USING CIVIC AND ETHICAL EDUCATION TO CURB UNETHICAL ACADEMIC PRACTICES AMONGST UNDERGRADUATES IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Corruption and unethical practices remain one of the critical challenges facing Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) in Nigeria. There are concerns about the lack of academic fidelity in the HEIs arising from scant interest in academic rigour and leading to academic dishonesty. Efforts towards addressing these problems in the HEIs have not produced lasting solutions. Aside the crucial applications of education in turning students into employable adults, education should also serve as a behavioural framework for inculcating values, rigorous academic-culture and ethical practices to aspiring scholars. So, employing civic and ethical education in HEIs for addressing the problems of corruption and unethical practice remains crucial. In spite of the prospects of ethics and civic education in addressing the problem as stated, ethics and civic education may not be functional at the HEIs presently. The paper therefore examined the extent to which this applies and appraises the challenges of unethical practices in the HEIs and the option of using a general studies approach to address this problem using survey method. The study design adopted a four-scale Likert-type questionnaire administered to 120 undergraduates of Universities in South West Nigeria. Data were analysed using the descriptive statistics and findings indicated that ethics and civic education have optimum potentials in addressing corruption related problems, especially among fresh undergraduates. It is therefore recommended that, higher education authorities and stakeholders should leverage on the prospects of the fresh students to introduce and deploy sufficient resources to this programme in the HEIs.

Keywords: Unethical practices; Ethics and Civic Education, Nigeria.

Introduction

In every clime, education has become increasingly acknowledged as a veritable channel per excellence for communicating behavioural change. It is recognised as a means of contending with diverse societal problems. The education obtained at higher education institutions (HEIs) is also widely accredited as pre-eminent in fostering attitudes, knowledge and skills needed for the transition of students into young adults. However, strong moral issues are tackled by inculcating responsible

conducts through ethics and civic education to citizens (Birhanu, 2012). Outside formal education there will be difficulty in enhancing good conducts that can transform the students of today to responsible citizens tomorrow. In other words, once there are cohorts of graduates and generations of young people who fail to understand, respect and uphold established norms, values and requisite attitudes for communal life and services, moral crisis becomes inevitable. Developing responsible citizenship and morally sound individuals should be the cardinal focus of our HEIs. Such persons can contribute to the development of the academic community and the nation as a whole, and this requires a concerted and coordinated educational effort.

However, it does appear that the required level of concerted and coordinated educational effort has not been observed with the developing countries and HEIs in Africa particularly. Certainly, the problems associated with unethical academic practices should be of great concern to all in intellectual circles. Evidence in literature had shown that the concern for curtailing unethical conducts were domesticated mostly by developed countries and with minimal effort in developing countries, Nigeria inclusive, Orim, (2014) and Babalola, (2012). Regardless of the success or feeble efforts made by universities to reduce unethical academic practices, it is however expected that situation should respond commensurately. Unfortunately, the occurrence of unethical academic practices and other related vices have continued to rise in even developed but more particularly in developing economies (Benilde, García-Cabrero, 2017). The absence of academic rigour and scholarly scrutiny amongst students has been identified as a factor responsible for the present state of affairs, (Olutola, 2016). It is therefore a must that appropriate scholarship enthusiasm be pursued in order to assist university students to acquire intellectual capacity for handling academic challenges. The involvement of students by educating them on academic ethics is a vital measure to be adopted for prevention unethical and dishonest academic conducts (Orim, 2014). While the education in a specific field prepares the student for legitimate livelihood or career, the civics and ethical education on the other hand creates the culture of qualitative scholarship in the HEIs and beyond.

The starting point towards achieving this laudable endeavour therefore is by instituting requisite and timeous academic programme. Hence, the inculcation of the ethical where-withal into undergraduate programmes in the HEIs remains paramount. This underscores the need to understand the current state of the university by discovering if there be an extant curriculum content and methodology for the delivery of Civics and Ethical Education and to what extent it is poised to combat unethical academic practices**.** Also, it will verify whether Civics and Ethical Education has commenced at the particular sampled higher educational institution.

Statement of Problem

The rate of unethical propensities amongst students in the higher education institutions will definitely have a very serious negative effect on the quality of outputs from the institutions. However, the educational curriculum presently centred on specific field that tends to prepare student only for life in world of work without commensurate effort in making the students to be well adjusted into life of decent conducts. Specifically, civics and ethical education create the culture of qualitative scholarship in the HEIs and such respectable life is treasured even beyond the world of learning.

The present investigation has to do with whether the academic programme needed to inculcate the right ethical where-withal into undergraduate programmes in the HEIs are instituted and given the required prominence. Studies have attested to the fact that students presently are not able to develop the expected academic knowledge and skills that they need to escape the trap of unethical practices (Orim 2014). He opined further that there are no developed curricula that are harmonized at national level for Civics and Ethical Education, which indicates that the impending problem will take some time before it can be resolved. Moreover, ignorance of the extent the application of civic and ethical education is poised to combat unethical academic practices is not helpful too. So, this paper is designed for the purpose of acknowledging and appreciating the practice of unethical conduct among students in the sampled institutions, and specifically, outcomes will help to mitigate the consequences of unethical practices.

Though there were studies of unethical practices amongst undergraduates in Nigeria, this paper examined further by adding the dimensions of the usefulness of civics and ethical education and the extent of institutional adoption and preparation of students through civics and ethical education amongst Nigeria Undergraduates as a way of proffering lasting solution to the menace of unethical practices.

Research Questions

1. What is the extent of introduction and use of civic and ethical education to curb unethical practices in selected universities in Ogun State?
2. What is the extent of students' involvement and responsiveness to civic and ethical education to curb unethical practices in universities in Ogun State?

Research Hypotheses

1. There is no significant difference in the desire of male and female students for implementation of graded course work in civic and ethical education in selected universities in Ogun States

Literature and Theoretical Review

The universities and higher educational institutions integrate learning domains that are favourable to values education and to personality development education (Santos and Lorenzo, 2007a, b, and c). Universities are places where people learn to become citizens. Even a personal education concerned with academic and professional excellence is incomplete if it is not accompanied by developing a set of competencies related to education in values that lend credence to active citizenship concerning social adjustments ethical conducts (Santos, 2005). The challenge of unethical practices in the academic circles and the paucity of empirical investigations on effort aimed at curtailing it through civic education have not received enough attention especially in Nigeria. Notwithstanding unethical issues generally appear to be on the increase, thereby suggesting a need to investigate its occurrence and mitigating measures in Nigerian universities (Okebukola, 2010). The university student must be able to become involved in that world, must know how to become committed to projects in active citizenship, and must dare to change it and transform it. This is the reason why civics learning should fundamentally be a matter of competences (Martinez and Esteban, 2005). Defining what those "competences" are is a difficult task. In the context of Nigerian universities it may be said that they are formed from structures of processes that enable the student to imbibe strong moral ethics. Civic education at the university ordinarily should be focused on objectives that directly relate to the acquisition of types of competences: ethical competences –resulting from education aimed at teaching the person to be able to develop and guide his or her way and style of life, (Okebukola, 2010). The concept of moral and ethical soundness as an adjunct of citizenship may possibly extend the idea of civic education for citizenship from being a pure political judgment. Rather, it could be seen to include the social and interpersonal dynamics of social construct of people through learning by cognitive process. In essence, morality has become a multidimensional construct which therefore borders on ethical consideration, seen as pivotal in students' education, (Adeniyi and Taiwo, 2011). This should include social, cultural, developmental, circumstantial/situational and acquired expertise perspectives. Its theoretical modelling, practical applications and measurements have become central scientific tasks. Citizenship and moral development are part of civic education necessary to deter unethical conduct in students. The consequences of undeterred moral conducts amongst students had snowballed into bigger national crime and insecurity problems. The problem is exacerbated by the preponderance of mischief makers among the elites, the political and religious leaders, coupled with the lack of control for the proliferation of small arm and light weapons in the northern part of Nigeria which as observed by Oji and Okeke (2014), had created a fertile ground for crime to soar in the larger society. Hence, Okebukola (2010) had counselled

earlier that effort should be expedited towards using education to ameliorate the unethical and immoral practices and the associated problems.

Theoretical Perspectives
A successful communication of ideas through effective learning helps the students to be equipped to participate and function properly in the academic and wider society. Theoretical explanation for this phenomenon is the main consideration here but with the practical perspectives of learning theory. In the 1960s scholars were limited to the early formulations of the theories of Albert Bandura and Lawrence Kohlberg that were available at that time. Those theories were the theoretical basis for explaining virtually all aspects of human behaviour and behavioural change. However, they were not always suitable for understanding the many facets of ethical and moral issues particularly, those that in the core of ethical development that must occur through structured pedagogy. Hence, theoretical approaches tailored to understanding civic and ethical learning leading to sound moral and academic development and not only social development. Oser, Althof and Higgins-D'Alessandro (2008) report how school government affords opportunities for civic voice. Though Lievrouw (2011) further describes how families, peer groups, and social media had remained agency for moral and specific socialisation, yet effective civic education needs to recognize the complexity of the wide variety of civic experiences that young people bring to the classroom, thus offering opportunities for rich interactive learning, real-life authentic civic learners' experience that contributes to civic identity, motivation, purpose, responsibility, agency, and efficacy thus reducing incidences of academic dishonesty, Adeniyi and Taiwo (2011).

Early Learning Theory vis-à-vis Cognitive-information Processes and Constructivism
The proponents of learning theory that stresses learning by association dominated the behavioural era and the beginning of the cognitive revolution. However, as limitations of learning by association of the behavioural theorist was evinced through persuasive arguments against behaviourist theories by pundits, the emergence of cognitivist then became inevitable. Another prominent factor was the analogy offered by input-output process that came with the development of computers (Baars, 1986), which provided both a credible metaphor for human information processing, and depicting a significant approach for exploring human cognitive processes. One major group of cognitive theories may be classified as cognitive-information processing learning theories. Being the second sub-set of learning theory- cognitive-information processing theories, and according to the cognitive information processing (CIP) view, the human learner is conceived to be a processor of information, in much the same way a computer is. When learning

occurs, information is inputed from the environment, processed and stored in memory, and repeoduced in the form of a learned capability. Proponents of the CIP model, like behaviourists, seek to explain how the environment modifies human behaviour. However, unlike behaviourists, they assume an intervening variable between the environment and behaviour. That variable is the information processing system of the learner. Most models of information processing can be traced to Atkinson and Shiffrin (1968) who proposed a multistage theory of memory in which information received by the processing system undergoes a series of transformation before it can be permanently stored in the learners' memory. Yet the Constructivist specifically sees learning to be a product of individual and group mental construction of the environmental variables. The cognitive-constructivist learning theory was advanced by von Glasersfeld (1989, 1981), Jonassen (1991), Rorty (1991) and Cunningham (1998).These sources provided the groundwork for constructivism not just as a psycho-theoretical concept but having practical application to education. The common belief of theorists is that knowledge is constructed within an individual or group social context, and this is the foundation for constructivism approach to learning.

Consideration of learning that equips students for honest academic endeavours therefore, can be in a platform that provides the means for reflective practice necessary to connect abstract ideas with real-life situations. So, that capacity for civic participation is achieved and linked to acceptable academic and larger community engagement in in the learner. This involves a combination of the behaviourist, cognitive information processing and the constructivist approach. As learning by association and information processing has to be reinforced through organizing peers related activities as a site for the development of civic competence. Cammarota and Fine (2008) and Ginwright (2010) show how community-based civic action is particularly salient and participation requires and fosters coming together, working with others, mediating differences and establishing shared goals in order to regulate, direct, and develop common affairs for public good. This is mastery of responsibility and commitment to partner with others in understanding problems, and responsiveness in developing and implementing solutions. Furthermore, community activism builds interdependence and a strong sense of belonging to local environments (Kassimir and Flanagan, 2010). The foregoing has implications for education, by enabling young people to draw upon experiences in several areas of life, to make sense of their cognitive and affective responses and to consider a range of possible actions. Hence, civic competences, reasoning, affect and behaviour are not explained only in terms of individual characteristics, nor can effective civic ethical education be achieved if the learner is seen as isolated from the social context. The roles of learners' experience, resources and interaction are inherent in creating all aspects of civic competence, expression and the education

for their development, and also framework for exploring and explaining acquisition of ethical where-withal.

Methodology
Because of the nature of the study the descriptive survey research design was preferred for this study. The entire population for the study comprised all university students in the universities in Ogun-State. Stratified random sampling procedure was used to draw the samples of respondents used for the study. The universities were stratified into public and private and a random sample of about 140 students was selected from the participating universities. A questionnaire titled: Civic and Ethical Education to Curb Unethical Academic Practices amongst Undergraduates in Nigeria was developed and used as the main instrument for data collection. The four-scale Likert-type questionnaire was developed to know the extent of students' involvement and responsiveness to civic and ethical education as a means of curbing unethical practices. The instrument was pilot tested and yielded a reliability coefficient of r=0.69. The instrument was used to collect information from the sampled students. The hypothesis raised for the study was tested at 0.05 level of significance and the data obtained from the field were analysed using descriptive statistics.

Research Question 1
What is the extent of introduction and use of civic and ethical education to curb unethical practices in selected   universities in Ogun State?

The Extent of Use of Civic and Ethical Education to Curb Unethical Practices
From the result, 86.0% of those sampled acknowledged that they have been instructed at one time or the other to desist from unethical practices. However, about 14.0% among them disagreed (Mean=3.23, SD=0.31). Also, 95.7% of the students who participated in the study equally accepted that instituted programme on civic and ethical education was absent in their institution, but 4.3% disagreed with this view (Mean=3.94,SD=1.29). Also, 92.0% settled with the view that their universities have no specific measures in dealing with unethical practices, while 8.0% disagreed meaning that there are specific measures for dealing with the problem (Mean=2.92, SD=0.76). Again 79.4% of the students sampled agreed that having an extensive orientation programme will be the best way for effective mentoring of students against unethical practices while 20.6% disagreed (Mean=3.19, SD=0.92). 87.3% of respondents agreed that they are not willing to take a graded course work as a way of enhancing students' understating university ethical policy, while 12.7% disagreed (Mean=3.81, SD=0.19). The descriptive statistics generated mean responses that were generally above 2.5 and a majority of the respondents agreed with the items of the instrument, inference could be made

that most students in the sampled universities that the of Use of Civic and Ethical Education to Curb Unethical Practices is present but not instituted to a greater extent. Moreover, they were not willing to be subjected to coursework rather they prefered an extended orientation programme.

Research Question 2

What is the extent of students' involvement and responsiveness to civic and ethical education to curb unethical practices in universities in Ogun State?

Extent of students' involvement and responsiveness to civic and ethical education to curb unethical practices

Research question 2 had generated the following responses that about 25.3% of those sampled agreed that they want to be involved in curbing unethical practices, while 74.7% disagreed (Mean=3.37, SD=0.32). Again, 55.9% of the respondents also agreed that there is willingness to join in controlling unethical practices in their universities while 54.1% disagreed (Mean=2.62, SD=0.93). The respondents who desired to be adequately prepared against unethical practices through an institute-wide course work were only 22.0% of the sampled students, while 78.0% disagreed(Mean=2.02, SD=0.93). Yet many respondents agreed that students are to be made part of ethical vanguard but there are no nationally delineated universities policies for dealing with unethical practices and issues though a few differed; 69.0% and 31% respectively (Mean=2.92, SD=0.91). Moreover, 56.9% of the respondents agreed that university authories should resolve whether to use or adopt any form of commensurate punishment against unethical conduct, while 43.1% disagreed (Mean=2.82, SD=0.63). Flowing from the analysis of responses, it could be concluded that while the students were eager to be well informed about unethical conduct and that necessary penal measures be adopted in the sampled universities but it appeared that students were not prepared to pay the price for the adoption and to acquire the requisite knowledge.

Hypothesis 1

> There is no significant difference between the males and females students who desire the for implementation of graded course work in civic and ethical education in selected universities in Ogun State?

Table 1: Difference between the desired implementation of graded course work in civic and ethical education in selected   universities based on gender

Variables	N	Mean	Std. Dev	Df	t	Sig	P	Remark
Male	62	14.978	2.1716	138	0.768	0.689	**0.05**	Not significant
Female	78	21.361	4.921					

In comparing the difference the desires for the implementation of graded course work in civic and ethical education in selected universities based on gender in the universities sampled. No significant mean differences were found (t=0.768, p>0.05). The result revealed that the mean desires for implementation of graded course work in civic and ethical education in selected   universities based on male gender (mean =14.978, S.D=2.1716) was not significantly higher than that of female (mean =21.361, S.D=4.921). Thus pointing to the fact that from the result of the analysis there is no statistical reason for not accepting the null hypothesis, in other words, the mean desire for the implementation of course work amongst the male gender in the universities is not significantly higher than that of females. The t-test indicates 0.768 which shows the level of significance of gender towards the introduction of civics and ethical education.

Discussion of Findings

From the result it is seen that the students have been instructed at one time or the other to desist from unethical practices however, instituted programme on civic and ethical education was absent in many of the institutions' curriculum. Also, many respondents agreed that students are to be made part of ethical campaign but there are no nationally delineated universities policies for dealing with unethical practices and issues Okebukola (2010). It is unfortunate that the students preferred having extended orientation programme thus exposing their unwillingness to take a graded course work as a way of enhancing their understating of extant university ethical policy. Moreover the unwillingness to be subjected to coursework rather than an extended orientation programme contradicts the findings of Santos and Lorenzo, (2007) which show that students seek competencies. Flowing from the analysis of responses, it could be deduced that while the students were eager to be well informed about unethical conduct and that necessary penal measures be adopted in the sampled universities it however appears that students were not willing to pay the price for the adoption and to acquire the requisite knowledge. The absence of academic rigour and scholarly painstaking amongst students has

been identified as a factor responsible for the present state of affairs (Lina and Neringa 2014). It is unfortunate that students lack the appropriate scholarship enthusiasm leading to the acquisition of intellectual capacity for handling academic demands, (Olutola, 2016).

Conclusion

The study shows the perspective of selected students towards civic and ethical education in schools. This they demonstrated through an unenviable unwillingness to take graded course-work in the field rather a form of regulated orientation programme. The absence of academic rigour and scholarly painstaking amongst students has been identified as a factor responsible for the present state of affairs, and it will be amenable to change through education but this is not so, as it is obvious that a majority of the students may be lacking in the appropriate scholarship enthusiasm leading to the acquisition of intellectual capacity for handling academic demands honestly in such field that they did not see it as part of their academic pursuit.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made based on the findings of the study:
1. The orientation programme for the new intakes should be taken very seriously as a point to get the students better prepared for academic and civic work
2. A non-graded but compulsory course work on ethical education should be introduced at the right time
3. Nigerian university authorities should be willing to devote sufficient resources to the development of curricular and extra-curricular activities that enhance academic ethics.   .
4. There should be a national policy on the implementation of civic and ethical education in our universities with an enforcement task force.

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