



Managing Students' Unethical Behaviours for Quality Education in Universities in Rivers State, Nigeria

Onwuamadike, Onyinye Maureen

**Department of Educational Management,
Faculty of Education,
University of Port Harcourt,
Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria
08063752022, onwuamadikeonyinye@gmail.com**

ABSTRACT

The study focused on managing students' unethical behaviours for quality education in Universities in Rivers State. Two research questions and two corresponding hypotheses guided the study. The study adopted descriptive survey design. The population of the study was 2,775 academic staff in the three public universities in Rivers State. The sample size for this study comprised 333 (162 male and 171 female) academic staff from the three public universities in Rivers State, representing 12% of the total population. An instrument titled "Managing Students' Unethical Behaviours for Quality Education Questionnaire" (MSUBQEQ) was used for data collection. Face and content validities were ensured by two lecturers in Educational Management and Educational Psychology, Guidance and Counselling, in University of Port Harcourt. The internal consistency of the MSUBQEQ was determined using Cronbach alpha and an index of 0.81 was determined. Out of the 333 copies of questionnaire administered, 321 copies representing 96.3% were retrieved and adequate for the study. Mean and standard deviation were used in answering the research questions while z-test statistics was used in testing the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The result of the study showed that the ways of managing examination malpractice and plagiarism included prohibition of the use electronic devices during examination and reinforcement by lecturers during lectures on the issue of plagiarism respectively among others. It was recommended that more sensitization programmes on students' unethical conducts should be carried out and use of electronic devices such as CCTV in the supervision and administration of examination should be provided to curb some of these unethical behaviours.

Keywords: Students, Unethical Behaviours, Quality Education, Universities, Rivers State

INTRODUCTION

Education is an essential tool for human life and national growth. University education as its pyramid for further learning can't be overlooked or treated mildly. The main purpose of a University in any given society is to offer an atmosphere for learning, for the benefit of the learner, the society and humanity in general. Education is the key agent to the development of human factor and quality of life- the human personality, human potentials, human talents, skills and attitudes. Recently the quality of education in universities has been on the decline because of some factors including students' unethical behaviours. Our current educational system risks the chance of losing her mandate of making available qualitative education if the increasing decline in ethics continues unchecked.

Richter and Buttery (2002) stated that ethics is a set of rules that explain right and wrong conduct of individuals to help distinguish between belief and fact, deciding moral principles that apply to certain situations. This means that unethical behaviours are attitudes displayed by an individual which negates the right conduct expected from the members of any organization. Unethical behaviours in Universities take diverse forms and shapes and this often affect the quality of educational outcome at any level of education including the university.

Educational researchers such as Leke (2009) included improper dressing, cheating during examination, truancy, lying and leaking examination questions among others as unethical practices that distract the minds of students, which meddle with the quality teaching and learning process. In a

university environment, the main goal is for students to receive quality education and this is why the United Nations (UN) in her 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) included quality education and promoting lifelong learning as part of their goals. They saw a reason to have an education that serves each child pedagogically and developmentally; an educational system that is well structured to realize the potential of each child, regardless of the child's location or economic status (Sean, 2016). Quality of education includes a healthy environment, quality learners, quality teachers and standard education. Harry (2014) identified the six A's of quality education to include Assessment, Autonomy, Accountability, Attention to teachers, Attention to early childhood development and Attention to culture.

In today's goal-driven society, students are looking to achieve things faster and in any possible way to gain positive results. The pressure to compete and succeed in the university environment often leads to the majority of dishonest attitude which students resort to and which contributes to some of these unethical behaviours. In today's university, some students feel the need to cheat in examination and other continuous assessment activities or engage in all sorts of dishonest behaviours due to the pressure from parents or peers to be successful. In other cases, it is simply because they have failed to study for an exam, or because they fear the outcome of such examination because sufficient reading has not been done. Most of the cheatings in institutions of higher learning are related to issues of anxiety and insecurity (Callahan, 2015). Examination malpractice which is any practice that violates the conditions stipulated for the conduct of any examination has therefore continued to take different dimensions in today's digital world. This has badly affected the goals and objectives of university education in the country.

The International Centre for Academic Integrity (2014) showed that more than 70% of the students are immersed in many types of cheating during their educational process. They included cheating in examination halls, duplication of assignments and impersonation in some cases. It was further declared that values have changed; remarking that we have become more selfish, focused on money and being cutthroat and as a result colleges and universities need to establish stronger honour codes with faculty making a commitment to teaching integrity (Callahan, 2015). Similarly, Oko and Adie (2016) added that if examination malpractice must be dealt with in schools, check measures such as rustication of students, jail terms, fines, change in value systems, ban of digital devices during examinations, use of surveillance devices, review of examination timing are measures that must be put in place.

Since the commencement of universities in Nigeria, several studies on managing students' unethical behaviours have been carried out by persons from different spheres of life. Researchers have identified cases of plagiarism as another form of unethical behaviour that is fast advancing in most universities both among students and staff. According to Anney and Mosha (2015), plagiarism is a form of academic dishonest practice which involves stealing someone's idea without giving credit or acknowledging the owner of such idea. It is perceived as a form of academic theft or fraud. Therefore scholars such as Pecorari and Petrić (2014) pointed out that ways of managing this unethical behaviour includes developing a legal framework such as the University honor code, institutionalizing plagiarism policy in schools, educating students about plagiarism, introduction of writing skills course and using relevant writing software programmes among others.

Researchers have conducted several studies on how to manage some of these unethical behaviours in schools. Wosowei (2016) carried out research on approaches for controlling students' unethical behaviours in tertiary institutions in Bayelsa State, Nigeria. The population for the study was the 7 tertiary institutions in Bayelsa state which has 1384 academic staff and 2194 non-academic staff. The sample of 716 respondents made up of 277 academic staff and 439 non-academic staff was drawn using stratified random sampling technique. Data was collected using a questionnaire. The research showed among others that the quest for a good grade is one of the basis of examination malpractice. The study recommended that the government have to make available adequate facilities for institutions so as to stimulate the teaching-learning process.

Olt (2002) looked at methods to reduce academic deceit in online learning. Primarily, with the help of a technology specialist, a log-in system is created. This is an effort to permit just approved students into the electronic system. In the course of online lectures or slideshows, teachers have to apply several brief assignments or checkpoints during the lecture so students have to continue with readings and do the short assignment at that instant instead of work together with other students on an

assignment at the end of the complete class. For researched based papers, there are websites as “turnitin.com” which scans written work to search for plagiarism. The researcher found out that it is only very few professors that discuss the honour code with their students. The study showed that only 15% of the syllabi collected had academic policies in them. The researcher recommended that teachers have to modify the course prerequisites and types of assignments thus students are not able to easily copy online or borrow work from a student who took the same course taught by the same professor the previous semester.

Steenkamp and Roberts (2016) carried out a similar study on Unethical practices in response to poor student quality: An Australian perspective. The design for the study was qualitative with a population of 39 Australian universities. The researcher adopted an online survey. Data were analysed by tabulating the frequencies of the responses. The study showed that causes of unethical practices included institutional pressures to achieve higher pass rates, deal with sub-par core skills, treating students as clients and increase student retention. The researcher discovered that deterioration in the quality of students may put pressure on accounting academics to engage in unethical practices. It was recommended that institutions should accept the number of students they can handle to avoid pressures on the lecturers.

Imran (2012) investigated the pattern and causes of unethical practices in the University of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) in Pakistan. Three research questions were formulated and tested for the study. The population for the study was 25 universities. The sample was constrained only to 12 universities having 376 respondents consisting of 339 students and 37 teachers. The research collected the primary data from the respondents on a questionnaire. Data were analysed using Descriptive Statistical Analysis, Correlation and regression models. The result suggests that overcrowding in the class during an examination; inadequate teaching and learning facilities, which made students ill-equipped for the examinations; and examination staff not keeping check encourages students to use unfair means during examination. This research is correlated to the present study as an attempt was made to investigate students’ ethical behaviours in a university environment but the geographical location differs. It was recommended that further research should be carried on private sector universities, Public sector universities, and on universities students separately.

Boma (2015) carried out a study on Unethical Practices and Management Option in Mission Schools as Perceived by Teachers in Delta State, Nigeria. Four research questions were formulated and tested for the study. The population included 1117 teachers in 40 mission schools in Delta state. The researcher used a descriptive survey which adopted the ex-post-facto design. A total of 456 teachers drawn from the population of the study which represented 40% of the entire population were sampled. The instrument used for the study was a self-developed questionnaire. The result of the study indicated that lack of parental supervision, freedom granted by the parents to their children, and students’ laziness to the cause of unethical practices in Delta State mission schools. Recommendations included the need to organise behaviour workshops and seminars for teachers, principals and students on damaging consequence of unethical practices and need to pass law that is focussed on disciplining any student or teacher who take part in unethical behaviours in the school.

Students’ unethical behaviours have presented numerous challenges in the realisation of quality education. This is in the form of poor student attitude and skill in the labour market after graduation, moral decadence among graduate students, lack of innovativeness and reduced rating of Nigerian universities in the international space. The multitude of challenges of students’ unethical behaviours in universities is evident in students, institutions and the society at large. Thus, it is of extreme significance to find ways to manage these unethical behaviours of students and universities and private as well as public organizations should provide necessary take necessary steps to deal with this situation before it gets out of control.

Statement of the Problem

University education in Nigeria has failed over the years to compete favourably with other universities around the world in terms of university ranking. This poor state is largely due to the fact that students and staff of these universities have not been able to meet up with international standards in terms of ethical practices. Students in some of these universities have failed to show globally accepted ethical behaviours in and outside the university environment.

Similarly, more worrisome is that fact that most of the students who graduate from these universities are not able to defend their degrees in the labour market because some of these students graduated on

the platform of examination malpractice. Similarly, some of these students are unable to market their skills and knowledge outside the country since most of their skills and knowledge are products of plagiarized properties. Therefore, it is important to find out ways of managing these unethical behaviours among these students in order to attain quality education in universities especially in Rivers State and hence the need for this study.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of the study was to find out the ways of managing of students' unethical behaviour for quality education in Universities in Rivers State; and particularly the objectives of the study were to:

1. identify ways of managing examination malpractice as students' unethical behaviour for quality education in universities in Rivers State; and
2. find out ways of managing plagiarism as students' unethical behaviour for quality education in universities in Rivers State.

Research Questions

These research questions guided the study.

1. What are the ways of managing examination malpractice as students' unethical behaviour for quality education in universities in Rivers State?
2. What are the ways of managing plagiarism as students' unethical behaviour for quality education in universities in Rivers State?

Hypotheses

These null hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance.

1. There is no significant difference between the mean rating of male and female academic staff regarding ways of managing examination malpractice as students' unethical behaviour for quality education in universities in Rivers State.
2. There is no significant difference between the mean rating of male and female academic staff regarding ways of managing plagiarism as students' unethical behaviour for quality education in universities in Rivers State.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted descriptive survey design. The population of the study was the three universities in Rivers State which are University of Port Harcourt, Rivers State University, and Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, with a total population of respondents of 2,775 academic staff in these three universities. The sample size for this study comprised 333 academic staff from the three universities in Rivers State, representing 12% of the entire population and they were drawn using the proportionate stratified random sampling technique. The instrument used in collecting data for this study was a 16-items structured questionnaire titled "Managing Students' Unethical Behaviours for Quality Education Questionnaire" (MSUBQEQ)". The validity of the instrument was established by two experts in Educational Management as well as Educational Psychology, Guidance and Counselling, University of Port Harcourt. The Cronbach alpha statistics was used to determine the reliability index of the instrument with an index of 0.81. Out of the 333 copies of questionnaire administered, 321 copies representing 96.3% were retrieved and adequate for the study. Mean and standard deviation was used in answering the research questions while z-test statistic was used in testing the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research question 1: *What are the ways of managing examination malpractice as students' unethical behaviour for quality education in universities in Rivers State?*

Table 1: Weighted mean and standard deviation on the ways of managing examination malpractice as students' unethical behaviour for quality education

	Ways of managing examination malpractice	Male academic staff			Female academic staff		
		Mean	Std	Decision	Mean	Std	Decision
1	Encouragement of students to pursue a course they are best suited in terms of abilities can minimize examination malpractice	3.09	.57	Agreed	3.09	.58	Agreed
2	Examination malpractice can be managed by prohibition of the use of electronic devices during examination	3.31	.72	Agreed	3.28	.72	Agreed
3	Adaptation of the use of computer-based test with immediate scoring will discourage manipulation of results.	3.27	.56	Agreed	3.26	.55	Agreed
4	Presentation of students' identification card of all before any course examination will curb impersonation	3.11	.64	Agreed	3.09	.64	Agreed
5	Changing sitting arrangement of students daily will curb planned group pre-examination malpractice	3.15	.57	Agreed	3.15	.55	Agreed
6	Proper orientation on consequences of examination malpractice can help students avoid it	3.03	.44	Agreed	3.04	.44	Agreed
7	Deemphasizing of objective type of questions as it is easier to copy from others will reduce rate of exam malpractice	3.13	.39	Agreed	3.07	.46	Agreed
8	Students can be discouraged from exam malpractice by planting monitoring devices like a camera in examination halls	2.27	.56	Disagreed	2.32	.58	Disagree
Grand mean		3.05			3.04		

Table 1 showed that items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 have mean values above the criterion mean value of 2.50 and were agreed by the respondents as the ways of managing examination malpractice as students' unethical behaviour for quality education in universities in Rivers State while item 8 was disagreed. The ways of managing examination malpractice as students' unethical behaviour for quality education in universities in Rivers State are: Encouragement of students to pursue a course they are best suited in terms of abilities can minimize examination malpractice, examination malpractice can be managed by prohibition of the use of electronic devices during examination, adaptation of the use of computer-based test with immediate scoring will discourage manipulation of results, presentation of students' identification card of all before any course examination will curb impersonation, changing sitting arrangement of students daily will planned group pre-examination malpractice, proper orientation on consequences of examination malpractice can help students avoid it and deemphasizing of objective type of questions as it is easier to copy from others will reduce rate of

exam malpractice. The highest mean on ways to manage examination malpractice is that it can be managed by prohibition of the use electronic devices during examination while the lowest is that Students can be discouraged from exam malpractice by planting monitoring devices like a camera in examination halls.

Research question 2: *What are the ways of managing plagiarism as students' unethical behaviour for quality education in universities in Rivers State?*

Table 2: Weighted mean and standard deviation on the ways of managing plagiarism as students' unethical behaviour for quality education

	Ways of managing plagiarism	Male academic staff			Female academic staff		
		Mean	Std	Decision	Mean	Std	Decision
9	Use of Plagiarism Detection Software to check students' work will help reduce plagiarism	2.56	.57	Agreed	2.55	.57	Agreed
10	Confidential system to report plagiarism without being identified will help fish out guilty students	2.92	.39	Agreed	2.93	.38	Agreed
11	Compulsory honouring of pledges declarations by writers will reduce plagiarism	2.92	.43	Agreed	2.98	.48	Agreed
12	Training and retraining of students regularly to reinforce academic integrity will decree the number of students guilty of plagiarism	2.96	.34	Agreed	2.99	.37	Agreed
13	Manual reviewing of the research work before grading will help detect plagiarised works	3.00	.52	Agreed	3.02	.53	Agreed
14	Reinforcement by lecturers during lectures on avoiding plagiarism can help curb it	3.06	.49	Agreed	3.05	.48	Agreed
15	Exposing students to proper ways of referencing and citation will reduce plagiarism	2.15	.69	Disagreed	2.25	.79	Disagreed
16	Enforcement of penalty to students caught in the act of plagiarism will help reduce it	2.96	.59	Agreed	2.96	.59	Agreed
Grand mean		2.82			2.84		

Table 2 showed that items 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14 and 16 have their various mean values above the criterion mean of 2.50 and were agreed by the respondents as the ways of managing plagiarism as students' unethical behaviour for quality education in universities in Rivers State while item 15 was disagreed. The ways of managing plagiarism as students' unethical behaviour are through: the use of Plagiarism Detection Software to check students' work will help reduce plagiarism; confidential system to report plagiarism without being identified will help fish out guilty students; compulsory honouring of pledges declarations by writers will reduce plagiarism; training and retraining of students regularly to reinforce academic integrity will decree the number of students guilty of plagiarism; manual reviewing of the research work before grading will help detect plagiarised works; reinforcement by lecturers during lectures on avoiding plagiarism can help curb it and enforcement of penalty to students caught in the act of plagiarism will help reduce it.

Test of Hypotheses

Ho₁: There is no significant difference between the mean rating of male and female academic staff regarding ways of managing examination malpractice as students’ unethical behaviour for quality education in universities in Rivers State.

Table 3: z-test of male and female academic staff on the ways of managing examination malpractice as students’ unethical behaviour for quality education

Categories	n	Mean	Std	df	z-cal	z-crit.	Decision
Male academic staff	156	24.38	1.93	319	0.35	1.96	Not Rejected
Female academic staff	165	24.31	1.92				

Table 3 revealed that male academic staff had mean and standard deviation scores of 24.38 and 1.93 while female academic staff have mean and standard deviation scores of 24.31 and 1.92. With a degree of freedom of 319, the calculated z-test value of 0.35 was less than the critical table value of 1.96 therefore, the null hypothesis was not rejected. By implication, there was no significant difference between the mean rating of male and female academic staff regarding the ways of managing examination malpractice as students’ unethical behaviour for quality education in universities in Rivers State.

Ho₂: There is no significant difference between the mean rating of male and female academic staff regarding ways of managing plagiarism in universities in Rivers State.

Table 4: z-test of male and female academic staff on the ways of managing plagiarism as students’ unethical behaviour for quality education

Categories	n	mean	Std	df	z-cal	z-crit.	Decision
male academic staff	156	22.54	1.75	319	1.01	1.96	Not rejected
female academic staff	165	22.55	1.92				

Table 4 revealed that male academic staff had mean and standard deviation scores of 22.54 and 1.75 while female academic staff have mean and standard deviation scores of 22.55 and 1.92. With a degree of freedom of 319, the calculated z-test value of 1.01 was less than the critical table value of 1.96, therefore, the null hypothesis was not rejected. By implication, there was no significant difference between the mean rating of male and female academic staff regarding ways of managing plagiarism in universities in Rivers State.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The study revealed that the ways to manage examination malpractice as students’ unethical behaviour for quality education in universities in Rivers State are: encouragement of students to pursue a course they are best suited in terms of abilities can minimize examination malpractice, examination malpractice can be managed by prohibition of the use of electronic devices during examination, adaptation of the use of computer-based test with immediate scoring will discourage manipulation of results, presentation of students’ identification card of all students before any course examination will curb impersonation, changing sitting arrangement of students daily will curb planned group pre-examination malpractice, proper orientation on consequences of examination malpractice can help students avoid it and deemphasizing of objective type of questions as it is easier to copy from others will reduce rate of exam malpractice. Supporting this assertion, Wasowei (2016) pointed out in the finding of his study that there is need for provision of adequate learning resources for students and teachers to deal with cases of examination malpractice in schools.

Students who do not pursue the required course of study may end up being discouraged and distracted thereby strongly involving in condemnable behaviours in the school. Agreeing with this position, Steenkamp and Roberts (2016) pointed out that students need regular assistance to behave well in schools. This set of students may lack the zeal and quest for arduous academic activities and may

consequently get involved in examination malpractice. The schools' authorities can manage some of these unworthy behaviours by the introduction of sit arrangement, orientation services before examination and content coverage before examinations. The findings of this study were corroborated by Imran (2012) who discovered that top management is involved in the promotion of unethical practices in overall universities system of KPK. Also that Overcrowding in the class during the examination; Inadequate teaching and learning facilities, which made students ill-equipped for the examinations; and examination staff not keeping check encourage students to use unfair means during examination.

It was found that the ways to manage plagiarism as students' unethical behaviour are through: the use of Plagiarism Detection Software to check students' work will help reduce plagiarism; confidential system to report plagiarism without being identified will help fish out guilty students; compulsory honouring of pledges declarations by writers will reduce plagiarism; training and retraining of students regularly to reinforce academic integrity will decrease the number of students guilty of plagiarism; manual reviewing of the research work before grading will help detect plagiarised works; reinforcement by lecturers during lectures on avoiding plagiarism can help curb it and enforcement of penalty to students caught in the act of plagiarism will help reduce it. Boma (2015) supported this position as it was revealed in the findings of his study that there is need for training of students through seminar and workshops to deal with these unethical behaviours.

The levels to which the students remove the cover pages of a project to become their own is quite alarming. Most of these students are very lazy to the extent that they copy verbatim the works of other people as their brainchild. The students may also pirate the work of their lecturers by photocopying their textbooks. This finding is in tandem with Olt (2002) who discovered that a large number of students are perpetrating the wrong activities of copyright through copying other students' assignments and research papers from the internet in the pursuit of their academic activities.

CONCLUSION

It was concluded in the findings of the study that staff of public universities in Rivers State have different ways of managing unethical behaviours such as examination malpractice and plagiarism for the attainment of quality education in these universities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations were made in this study:

1. More sensitization programmes on students' unethical conducts should be carried out through university bulletins, academic and students' unions, seminars, conferences and other public and private sensitization platforms.
2. Frantic efforts should be made by the university authorities on the use of electronic devices such as CCTV cameras and other software in the supervision and administration of examination as well as checking for plagiarism in order to deal with some of these unethical behaviours.
3. The process of checking the plagiarism in the school should be handled by staff who do not have questionable characters and have not been indicted for any criminal offence.

REFERENCES

- Anney, V. N. & Mosha, M. A. (2015). Student's plagiarisms in higher learning institutions in the era of improved internet access: Case study of developing countries. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 6(13), 203-216
- Boma, G. (2015). *Unethical practices and management options in mission schools as perceived by teachers in Delta State*. Delta State University.
- Callahan, D. (2015). *The cheating culture: why more Americans are doing wrong to get ahead*. Orlando, FL: Harcourt Publishers.
- Harry, A. P. (2014). *The six A's of Quality education*. Education for Global Development, The world bank. Retrieved from <http://blogs.worldbank.org/education/node/722>
- Imran, N. (2012) Unethical practices in university system: pattern and causes. Universities of Khyber Pakhtoon Kha (KPK), Pakistan. Retrieved from <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/234166477>

- International Centre for Academic Integrity (2014). *The fundamental values of academic integrity*. Retrieved from <http://www.academicintegrity.org/icai/assets>
- Leke, O. (2009). Ethics and Conflict Management in Nigerian Universities. *International Journal of Social and Policy Issues* 6 (1and2):98-110
- Oko, S. U. & Adie, R. I. (2016). Examination malpractice: Causes, effects and possible ways of curbing the menace. A study of Cross River University of technology. *International Journal of Managerial Studies and Research*, 4(1), 59-65
- Olt, M. R. (2002). Ethics and distance education: Strategies for minimizing academic dishonesty in online assessment. *Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration*, 1(3), 18-26
- Pecorari, D. & Petrić, B. (2014). Plagiarism in second-language writing: *Language Teaching*, 47(3), 269-302
- Richter, E. M. & Buttery, E. A. (2002). Convergence of ethics? *Management Decision*, 40(2), 142-151
- Sean, S. (2016). What Do We Mean by a Quality Education? *Huffpost blog*. Retrieved from <https://widget.perfectmarket.com/aol-huffingtonpost/load.js>
- Steenkamp, N. & Roberts, R. (2016). Unethical practices in response to poor student quality: An Australian perspective. *The accounting educators' journal, special edition*. Retrieved from <http://www.australianuniversities.com.au/list/>
- Wosowei, M. U. P. (2016). *Strategies for managing Students' unethical behaviours in tertiary institutions in Bayelsa State, Nigeria*. Faculty of Education, University of Port Harcourt