. Bringing this theory to bear on corruption in institutions of learning, it could be asserted that the students imitate some of their teaching and non-teaching staff as well as other adults in position of constituted authority that engage in corrupt practices. These people serve as role models to the youth and are encouraged by the amount of material accruable from such behaviours. Some of these corrupt individuals (e.g. politicians, public office holders, administrators) usually go scot-free even when there is clear evidence against them. If not, why should somebody be found guilty of fraud involving millions of naira and is allowed to go unpunished? Besides, who is that person that will indict the other? Is he or she free from the same offence? This explains why we have accusation and counter accusations over embezzlement of public funds and at the end only very few are eventually brought to book through temporarily. Current acts of prevarications on the part of EFCC and ICPC over Obasanjo, Atiku, Nnamani, Iwu, etc. will convince one that the anti-corruption crusade and other government machineries are yet to be very effective in pursuit of the objectives.

Thus, it could be observed that many of the leaders, administrators, politicians, teachers etc., are corrupt and therefore serve as role models of corruption for the youths to imitate and it is sustained by the reward accruable from such behaviours.

The Behavioural Perspective

This perspective attempts to determine the functional relationships between events in the environment and the behaviour of the individual. It holds that human behaviours are reactions we have to stimuli in the world around us (Woodruff, 1999). It is a process of conditioning (classical and operant) which is the basis for many of the most important kinds of human behaviour (Feldman, 2002). Drawing from the principle of conditioning, human behaviours are learned as a result of the reinforcement received while engaging in such behaviours.

During the conditioning/learning process, behaviours that are rewarded, are acquired and they become part and parcel of the individual. Those behaviours that are not rewarded or reinforced are unlearned or not learned at all. Using this to explain corruption in Nigeria, it is very obvious that corrupt practices yield positive outcomes. In Nigeria, some corrupt students make good grades in schools through 'sorting'. Some of the corrupt workers/leaders are reinforced as they buy the best of cars, acquire many plots of land, build good houses, wear the costliest clothes around, afford medical treatment from reputable hospitals within and outside the country, have access to qualitative education and achieve political prowess. With all these glaring rewards, it will be very difficult if not impossible to convince any young person to abhor corruption. Comparing the corrupt with the honest, it seems obvious that the honest cannot afford the kind of affluence/luxury of the corrupt person. At times, the honest person finds it difficult to afford three square meals a day, pay for medical bills, keep their children in school, pay for accommodation and other basic needs of life. In other words, because corruption is reinforced, many people particularly the youths learn it and stick to it in order to survive. To modify the unwanted behaviour, people must learn new skills or unlearn faulty ones (Bergin & Garfield, 1994; Agras & Berkowitz, 1996). Thus, corrupt practices should not be rewarded to discourage the youths. Process of counter-conditioning using reinforcement schedules appropriated to help the corrupt ones unlearn their corrupt behaviours should be adopted.

The Cognitive Theory

According to Feldman (2002) the cognitive perspective focuses on how people think and understand the world and how our ways of thinking about the world influence our behaviour. In other words, human

behaviour is the result of the meaning we ascribe to events in our lives. People respond to events or acquire behaviour according to their perception of the antecedents in the environment. Thus, corruption is seen as the surest and easiest means of achieving one's goals or meeting one's needs.

As at present, it seems to be the only sure way to self-actualization, which if translated into material terms made stands as the only means to acquire wealth to the magnitude desired. Looking at the situation of things in Nigeria, nobody appears to be interested in how one accumulates wealth. What is important is that the person has 'made' it and should be honoured.

CURBING CORRUPTION

Having looked at some of these theories, it could be discerned that Implicit in all of them is the attitude of the people. The major reinforcer to corruption is one's attitude towards the gains accruable from such behaviour. According to Eagly & Chaiken (1995), attitude is a learned predisposition to respond in a favourable or unfavourable manner to a particular person, behaviour, belief or thing.

To embark on attitude change, the techniques of cognitive restructuring should be adopted. It is a process of teaching people to think in a more adaptive ways by changing their dysfunctional cognition about the world and themselves (Becks, 1991; McCullough, 1999). Thus the technique aims at changing people's perception of wealth and its means of acquisition using logic and reason. This could be done through mass media, symposium and campaigns against ill-gotten wealth. Through this media, emphasis should be placed on hard-work, productivity, and innovations since these are the things that immortalize somebody's name and of greater benefit to the person and the society.

Moreover, people who lived honest lives and impacted positively on the lives of others and the society should be presented as role models for the youths to emulate. (e.g. Zik of Africa, Bill Clinton, Michael Okpara, among others). The lives of these people are immortalized by the legacies they left behind for posterity. They were not in any way associated with corruption but they did not live nor died wretched. There are others who used their aptitudes and God-given talents to develop and improve the lives of others by providing goods and services (e.g. Microsoft for computer software, mobile phone/internet/E-mail services, vaccines, cars, aero planes, etc. etc.). These people should be presented as models for youths. It is this kind of achievement that is globally acclaimed role not localized popularity of the corrupt individuals.

Finally, a machinery should be put in place to flush out these corrupt teachers in our institutions of learning starting from the Head (Vice-Chancellors) to the least person in our institutions of learning. Quality teachers, who are ready and willing to develop our youths should be employed so that certificates will match properly with the level of knowledge and skills acquired. Admissions should be based on merit and appointment of Vice-Chancellors, principals and headmasters should be based on qualification, experience and not on sentiment or on the highest bidder. Those appointed must not have a history of corruption so that they can sanitize their institutions by dealing mercilessly with any staff found wanting or engaging in corrupt practices. The authorities should also find ways to reward non-corrupt and hardworking teachers/workers to encourage them. Kadzin (1994), asserted that we should reward people for exhibiting desirable behaviours and discourage undesirable behaviors through punishment. If our institutions of learning has quality, reliable, non-corrupt personnel, the youths will become more serious with their studies and acquire the necessary knowledge and skills for living.

CONCLUSION

Corruption is one of the social ills that is pervasive and devastating. It has debilitating effect especially among the youths, who are impoverished and underdeveloped. Owing to its devastating effects, it

becomes very imperative that corruption be wiped out in the society particularly in institutions of learning. To achieve this, the psychological approaches should be adopted since once people's attitude are changed positively, their behaviours will change as well including corruption. When this is achieved, the youths will be completely developed, skilful, knowledgeable and accomplished and this will ensure national development.

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