Prevalence, Contributing Factors and Consequences of Unethical Practices among University Students in Edo State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study investigated the prevalence, contributing factors and consequences of unethical practices among university students in Edo State, Nigeria. Three research questions guided the study. The descriptive survey design was adopted for this study. The population of the study comprised all full-time undergraduates and lecturers in public and privately-owned universities in Edo State. Using a multistage sampling procedure, a sample of 720 students and 200 lecturers was drawn for the study. Data were collected through two questionnaires entitled "Unethical Practices among University Students Questionnaire: (UPUSQ) and "Unethical Practices and University Education Questionnaire" (UPUEQ). The instruments were face-validated by two other experts in Measurement and Evaluation in the Faculty of Education, University of Benin. A reliability testing of the instruments was done using Cronbach's Alpha. The results of the study revealed, among others, that all the identified unethical practices except vandalism and the threat and actual kidnapping of lecturers by students were moderately prevalent among university students in Edo State. Findings further revealed that students' desperation to pass examinations at all cost, excess workload on students, poor policy implementation and negative peer influence were the main contributing factors to university students' involvement in unethical practices in Edo State. Based on the findings of this study, the authors recommended, inter alia, that reported cases of unethical practices should be promptly addressed and thoroughly investigated, and that defaulters should be sanctioned or punished by each university's rules and regulations for such offences or by-laws stipulated for such offences.

Keywords: unethical practices, prevalence, contributing factors

Introduction

The appropriateness of the education that a University provides is partly dependent on the extent to which the education develops the students culturally and how much of a good character it inculcates in them. This is why university degrees are awarded to recipients based on good character and satisfactory learning. A good character among students is the pivot of ethics. Ethics means laid down principles and practices that govern good human conduct in an organization or society. Principles express the fundamental beliefs or ideals that individuals use in action. Such beliefs or ideals help individuals in deciding between right and wrong. According to Alutu and Aluede (2005), the term ethics can simply be defined as laid down guidelines, principles, codes of conduct, rules and regulations guiding the behaviour of individuals in an organization or a society. Principles are also values that help us arrange our beliefs in the hierarchy of importance. Examples of principles are integrity, honesty, loyalty, patriotism, commitment, hard work, professionalism, excellence, among others. An example of a fundamental ethical principle in the conduct of academic staff is that no staff member should have a personal interest that conflicts with the full performance of his or her duties (Alutu & Aluede, 2005).

In a university setting, ethics are viewed in terms of principles and codes of conduct for academic members of staff and students. The university, being the highest institution of learning, demands the need for the maintenance of high academic standards through an emphasis on ethics. Mahuta (2013) conceptualized ethics as moral principles that govern a person's or a group's behaviour. It can be referred to as codes of conduct, rules and regulations guiding people's conducts. It encompasses traditional social codes or systems of moral principles. Thus, the meaning of ethics can be constructed on a spectrum of morality issues. Asodike (2014) further pointed out that ethics in the university system focuses on for example community ethics and teaching ethics. The ethics of the school therefore gives direction on what constitutes the acceptable and non-acceptable policies of the school as they relate to the main actors in the school system (teachers and students).

Unethical practices are practices that are against the ethical code of conduct of any university. Such practices include but are not limited to: sexual harassment of fellow students, indecent dressing on campus, drug abuse, vandalism and stealing of university property, theft, writing projects, assignments and seminar papers for fellow students for financial rewards, certificate forgery/racketeering and printing of fake school fees receipts and examination malpractice which has

multifarious forms such as leakage of question papers, impersonation, cheating involving collusion, swapping of scripts, assaulting examination invigilators, disorderly behaviour in examination halls and so on. These practices could pose very serious challenges to the entire university system. Unethical practices like examination malpractice, for instance, can diminish the quality of universities and graduates. It can also lead to wastage. Universities spend a lot of money fighting examination malpractice, especially in the area of bringing on campuses, police, and secret agents with their gadgets to stay around the campus during examinations. Examinations are sometimes postponed or repeated when papers leak, and these are inconveniences that cost money, energy and time (Idogho, 2011; Onotume, 1993; Ogunu, 1993; Kanu & Akanwa, 2012)

Drug abuse which is one of the unethical practices under focus in this study has, on several occasions in the past, led to organized crimes and interruption of academic programmes in universities. It has also led to increased secret cult activities in secondary schools and most Nigerian universities, which has been a source of threat to the lives and properties of innocent people within the school community (Agoreyo, Agoreyo, Ekwukoma & Agoreyo, 2021). Fruitful learning can hardly take place in a university climate that is characterized by the threat to lives and properties as a result of students' involvement in drug abuse and secret cultism (Oni, 2008; Umobong, 2005; Afe, 2006).

The vandalism and stealing of university property can lead to gross inadequacy of learning facilities. Students usually vandalize university property when they go on a rampage. Most universities in Nigeria do not have adequate facilities for learning. The facilities, therefore, become grossly inadequate when students vandalize the existing ones. The challenge this could pose to the university is that it will restrain learning. It will also cost the university more money, time and energy to replace the stolen or vandalized facilities.

According to Inua (2008), the terrible implications of unethical practices among university students include:

   (a)   Loss of value for certificates earned from institutions that are known for unethical practices;
   (b)   Unethical practices such as 'sorting' (bribing a lecturer to get a better grade) and examination malpractices could discourage hard work among serious-minded students who discover that their unserious classmates are making the same or even better grades than themselves through unethical means;

(c)   Leaders of tomorrow who will be at the helm of affairs in the country's economic, education, health and other sectors will not have the intellectual ability to manage the country's vast resources. This portends doom for the country.

Rumyantseva (2005), Kasum and Shelly (2013), Ijeoma (2013), Olasehinde (2000) and Onokerhoraye (1993) also noted that the consequence of unethical practices in the education system, especially the university is a decline in quality, trust and self-generating cynicism about the entire system and its products. The several reported cases of unethical practices in the media by university students were the problem that prompted this study. Recently, for instance, a university lecturer in a state university in Edo State was reportedly kidnapped by a nursing student (Ekwukoma, 2019). Many university students who are supposed to be good role models for the larger society have in recent times become known for unethical practices, which has become a challenge to university education. These unethical practices could be part of the myriad of factors that constitute serious challenges to university education in Edo State. It is because of the seemingly negative impact of the listed unethical practices on the attainment of the goals of university education that the following research questions became pertinent: What is the extent of prevalence of unethical practices among university students in Edo State? What are the contributing factors to unethical practices among university students in Edo State? What are the consequences of unethical practices in the university system in Edo State? This is the crux of this study.

Method

The population of this study comprised all the 3,466 lecturers and 64,523 full-time undergraduates in public and privately-owned universities in Edo State. The universities include the University of Benin, Benin City; Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma; Edo University, Iyamo, Igbinedion University, Okada; Benson Idahosa University, Benin City; Wellspring University, Evbuobanosa and Samuel Adegboyega University, Ogwa. The sample for this study was 720 full-time undergraduate students and 200 lecturers from universities in Edo State. The study employed a multi-stage sampling procedure. A multi-state sampling procedure was adopted to enable the researchers divide the population into groups (or clusters) for ease of randomization and data collection.

The major research instruments that were used for this study were two self-developed questionnaires entitled 'Unethical Practices and University Education Questionnaire' (UPUEQ) for lecturers and 'Unethical Practices among University Students Questionnaire' (UPUSQ) for students. The questionnaires were sub-divided into four sections: A, B, C and D. Section A sought demographic information while sections B, C and D contained items/questions that elicited respondents' opinions on the prevalence, contributing factors and consequences of unethical practices among university students in Edo State, Nigeria.

To ensure the face validity of the instruments used, the researchers presented them to two experts in measurement and evaluation in the faculty of education, the University of Benin for thorough scrutiny and face-validation. A reliability test of the instruments was done with forty (40) subjects (twenty university students and twenty university lecturers) who did not form part of the population of the study. Essentially, a procedure of reliability testing using Cronbach's Alpha was used to establish the reliability estimates of 0.75 and 0.76 for the lecturers' and students' questionnaires respectively. These figures indicated that the instruments were reliable. The distribution and retrieval of the copies of the questionnaire were done by the researchers and research assistants. Descriptive statistics were used to answer the research questions.

Presentation of Results

Research Question One: What is the extent of the prevalence of unethical practices among university students in Edo State?

The result in Table 1 shows the mean and percentage values of responses on the extent of prevalence of unethical practices among university students in Edo State. The result is a three-point scale ranging from 0– 2 interpreted as three levels (low, moderate and high).

Table 1

Unethical Practices among University Students in Edo State

| S/N	Unethical Practices	Mean	Std. Dev.	%	Decision
1.	Examination malpractice	1.13	.67	56.5	Moderate
2.	Sexual harassment of fellow students	.78	.74	39	Moderate
3.	Writing project and seminar papers for fellow students for money	1.06	.79	39.5	Moderate
4.	Secret cultism	1.01	.79	50.5	Moderate
5.	Absenteeism from classes	1.26	.73	63	Moderate
6.	Printing of fake school fees receipt	.70	.69	35	Moderate
7.	Plagiarism or outright stealing of academic works	86	.80	43	Moderate
8.	Drug abuse	.99	.71	49.5	Moderate
9.	Indecent dressing on campus	1.16	.73	58	Moderate
10.	Vandalism and stealing of university property	.60	.70	30	Low
11.	Certificate forgery/racketeering	.71	.78	35.5	Moderate
12.	Extortion of money from fellow students	.81	.81	40.5	Moderate
13.	The threat and actual kidnapping of lecturers by students	.52	.74	26	Low

Note. N = 825; Key: 0 – 33.5 = Low; 33.6 – 66.5 = Moderate; 66.6 – 100 = High

Table 1 shows that examination malpractices (56.5%), sexual harassment of fellow students (39%), writing project and seminar papers for fellow students for money (39.5%), secret cultism (50.5%), indecent dressing on campuses (58%), absenteeism from classes (63%), the printing of fake school fees receipts (35%), plagiarism or outright stealing of academic works (43%), drug abuse

(49.5%), certificate forgery/racketeering (35.5%) and extortion of money from fellow students (40.5%) are moderately prevalent among university students in Edo State. Vandalism (30%) and the threat and actual kidnapping of lecturers by students (26%) are low. Among the moderately prevalent unethical practices, examination malpractices, writing project and seminar papers for fellow students for money, secret cultism, absenteeism from classes and indecent dressing on campuses are taking the lead. They are very close to the high level of the scale used in the study.

Figure 1

Graphical Representation of the Extent of Prevalence of Unethical Practices among University Students in Edo State
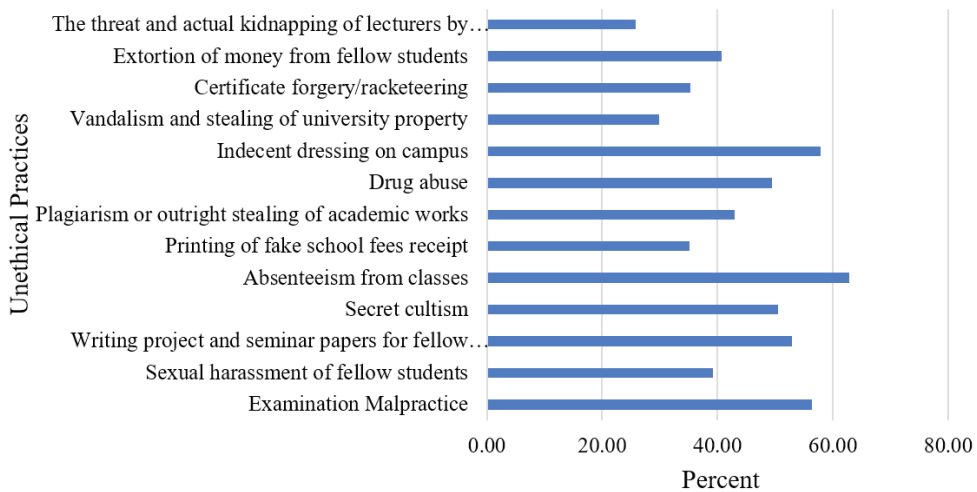
Research Question Two: What are the contributing factors to unethical practices among university students in Edo State?

The results in Table 2 show the mean values of responses on the contributing factors to unethical practices among university students in Edo State. The result is a four-point scale ranging from 1– 4 interpreted as three levels (low, moderate and high).

Table 2

*Contributing Factors (CF) to Unethical Practices among University Students in Edo State*

S/N	CF to Unethical Practices	Mean	Std. Dev.	Decision
1.	Desperation to pass examinations	3.3	.95	High
2.	Negative influence from the larger society	2.8	.86	Moderate
3.	Excess workload on students	3.0	1.0	High
4.	Poor supervision/monitoring of students on campus	2.8	.91	Moderate
5.	Laxity in punishing culprit students	2.6	.93	Moderate
6.	Underfunding of universities	2.7	.99	Moderate
7.	Poor state of learning facilities	2.8	1.1	Moderate
8.	Poor policy implementation	3.0	.97	High
9.	Incessant strike actions	2.7	1.0	Moderate
10.	Poor study habits on the part of students	2.8	1.0	Moderate
11.	Poor home training	2.7	.96	Moderate
12.	Negative peer influence	3.1	.86	High

Note. N = 825; Key: 1 – 1.99 = Low; 2.00 – 2.99 = Moderate; 3.00 – 4.00 = High

Table 2 shows students' desperation to pass examinations (3.3), excess workload on students (3.0); poor policy implementation (3.0) and negative peer influence (3.1) are highly causative of university students' involvement in unethical practices in Edo State. Negative influence from the larger society (2.8), poor supervision/monitoring of students on campuses (2.8), laxity in punishing culprit students (2.6), underfunding of universities (2.7), poor state of learning facilities (2.8), incessant strike actions (2.7), poor study habits on the part of students (2.8) and poor home training (2.7) are moderately causative of unethical practices among university students in Edo State.

Figure 2

Graphical Representation of the Contributing Factors to Unethical Practices among University Students in Edo State
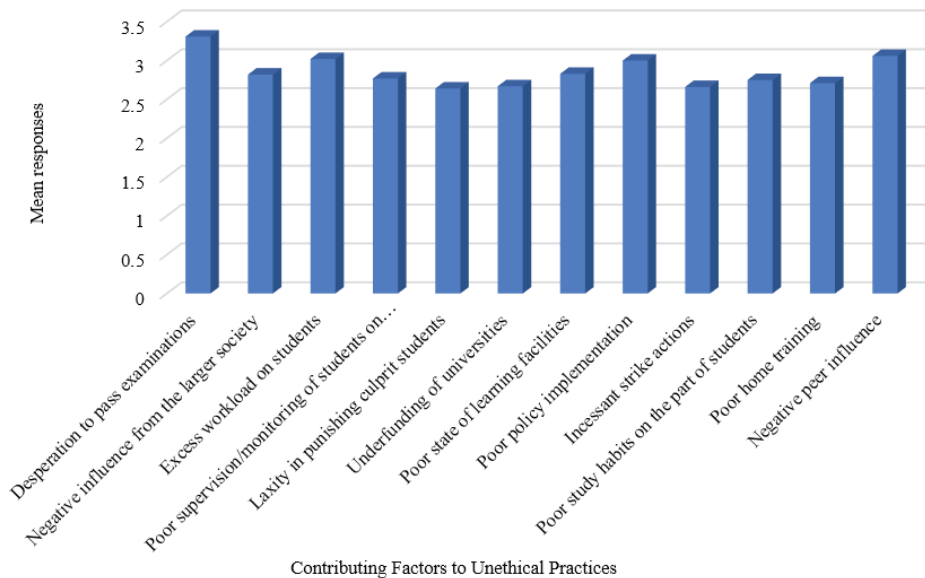
Research Question Three: What are the consequences of unethical practices among university students in Edo State?

The results in Table 4 show the mean values of responses on the consequences of unethical practices among university students in Edo State. The result is a four-point scale ranging from 1 – 4 interpreted as three levels (low, moderate and high).

Table 3 reveals that lecturers' fear of attack by students (2.2), fear by lecturers to investigate students properly (2.0), fear by lecturers to supervise students objectively (2.2), fear by lecturers to assess students objectively (2.2) are moderate consequences of unethical practices among university students in Edo State.

Table 3

*Consequences of Unethical Practices among University Students in Edo State*

S/N	Consequences of Unethical Practices	Mean	Std. Dev.	Decision
1.	Lecturers' fear of attack by students	2.2	.95	Moderate
2.	Fear by lecturers to invigilate students properly	2.0	.88	Moderate
3.	Fear by lecturers to supervise students objectively	2.2	.93	Moderate
4.	Fear by lecturers to assess students objectively	2.2	.93	Moderate
5.	Unethical issues among students can hinder the quality of teaching and learning in the university	3.0	.93	High
6.	Unethical issues among university students can reduce the quality of graduates	3.1	.88	High
7.	Unethical practices among university students can undermine employers' and the general public's trust in the products of universities	3.2	.85	High
8.	Unethical practices can discourage hard work	3.1	.94	High
9.	Unethical practices such as vandalism and stealing of university property can result in poor conditions of learning environment	3.2	.89	High
10.	Unethical practices can ruin the image of a university	3.4	.80	High
11.	Unethical practices can cause waste of resources in a university	3.1	.83	High
12.	Unethical practices can make teaching and learning irrelevant	3.1	.90	High
13.	Unethical practices can instil in students a culture of corruption	3.2	.90	High

Note. N = 825; Key: 1 – 1.99 = Low; 2.00 – 2.99 = Moderate; 3.00 – 4.00 = High

Table 3 reveals that lecturers' fear of attack by students (2.2), fear by lecturers to investigate students properly (2.0), fear by lecturers to supervise students objectively (2.2), fear by lecturers to assess students objectively (2.2) are moderate consequences of unethical practices among university students in Edo State. It is further revealed that hindrance to the quality of teaching and learning (3.0), reduction of the quality of graduates (3.1), undermining of employers' and the general public's trust in the products of universities (3.2), discouragement of hard work (3.1), poor conditions of the learning environment (3.2), ruining of the image of the university (3.4), waste of resources (3.1), making teaching and learning irrelevant (3.1) and instilling in students culture of corruption (3.2) are high consequences of unethical practices among university students in Edo State. The highest of the consequences of unethical practices among university students is the ruining of the image of the university.

Figure 3
Graphical Representation of the Consequences of Unethical Practices among University Students in Edo State
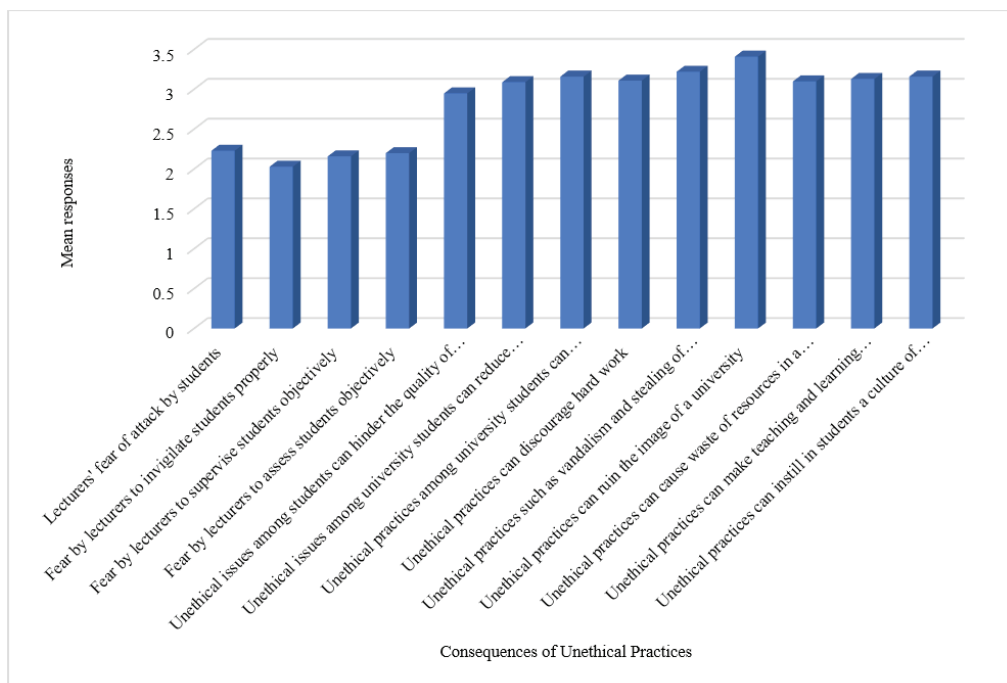
Discussion of Results

From the analysis of the responses on research question 1 shown in Table 1, the data shows that examination malpractice, sexual harassment of fellow students, writing projects and seminar papers for fellow students for money, secret cultism, absenteeism from classes and printing of fake school fees receipts are forms of unethical practices among university students in Edo State. Other forms of unethical practices among them include plagiarism or outright stealing of academic works, drug abuse, indecent dressing on campus, vandalism and stealing of university property, certificate forgery/racketeering, extortion of money from fellow students and the threat and actual kidnapping of lecturers by students. These findings are corroborated by the assertions of Nnodum (2008), Olasehinde (2000) and Bello (2011) that the university system in Nigeria is currently faced with the threat of unethical attributes. Okon and Petters (2013) had earlier observed that Nigerian universities have over the years become fertile grounds for the perpetration of aggression. On different occasions, students have been observed vandalizing school property, harassing their fellow students, threatening lecturers in a bid to stop them from carrying out their legitimate duties. These findings also agree with the findings of Onotume (1993), Ogunu (1993), Kanu and Akanwa (2012), Oni (2008), Umobong (2005) and Afe (2006). These researchers had earlier found the Nigerian educational system, particularly the university system, to be characterized with unethical behaviours such as examination malpractice, secret cultism, "sorting" or "blocking", plagiarism.

However, as for the extent of students' involvement in the identified unethical practices, examination malpractices, sexual harassment of fellow students, writing project and seminar papers for fellow students for money, secret cultism and indecent dressing on campuses, absenteeism from classes, printing of fake school fees receipts, plagiarism or outright stealing of academic works, drug abuse, certificate forgery/racketeering and extortion of money from fellow students are moderately prevalent among university students in Edo State. Vandalism and the threat and actual kidnapping of lecturers by students are low. This means that they are present but not profound. Their presence in the university system is worrisome. Among the moderately prevalent unethical practices, examination malpractices, writing project and seminar papers for fellow students for money, secret cultism, absenteeism from classes and indecent dressing on campuses were reported to be more prevalent. They are very close to the high level of the scale used in the study. This is in agreement with the position of Ogbonna (2006) who asserted that there is a high rate of

examination malpractices at all levels of the Nigerian educational system. The finding also conforms with the findings of Akintunde (2013) that examination malpractices and indecent dressing are forms of disciplinary problems in the Nigerian educational system.

The findings in research question two revealed that students' desperation to pass examinations, excess workload on students; poor policy implementation and negative peer influence highly contribute to university students' involvement in unethical practices in Edo State. Negative influence from the larger society, poor supervision/monitoring of students on campuses, laxity in punishing culprit students, underfunding of universities, poor state of learning facilities, incessant strike actions, poor study habits on the part of the students, and poor home training moderately contribute to unethical practices among university students in Edo State. This finding agrees with the findings of Eromosele (2005), Brown (1989), Joe (2004), Ganagana (2005) and Idiegbeyan-Ose, Nkiko and Osinulu (2016). Part of poor home training and negative influence from the larger society is parental attitude. Some parents want their children and/or wards to skip classes and graduate very early. Many have been known to financially induce their teachers to assist their children to pass examinations. Eromosele (2005) noted that examination malpractice thrives in a corrupt society which indicates that it is a reflection of the society. Similarly, Joe (2004) enumerated the fundamental contributing factor to unethical practices to include desperation to pass the examination and acquire paper qualifications, unrestrained moral decadence in the society, faulty value system where materialism is worshipped, and unbridled corruption. He argued that the Nigerian society with its inability to curb corruption has become a fertile nursery for various forms of unethical practices among university students. Brown (1989) had earlier found a strong relationship between peer group affiliation and unethical practices. Maithya (2009) revealed that the common reasons for drug abuse amongst secondary school students in Kenya are mostly out of curiosity and acceptance by friends (peer pressure). A study by Kiiru (2004) showed that peer pressure was responsible for youths' consumption of illicit drugs. Idiegbeyan-Ose et al (2016) earlier observed that plagiarism is usually caused by academic pressure.

The findings of research question three revealed that lecturers' fear of attack by students, fear to investigate students properly, to supervise students objectively, and to assess students objectively are moderate consequences of unethical practices among university students in Edo State. It is further revealed that hindrance to the quality of teaching and learning, reduction of the quality of

graduates, undermining of employers' and the general public's trust in the products of universities, discouragement of hard work, poor conditions of learning environment, ruining of the image of the university, waste of resources, making teaching and learning irrelevant and instilling in students culture of corruption are high consequences of unethical practices among university students in Edo State. The highest of the consequences of unethical practices among university students is the ruining of the image of the university. This result corroborates the findings of Rumyantseva (2005), Kasum and Shelly (2013), Ijeoma (2013), Olasehinde (2000) and Onokerhoraye (1993). Rumyantseva (2005) had earlier posited that the consequence of unethical practices in the education system, especially the university is a decline in quality, trust and self-generating cynicism about the entire system and its products.

Conclusions

From the findings of this study, a supported conclusion is that examination malpractice, sexual harassment of fellow students, writing projects and seminar papers for fellow students for money, secret cultism, absenteeism from classes and printing of fake school fees receipts were perceived forms of unethical practices among university students in Edo State. Other forms of unethical practices include plagiarism or outright stealing of academic works, drug abuse, indecent dressing on campus, vandalism and stealing of university property, certificate forgery/racketeering, extortion of money from fellow students and the threat and actual kidnapping of lecturers by students.

In terms of prevalence, it can be concluded that examination malpractices, sexual harassment of fellow students, writing project and seminar papers for fellow students for money, secret cultism and indecent dressing on campuses, absenteeism from classes, printing of fake school fees receipts, plagiarism or outright stealing of academic works, drug abuse, certificate forgery/racketeering and extortion of money from fellow students are moderately prevalent among university students in Edo State. However, vandalism and the threat and actual kidnapping of lecturers by students are low.

Furthermore, students' desperation to pass examinations, excess workload on students; poor policy implementation and negative peer influence highly contribute to university students' involvement in unethical practices in Edo State. Negative influence from the larger society, poor supervision/monitoring of students on campuses, laxity in punishing culprit students, underfunding of universities, poor state of learning facilities, incessant strike actions, poor study

habits on the part of students and poor home training moderately contribute to unethical practices among university students in Edo State.

Lecturers' fear of attack by students, fear to investigate students properly, to supervise students objectively, and to assess students objectively are moderate consequences of unethical practices among university students in Edo State. Hindrance to quality of teaching and learning, reduction of the quality of graduates, undermining of employers' and the general public's trust in the products of universities, discouragement of hard work, poor conditions of learning environment, ruining of the image of the university, waste of resources, making teaching and learning irrelevant and instilling in students' culture of corruption are high consequences of unethical practices among university students in Edo State. The highest of the consequences of unethical practices among university students is the ruining of the image of the university.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, here are the following recommendations:

1. Universities in Edo State should be adequately funded so that they can build good classrooms, standard examination halls and hostels for students. This can help curb the incidence of some unethical practices among students such as examination malpractices, secret cultism, racketeering of hostel accommodation, etc.

2. Students' academic activities should be properly structured to avoid too much pressure on them. For instance, there should be adequate gaps in-between courses during examinations to enable students to prepare well.

3. Seminars and workshops should be periodically organised by university counselling units on the dangers of unethical practices and other vices among university students. Also, guidance and counselling services should be provided to enhance university students' awareness of the need, and strategies for curbing unethical practices. Counselling services are crucial to help produce mentally healthy, happy, well-rounded and disciplined individuals who will place a high emphasis on what is considered ethical and proper in university and life.

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