



Demographic Variables and In-School-Adolescents' Perception of Corruption in Calabar, Nigeria

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Authors' contributions

This was a collaborative work by all the authors. Author PAO designed the study, and wrote the first draft of the manuscript. Authors CPD and PNA did the literature review and final editing of the manuscript. Authors CA, FUU and ONK handled the data collection and analysis of the study. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

Over the years, corruption has been recognized as a topical, pervasive and existential challenge to Nigeria's development, but scarcely has there been attempt to relate its perception to in-school-adolescents who are being prepared for the future. This literature gap motivated the authors to focus on how young people perceived the prevalence of this persistent phenomenon that undermines the progressive well-being of the society. As future leaders, revealing their perception regarding corruption is significant in that it could guide policymakers and administrators to plan relevant and targeted anti-corruption policies and programmes for them. Using a questionnaire instrument to collect data from a sample of 200 subjects and simple percentage and t-test statistics for analysis, the study sought to ascertain the perception level of corruption among secondary school students across age, gender and self-concept. The results revealed a generally high perception of prevalence of corrupt practices which cuts across all the sub-variables of the study as they were found to be significant factors that shaped respondents' perception. Amongst others, it was recommended that governments, schools and counsellors at all levels of the school system should provide programmes

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that will raise more awareness on corruption among students as well as build their self esteem and efficacy to appreciate and develop appropriate and better response patterns on the menace of corruption.

Keywords: Perception; corruption; demographic variables; in-school adolescents.

1. INTRODUCTION

Corruption and its painful consequences seem to be prevalent at a high level among many nations across the globe today. In Nigeria, however, it is the greatest human rights violation which has become a major existential challenge that is very deep-seated and pervasive as it cuts across all strata of society and affects almost everybody in all sectors of the economy including even churches/mosques and schools [1]. Between the years 2000 and 2018, Nigeria has the depressing record of being ranked among the most corrupt nations in the world by Transparency International while monitoring corrupt practices across the globe. Details of Transparency International ratings are as presented: In the survey of corruption level involving ninety countries in the year 2000, Nigeria was ranked the 90th; in 2001 out of ninety one nations that were ranked, Nigeria took second to the last position; in 2002 where 102 nations were surveyed, Nigeria's position was 101st while the next rating of 2003 and other subsequent years did not show any appreciable difference. Accordingly, the 2004 survey which encompassed 146 nations, Nigeria was ranked 3rd of the most corrupt nations only after Haiti and Bangladesh. Similarly, in the 2005 survey covering 158 nations, the 2006 with 163 and the 2007 with 147 nations, Nigeria was ranked 8th, 21st and 33rd respectively. In successive years following this, there was no remarkable change in corruption rating for Nigeria. Hence, Nigeria ranked 144 out of 177 in 2013, 136 out of 174 in 2014, 136 out of 168 in 2015, 136 out of 176 in 2016 and 136 out of 148 in 2018 [2].

Conceptualized as the violation of human rights, established rules and regulations to profit and benefit some people, corruption has increasingly continued to loom large in Nigeria since the rise of public administration and the discovery of oil and natural gas resources [3]. The existence, persistence and reproduction of this flagrant graft through time and space in Nigeria has been blamed on factors like satiation of greed and ostentatious lifestyles, ethnicity, poverty and traditional practices as well as colonial experience [1].

Corruption manifests in various ways: Election rigging, bribery, embezzlement and official misuse of public funds and resources as well as a lifestyle of public sleaze and lack of decorum are generally classified as political corruption [4]. This form of corruption which entails the use of official resources for private gain is typical among those who occupy public offices and politicians as they manipulate electoral processes and divert funds and public resources meant to better the lot of the people for use by a small number of persons, especially the elite and public office holders.

Among security agencies especially the police, the nature of corruption observable include bribery, intimidation, sexual harassment and truth misrepresentation [1]. [5] identified sports-related corruption to include faulty participant selection, intimidation and misapplication of funds. Other manifestations of this monster are in the Customs, Immigrations, Churches/Mosques and also recently, web-based and the use of the internet is becoming very prominent due to greed, poverty, poor youth orientation and unemployment.

As indicated so far, corruption can manifest in various ways and in varied settings within the society. However, within the school, it has unique characteristics because of the peculiar circumstances of the school system operating in a corruption-infested nation. It takes the form of diversion of official funds for personal use, mismanagement, unmerited allocation of hostels accommodation, embezzlement, discrimination in the allocation of staff quarters, improper use of school assets, inflation of cost of contracts, nepotism in the award of contracts, unfair allocation of grades, employment of unqualified staff, issuance of results for expelled students to graduate, truncation of staff salary on payroll, extortion of money from students, sexual harassment and misappropriation of funds as well as racketeering of admissions, transcripts, and certificates [3]. Also it can assume the shape of a male teacher forcing a female student to bed, cultism, extorting money from students through textual materials, examination malpractice, extorting of money from parents,

thuggery, academic fraud, and absenteeism as well as social, political and ethnic favouritism [6]. Sexual harassment of female students by their male teachers is also a very common occurrence and some of them carry on this with impunity despite national condemnation [7,8,9,4]. According to [10], emphasis in education has shifted from hard work and excellence to success through political connections. Teachers do not follow timetable, they are rather busy conducting other businesses from their offices, exploiting students, both sexually and financially and being intellectually and academically lazy [11]. Other forms of corrupt practices especially at the school level include certificate forgery, impersonation, gangsterism, rape, embezzlement of funds, unjust delay of payment of salaries and staff promotions and recycling of the crimes [12]. Hence, parents, teachers, students, secondary school administrators and the government all seem culpable of entrenching the culture of corruption in the educational system [13]. The problem is therefore societal, systemic and individualistic. Students, teaching and non-teaching staff, parents and governments are all culpable. The government, through its neglect or poor funding and remuneration has inadvertently allowed corruption to thrive in a country where those who work more earn less and those who work less earn more. The drift to decadence started in the 90s and by the millennium years, it had snowballed into this sorry state [14]. Increase in corruption in the larger society, the quest for material possession and the emphasis on paper qualification (certificate) instead of skills and lifelong learning, alongside admissions' racketeering and lowered standards of admissions to accommodate the intellectually weak ones, have encouraged the influx into the universities of candidates who are not good materials for university education. [15] stated that such students become so desperate that they employ every available means to succeed academically – bribing (sorting), sexual offers, impersonating, and intimidation through cults and so on. In essence, they cheat their way through since gone are the days when teachers were employed strictly on merit, when search teams went to the uttermost part of the world, to recruit the brightest and the best, who had the interest, aptitude and 119 acumen [7]. Nowadays, employment is by way of nepotism, favouritism, ethnicity and political party patronage and more often, it is the intellectually weak ones who gain from such connections. According to [16], favouritism leaves the appointment of high quality staff and gives

preference to the appointment of second-rate ones, some of whom are the very ones who engaged in corrupt practices when they were students, who neither have the intellectual capacity nor the interest in academia. That is to say that as long as one is not caught and punished that particular action is not wrong.

The situation is becoming more like academia without learning and character, that in turn produce individuals devoid of learning and character. Given the pervasive and persistent prevalence of corruption in Nigeria and the almost lack of data on this age cohort, it became necessary to find out how an in-school adolescent being groomed for the future perceived corruption. Generally, they are most prone to the risk of being confused in view of their unique biological, developmental and environmental characteristics. They are, generally very mobile, experimental, risk-taking and vulnerable [17]. Their disposition, character traits and general level of appreciation of societal issues which could be dependent on their age, gender and self-concept could easily make them assume that the patterns projected by corrupt practices in Nigeria are right and in tandem with global standards. The purpose of this study, therefore, was to investigate in-school adolescents' perception of corruption. Specifically, the study sought to determine the level of perception and the extent to which personal variables like age, gender and self-concept influenced the perception of corruption among secondary school students. Data generated from the study may guide policy makers and administrators to plan relevant and targeted anti-corruption policies, interventions and programmes for the teeming population of young people within this age bracket.

2. METHODOLOGY

The population of study was 2498 which comprised all senior secondary school students in all public schools in the study area. Using stratified random sampling technique, a sample of 200 (116 male and 84 females) students was selected. A questionnaire instrument titled 'Students' Personal Variables and Perception Questionnaire (SPVPQ) was developed by the researchers specifically to collect data for the present study. The questionnaire had two subscales: Part 1 focused on bio-data (age, gender and self-concept) while part 2 required students to respond to 21 items made up of statements and codes placed on the Likert like

scale – strongly agree (4) agree (3) disagree (2) and strongly disagree (1). Subjects were required to indicate their agreement or otherwise to each item by making a tick on any of the points Strongly agree (SA), Disagree (D), Agree (A) and Strongly disagree (SD). However, locally available measures in related studies focused on perception used a 'Yes' and 'No' response. This instrument differs from existing ones in focusing specifically on measuring perception of young people in a continuous manner. Items of the instrument were validated through scrutiny by experts in guidance and counseling and test and measurement from University of Calabar. The questionnaire was pretested among 50 students outside the sampled pool. The pretest result showed no ambiguity in the instrument. The Cronbach coefficient Alpha was conducted in order to establish reliability estimate of the instrument and a reliability index of 0.69 and 0.71 were derived.

Data collection and analysis the administration of the questionnaire was done directly to the subjects in their classrooms by the researchers with the help of two trained research assistants and the class teachers. The questionnaires were completed under the direction and guidance of the researchers while copies of the completed questionnaires were retrieved on the spot. For all positive statements, 4 points was assigned to 'strongly agree' responses, while 3 points were assigned to 'agree' responses. 2 and 1 points were respectively assigned to 'disagree' and 'strongly disagree' responses. However, the order scoring was reversed for all negative responses. Based on this, the sum of the score for each subject for the individual scale was determined and used for further analysis. The data collected were coded and analyzed using simple percentage and independent t-test statistics.

3. RESULTS OF THE STUDY

The results of data analysis based on the objective of the study are presented in Tables 1 to 4.

Table 1 presents a brief summary of subjects' responses to the items measuring perception of corruption among in-school adolescents. The results revealed that a greater number of respondents (50% and above) tended to agree (agree/strongly agree) that: a) extortion of money, intimidation/ gangs' pressure, sexual offers/harassment and improper use of school

and public resources was a form of self-help and b) nothing was wrong with discrimination and academic fraud/forgery and exam malpractice.

However, the results also show that a greater percentage of the respondents tended to disagree with the items that: a) generally) impersonation is being smart, b) taking of public funds was legitimate means of survival, c) use of faulty selection measures was right, d) inflation of costs was right, e) discrimination/favouritism, f) racketeering, bending the rules lack due process, g) bribery and cybercrime. These results indicate that the group of in-school adolescents used for this study tend to demonstrate fairly good perception of corruption concerning fifteen out of twenty-one items (1,2,3,6, 9,10,11,12, 13, 14, 15,16, 19,20, 21). These results indicate that the knowledge and awareness level of corruption of in-school adolescents is high (67%).

Table 2 is a summary of t-test analysis of the influence of one the classificatory sub-variables of the study, age on perception. The report produced a calculated t-value of 3.41 for the perception of corruption. This result indicates that the calculated t was more significant than the critical. This outcome implies that significant age difference exists in terms of in-school adolescents' perception of corruption. Also, the mean and standard deviation indicate that those in the senior category tend to show superior perception than their junior counterparts.

Table 3 shows that the summary t-test analysis produced a calculated t value of 4.10 which is higher than the critical t value at 0.05 probability level of significance. This result implies that significant gender differences exist in terms of in-school adolescents' perception of corruption with males tending to demonstrate superiority over the females.

The result on table 4 shows that the calculated t-value of 4.81 is greater than the critical t-value of 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance with 198 degrees of 242 freedom. With this result the null hypothesis that self-concept does not significantly influence the perception of corruption among secondary schools' students were rejected. This implies that self-concept significantly influences the perception of corruption of in-school adolescents with those having high self-concept tending to demonstrate superiority over those with low self-concept.

Table 1. Percentage responses of 200 students' perception of corruption (Strongly agree=SA; Agree= A; Disagree=D & strongly disagree)

S/N	Item descriptions	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD(%)
1	Impersonation is being smart	16(8)	20(10)	74(37)	90(45)
2	Taking of public funds is survival	30 (15)	36(18)	76(38)	58(29)
3	Misrepresent facts to escape	16(8)	40(20)	104(52)	40(20)
4	Extortion of money for self-help	70(35)	76(38)	36(18)	18(9)
5	Intimidation/sexual offers not bad	68(34)	76(38)	36(18)	20(10)
6	Faulty selection measures good	32(16)	48(24)	64(32)	56(28)
7	Improper use of school asserts is not bad	44(22)	72(36)	48(24)	36(18)
8	Diversion of public resources okay	76(38)	76(38)	28(14)	20(10)
9	Unmerited allocation of space ok	24 (12)	16(8)	56(28)	104(52)
10	Discrimination in offers/awards is not right	72(36)	64(32)	32(16)	32(16)
11	Inflation of costs of things is good	32(16)	24 (12)	76(38)	68(34)
12	Engaging unqualified staff is wrong	48(24)	84(42)	36(18)	32(16)
13	Favouritism to kinsmen/relations is good	20(10)	16(8)	86(43)	78(39)
14	Racketeering of admission/ certificate/transcripts wrong	32(16)	24 (12)	76(38)	68(34)
15	Academic fraud/forgery is not right	38(18)	32(16)	44(22)	88(44)
16	Sorting/exam malpractice is good	24 (12)	16(8)	56(28)	104(52)
17	Gangs' pressures/bullying is okay.	72(36)	68(34)	32(16)	32(16)
18	Not following due process is right	68 (34)	72(36)	24(12)	36(18)
19	Bending rules & regulations right	72(36)	72(36)	28(14)	24(12)
20	No harm in taking a bribe	24 (12)	16(8)	56(28)	104(52)
21	Cybercrime is dishonest gain	16(8)	20(10)	72(36)	92(46)

Table 2. Independent t-test analysis of the influence of age on the perception of corruption among students (N = 200)

Age	N	X	SD	t-value
11-13 (Junior)	90	12.50	2.05	
14-16 (senior)	110	15.21	1.98	3.41*

* Significant at 0.05 level, critical $t = 1.96$, $df = 198$

Table 3. Independent t-test analysis of the influence of gender on the perception of 236 corruption among students (N = 200)

Gender	N	X	SD	t-value
Males	116	16.00	2.01	
Females	84	14.81	1.85	4.10*

* Significant at 0.05 level, critical $t = 1.96$, $df = 198$

Table 4. Independent t-test analysis of the influence of self-efficacy on the perception of corruption among students (N = 200)

Self-concept	N	X	SD	t-value
High	96	16.50	2.06	
Low	104	11.71	1.75	4.81*

* Significant at 0.05 level, critical $t = 1.96$, $df = 198$

4. DISCUSSION

The results of this study revealed that the knowledge and awareness level of in-school adolescents is high as two out every three of them used in the study tend to have the high

perception of corruption. The results tend to corroborate similar research findings by [7] and [4] who reported that their respondents perceived profoundly the prevalence of such corrupt practices as impersonation, examination malpractice, sexual harassment, extortion through levies and imposition of textual materials and related acts with impunity. The findings of these researchers also indicate that their respondents knew that involvement in any of these acts was condemnable.

The results of this study further indicate that gender, age and self-concept significantly influenced the perception of corrupt practices among in-school adolescents in the study area. These results tend to corroborate research findings reported by [12,9,3], who showed that individuals demographic variables significantly influenced their perception of corruption.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has shown that in-school adolescents in the area of study tend to demonstrate high and appropriate perception of corruption practices. The research also indicates the existence of significant gender differences in favour of males, age differences in favour of seniors and self-concept in favour of those with high self-concept. Based on these results, efforts should be made by the government, school counsellors, scholars

and parents to respectively provide interventions, research outcomes, counseling programmes and parental guidance to improve and sustain the positive perception of corruption by in- school adolescents. Such programmes should help them to build self-concept, self- esteem and efficacy. In particular, while parents should inculcate in their children good virtues of life. Government should demonstrate the will, sincerity, transparency and commitment in decisively dealing with corruption issues, while Counsellors should at various levels collaborate with other stakeholders (civil societies; religious organizations etc.) to initiate and implement programmes like orientation, workshops, seminars and career talks and direct campaign against corrupt practices in schools and communities.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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