ETHICS AND CORRUPTION IN NIGERIAN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS: A CASE STUDY OF AMBROSE ALLI UNIVERSITY, EKPOMA

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ABSTRACT

This study sought to examine the perceptions of staff on the extent to which ethics can serve as instruments of restraint against corruption in Nigeria tertiary institutions. The institutions studied were Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, University of Benin, Benin City and Auchi Polytechnic, Auchi, all in Edo State, Nigeria. Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was the method adopted. Evidences were generated from two groups in each of the institutions. It was found in relation to the institutions studied that: (1) Ethics is still relevant in checking corruption. (2) The dominant members of the discussants had no prior knowledge of ethics. (3) The dominant section of the discussants believe that ethics can be a more effective check on corruption than other types of ethics in Nigeria. (4) Faith based organizations in Nigeria themselves have been infiltrated by corruption. (5) Between the academic and non-academic discussants, one section accused the other as being more corrupt than itself.

INTRODUCTION

It is not disputable that Nigeria is one of the poorest countries in the world, and also one of the richest in terms of natural resources. Today the image of this blessed country is battered by lack of professional ethics, corruption and leadership crises. Corruption has tragically devastated the Nigerian societies and made millions of the citizens destitute. The tentacles of corruption has reached everywhere in the country. From the offices of the President, Governors and to the smallest administrative unit of government including tertiary Institutions, corruption is found everywhere.

This paper focuses on ethics and corruption in the Nigerian tertiary Institutions. In this study, we see corruption as a fact of life and a universal phenomenon. It has been argued in many fora that the main problem that has bedeviled Nigeria is corruption. This has been generally identified as the root causes of Nigeria's socio-economic and political problems. It is no longer news that while the poor in Nigeria are languishing in abject poverty and hunger,

squalor, disease and destitution, corrupt Nigerian leaders are only after working out strategies on how to enrich and perpetuate themselves in office.

Tertiary Institutions are not left out of the practice of corruption in all their activities due to the pervasiveness of the concept in all ramificaets in the country. Therefore, this paper looked at the occurrence of the practice of professional ethics and corruption in Ambrose Alli University which is the case study.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

Ethics:

This concept may be adopted to refer to either of two major interrelated phenomena. They are ethics as a course of study and as a human value. In trying to establish what ethics as a course of study means, a definition was precipitated by a rigorous analysis of the works of early philosophers in the field, beginning from Plato and Aristotle, up to current scholars. The analysed works are Hosper (1985), Sober (1991), Omoregbe (19993) and Izibili (2006). The precipitated definition is that ethics is a branch of philosophy which concerns itself with moral terms, concepts principles, theories, as well as their interpretations and applications by individuals, groups and societies.

In the area of specifics, what constitutes ethics as a course of study in Nigeria tertiary institution is clearly spelt out in the benchmark minimum academic standards of the relevant Federal Government supervisory bodies. Examples are National Universities Commission (NUC) for Universities and National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) for polytechnics. The definition given above adequately encapsulates the course contents on ethics of these institutions.

Ethics as a human value is approximated to moral value by philosophers of analytical school. It is often traced to the works of Aristotle, a Greek philosopher as derived from the Greek word ethos and Latin word mos. Originally they both mean customs established and accepted by social convention to be a manner or guide of behaviour. Omoregbe (1993) and Echekwube (1999) see ethics as embracing various facets of morality of human behaviour. The facets include actions which are good, right, just, virtuous, acceptable obligation, legal, etc, while their opposites are rejected.

Iroegbu (2005) and Izibili (2006) identified ethics as indispensable in every human group and society. This is because they see it as required for happiness, survival, goal attainment, law, security, professionalism, welfare, advancement, freedom, etc, of individuals, groups, organizations, states and the international community.

A natural consequence of ethics being philosophical and a moral value is that its principles, constituents, justifications and their interpretations are subject to contestations. Attempts at a tendency towards paradigms building and specifications have led to epochal and model constructions. Such constructions help to investigate justification of moral principles to ascertain or trace their acceptability to normative values which may be religious, metaphysical, legal, group specific, time specific, etc. To such constructions, we now direct our focus.

Models discussed by Onimawo (1999) and Izibili (2006) are emotivism, voluntarism , teleological or natural law ethics and deontological theory. Emotism as an ethical theory perceives ethical utterances as expressions of the proponents' moral emotions intended to arouse similar emotions in the listeners. So emotivism ethicists contends that an action which may be regarded as immoral by a person or group may be regarded as moral by another depending on their emotional preferences, Azelama (2012).

People have their prejudices and may have conflicting responses to a particular stimulus. The question that suggests itself then relates to whether individuals should be allowed to choose what they regard as ethical. To avoid the philosophical jungle which would have been the natural consequence, every society normally sets and maintains its standards. The standards are stipulated and reflected in the group and societal laws, regulations and norms. Where these are either democratically made or legitimate, they represent and become the approximate accepted emotions of the group or society and therefore the foundation for and the actual accepted ethics.

Voluntarism as derived from the Latin word voluntes means will. This theory contends that what is regarded as ethical by a group or society is nothing more than the will of the law makers or those in authority which goes to determine the law, rules, regulations and norms, Azelama (2012). Where these are either democratically made or legitimate they become an approximation of the will of the society or group.

Teleological or natural law ethics model has as its central theme, goal or end or purpose as derived from the Greek word, teles. So this theory sees ethics as determined by established requirements for attainment of the group or societal goals.

A question that may be raised then relates to what happens when the requirements for attainment of a group or societal goals violate the needs of some persons. This question has led to consideration of aspects of the teleological theory identified as egoism, utilitarianism and prudentialism. Egoism recognizes that some individual needs may suffer in the process of ensuring attainment of group and societal goals. Some principles outlined here become expedient in such a situation. Individuals remain in groups and societies for better protection of their interests. Every member at one time or the other has to endure subjugating his/her

individual needs or interests to group or societal ethical values. When an individual internalizes this practice or develops the habit, it becomes a virtue. Where the group or society can accommodate it, laws, rules, regulations and norms are made to provide for peculiar individual or sectional needs. Selfish individual needs are injurious to individuals and their groups or societies. Utilitarianism or consequentialism is the philosophy behind the principle of the greatest good for greatest number. In policy making, states and organizations usually make arrangements to provide for those who may become disadvantaged by the policy.

Prudential personalists ethics recognizes practical goal seeking and contextual nature of ethics. It emphasizes that laws, rules and norms are not abstract aimless stipulations. Rather they are intelligent and helpful guides at the time of their making and modifications.

Deontological or non-consequential theory emphasizes that the intention of the moral agent is indispensable in the determination of the rightness or wrongness of an action. That an action has produced good consequences is not enough. Well, the general purpose of constitutions, organization, etc, is usually stated. They guide the operators who are convinced that such purposes can be met by enforcing or implementing sections of the law or policies. Where there are contradictions, modifications are often made.

The overview of selected ethical theories presented here has led to their point of convergence. It is that different ethicists have drawn attentions to areas which should not be ignored in setting ethical standards. Our survey has shown that group and societal laws, rules, regulations and norms approximately accommodate these areas in their making and modification. The constituents of ethics in Nigerian tertiary institutions therefore are approximately and adequately provided for by their laws, rules, regulations and norms. They are also contained in the practices of the bodies supervising them.

Corruption:

Azelama (2014) defined corruption as any action or omission enacted by a member of an organization   or group which violates its laws, rules, ethics, norms, etc, the purpose of which is to protect the selfish end of the member.

Sen (1999) defines corruption or corrupt behaviour as "the violation of established rules for personal gains and profit." From a sociological point of view, Altas (1968) sees corruption as a symptom of dysfunctionality of the relationship between the state and the people, characterized by bribery, extortion and nepotism. From a political point of view, Aiyede (2006) views corruption as "the abuse or misuse of public or governmental power for illegitimate private advantages.

Corruption as phenomenon is a global problem, and exists in varying degrees in different countries. While it is more prevalent in the developing countries like Nigeria and

other African countries, the developed countries experience corruption at a minimal level. The important reason for the minimal level in the developed nations is that the control mechanisms are more developed and effective than in the developing countries. The efficacy of control mechanisms in the advance democracies of the world further accounts for the relative political and democratic stability that these countries enjoy.

METHOD

Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was the method adopted. Three tertiary institutions, Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma,. University of Benin, Benin-City and Auchi Polytechnic, Auchi, all of Edo State were studied. Two FGD groups with each made up of between six to eight members were formed. They were made up of academic staff and some non-academic staff members. Open discussions took place for each of the groups for average of two hours. The researcher had to explain some of the concepts to discussants. The recorded findings were analyzed.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

It was found in relation to the institutions studied that: (1) Ethics is still relevant in checking corruption. (2) The dominant section of each of the group had no prior knowledge of human governance. (3) The dominant section of the discussants believe that human governance can be a more effective check on corruption than other forms of ethics in Nigeria. (4) Faith based organizations in Nigeria have themselves been largely infiltrated by corruption. (5) Between the academic and non-academic discussants, one section accused the other as being more corrupt than itself.

The relevance of ethics in checking corruption in Nigerian tertiary institutions echoed in this study was emphasized by Azelama (2012). He recognized crises in value system, dangerous philosophy and low patriotism as factors instigating crisis in value system. Perhaps human governance may fill the gap. Leaders of faith based organizations and state institutions should therefore be encouraged to lead in putting in place human governance.

Governments and other leaders in Nigeria may not be adequately informed of human governance and its potency to reduce corruption to a tolerable level. There is a need therefore to make the leaders and the led have adequate awareness of human governance. That faith based organizations themselves have been infiltrated by corruption shows that corruption in Nigeria has become a crisis. This is because the principles and institutions which would have been adopted to fight corruption have themselves become conflicting and problematic.

Orientation of leaders and the led on human governance could lay a good foundation for checking corruption.

Where corruption is reduced to a tolerable level with the instrumentality of human governance, other frameworks put in place for this purpose are likely to become adequately effective. These are legal system, security, educational institutions, patriotism, societal and familiar values, etc.

The accusation and counter accusation between academic and non-academic staff in the PGD may be attributable to intergroup conflict. In Nigeria, there has been a prolonged conflict between the two groups relating to conflicting interests in trade unionism. It has led to many members of tertiary institutions frowning at being referred to as non-academic staff. They would rather like to be referred to as non-teaching staff. It is however difficult to adopt this term. This is because some of their members are teachers employed to teach. This makes the coinage inappropriate. As this becomes an issue, it is relevant that the term non-academic is not intended to belittle any staff. It is true that among those regarded as non-academic are university graduates with some holding master and doctoral degrees. Well, anybody who has a diploma or degree, etc, belongs to intellectuals. Academic staffs are those intellectuals whose promotions depend dominantly on research publications.

CONCLUSION

Nigerians are aware that corruption is a dominant challenge frustrating efficient attainment of socio-economic and political goals. They are also conscious of the instrument put in place by the Nigerian nation-state, organizations, groups and educational institutions to check corruption. Human governance is regarded as having a high potential in checking corruption in Nigeria apparently due to the emergent boom in membership and participation in activities of some faith base organizations.

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