

# Roles of Tertiary Institutions in Curbing Corruption in Nigeria

**Niyi Jacob Ogunode**

Department of Education, University of Abuja, Nigeria  
[ogunodejacob@gmail.com](mailto:ogunodejacob@gmail.com)

**Evans Oluwagbamila Ayeni, PhD**

Department of Political Science, Federal University Wukari, Taraba State

**Joshua Ogwuche**

Department of Public Administration, Kwararafa University Wukari, Taraba State

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**Abstract.** This paper explored the roles of tertiary institutions in curbing corruption in Nigeria. The research method employed for this study is the documentary research method, using secondary data that were collected from both print and online publications. The paper established that tertiary institutions have a lot of roles to play in curbing corruption in Nigeria. Specifically, the paper identified teaching, research, provision of community service, establishment of centres for the studies on corruption prevention and development of professional programmes on corruption prevention as the roles of tertiary institutions in curbing corruption. Based on the findings of this study, the paper recommended that all tertiary institutions in Nigeria should set up the ‘Centre for Anti-Corruption Studies’ for training of public and civil servants in grade level 8 and above, and be given a special role in the fight against corruption in Nigeria. The suggested solution will enable government workers to implement some of their suggestions and recommendations coming out of the various Centres for Corruption Studies’ in Nigeria.

**Key words:** Corruption, Tertiary institutions, character development, teaching, Nigeria

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## INTRODUCTION

In 2022, Nigeria obtained 24 out of a possible 100 points in Transparency International’s Corrupt Perception Index (CPI). This is the same score as the Central African

Republic, Guatemala, and Tajikistan and well below the global average of 43 out of 100. Corruption impedes the functioning of the public sector and the economy with a debilitating effect on the quality of public service delivery (Williams, Adeniran and Ordu, 2023). Also, the percentage of GDP that is spent on procurement in Nigeria varies over time, but it is estimated to range from 10-25 %. Moreover, the amount spent on procurement, by the Anti-Corruption Agencies of Nigeria (comprising all agencies with mandates to investigate corruption and financial crimes) estimates that Nigeria loses \$18 billion every year to corruption and financial crimes. This is a staggering estimate, amounting to 3.8% of Nigeria's GDP in 2022 (Williams, et al 2023). The above development is well captured by Ayeni and Nwaorgu (2018), who argued that corruption has been the root of incalculable damages that have stagnated national development despite the fight against it.

Recently, the new Chairman of the Economics and Finance Crimes Commission (EFCC), Ola Olukoyede, noted that about ₦2.9 trillion meant for some government projects was diverted into personal use by contractors between 2018 and 2020. He said "I surveyed between 2018 and 2020 on 50 entities in Nigeria, both human and corporate entities. I picked just one scheme, one species of fraud, which is called contract and procurement fraud. I discovered that within the three years, Nigeria lost N2.9trn," (Ogundapo, 2023). The above is corroborated by Ayeni, Andeshi and Uzoigwe (2022, p. 271, when they contended that "this misappropriation of the capital budget has made the political officeholders and public bureaucrats put members of the public in a state of poor human security". Therefore, "Nigerians have so far been worried about the level of corruption in the Nigeria civil service, most worrisome is the effect of these corrupt practices on the national economy" (Amaechi, Ayeni, & Madu, 2019, p. 120). The high level of corrupt practices has left tertiary institutions with no option but to intervene through advocacy and teaching on the ills of corruption.

In 2020, Transparency International maintained in their annual report that 66 per cent of the money the Nigerian government allocate to education is stolen by corrupt officials. According to the report, corruption is commonplace in education systems across the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS, (Premium Times 2020; Ogunode, & Johnson, 2021). UNESCO (2014) and Ogunode & Stephen (2021) reports on 'Teaching and Learning: Achieving Quality for All' show that Nigeria is among the 37 countries that are losing money spent on education because children are not learning. UNESCO disclosed that the menace is already costing governments USD 129 billion a year. It stressed further that despite the money being spent, the rejuvenation of primary education is not so soon because of poor-quality education that cannot ensure that children learn (NEEDS, 2014). This poor quality of education being attributed to corruption hurts economic development. The above is well captured by Ayeni, Abdullahi and Andeshi (2021, p. 38) when they posited that the absence of an educated population is one of the missing links "why developing country like Nigeria finds it difficult to achieve economic development".

At the 2013 media launch of the Global Corruption Report on Education, Transparency International SERAP stressed that corrupt practices have been identified in Nigeria's education sector. The report revealed that corruption has a devastating impact on national development, particularly in Africa, hindering progress towards the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) now SDGs, and jeopardizing socio-economic development. With particular reference to Nigeria, it is disheartening to note that this cankerworm was noticed at all levels of education, where massive

embezzlement and misappropriation of funds running into millions of Dollars and Billions of Naira are taking place (SERAP, 2013). Ogune (2021) cited YIAGA Programme Manager, Cynthia Mbamalu who disclosed during the National Debate Competition on Anti-Corruption that about N1.3 trillion of public funds was reportedly laundered between 2011 and 2015 alone. What the above implies is that there is a lack of integrity among public officeholders who have been given tertiary institutions funds to manage. The above is aptly put in this manner, “people who lack developmental integrity are those who derive pleasure in truncating the development strive of government or individual to make life more meaningful for the people” (Ayeni, 2018)

Corruption is a global phenomenon which has permeated nations’ economies and education systems. In Nigeria, the first recorded case of corruption in the education industry took place in 1906 when the primary school certificate examination questions leaked (Asiyai, 2020; Asiyai, 2000). Since then corruption has continued to reoccur in the system and penetrated the secondary education level. Corruption has penetrated almost all public and private institutions across the country (Ogunode & Johnson, 2021; Ogunode & Stephen, 2021; Adebajo, 2014; and Adebayo and Obaje, 2016). Ogune (2021) cited National Union of Campus Journalists (NUCJ), Secretary, Uchenna Igwe lamented that corruption can be noticed in every challenge facing the country today, maintained that there is hardly any section that it has not pervaded, adding that the menace was destroying most things necessary for human and capital development and confining the people to the most desperate levels of poverty.

Even though studies abound on corruption in Sub-Saharan Africa studies, much has not been known about the role of tertiary institutions in curbing corruption in Nigeria. Corruption has been described as one of the social problems facing Nigeria. Ogunode and Onakoya (2024) noted societal problems can be solved by tertiary institutions whose roles and mandates include helping societies solve pressing socioeconomic and health problems through research. Ogunode, Tseveda, and Atim (2024) maintained that tertiary institutions in Nigeria have a great role to play when it comes to issues facing society.

It is based on this that this paper aims to examine the roles of tertiary institutions in curbing corruption in Nigeria.

The study employed a documentary research method, using content analysis as a method of data analysis.

### **Conceptual Clarification: Tertiary Institutions and Corruption**

Tertiary institutions have been defined by many scholars. For instance, Ogunode, Edinoh and Okolie (2023) conceptualized tertiary education as a planned and organized educational system designed for the total development of man/woman and the total transformation of society through the utilization of teaching, research and provision of community service. Tertiary education can also be viewed as post-basic and secondary school education that embraces advanced teaching, research and community service. Tertiary education or Higher education according to Alemu (2018) covers a wider range of higher learning institutions including the university. These higher learning institutions could be organized in different ways, commonly within a university and in a separate institution as university and other tertiary learning institutions. Not only that, tertiary education is viewed by the National Policy on Education (2013) as the education given after Post Basic Education in institutions such as Universities and Inter-University Centres such as the Nigeria French Language Village, Nigeria Arabic Language Village, National Institute of Nigerian Languages, institutions such as

Innovation Enterprise Institutions (IEIs), and Colleges of Education, Monotechnics, Polytechnics, and other specialized institutions such as Colleges of Agriculture, Schools of Health and Technology and the National Teachers' Institutes (NTI).

The United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC), (2003) defined corruption as an insidious plague having several corrosive effects on nations. Accordingly, UNCAC stressed that corruption undermines the rule of law, quality of life and democratic principles, leads to violation of human rights, threatens human security and distortion of markets. Crime and terrorism abound in a country where corruption thrives as a lifestyle of the citizens. Every organization has individuals or persons entrusted with the power to coordinate and direct the affairs of the organization. Some of these individuals misuse the power bestowed on them by doing things contrary to that which is expected of them only to their advantage. These individuals put their interests first and surrogate the interests of the organization. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2008) defined corruption as a misuse of entrusted power for private gain through bribery, extortion, nepotism, or embezzlement. Related to the above definition is the one given by Ayeni and Nwaorgu (2018, p. 86), they see corruption as “behaviours that contravene the laydown rules and procedures which tend to favour an individual or group over another”. Not only that, Transparency International (2010) defines corruption in a simple way as abuse of entrusted power for private benefit. All of these definitions are significantly related to what is happening in Nigerian society. Corruption in public primary schools is defined as the systematic use of public office for private gain whose impact is significant on access to quality or equity education (Hallak & Poisson, 2001). Adebajo (2014) opined that corruption is an immoral and criminal act, a mindset to do wrong and a disposition to exhibit dishonest behaviour by committing an offence against morality, the law and the ethical norms of the society. Ogunode, Ohunene, and Olatunde-Aiyedun, (2022) and Priye (undated) concluded that factors responsible for the high rate of financial corruption in Nigerian public educational institutions (universities) include; corrupt school administrators, weak monitoring and evaluation system, weak trade unions, poor participation of university stakeholders’ weak preventive system and poor accountability system. The effects of corruption on education are dangerous and inimical to the development of education (Amini-Philips and Chukwuma, 2017; Ogunode 2021; Ogunode, Johnson and Olatunde-Aiyedun, 2022 and Oladele, 2019).

### **Theoretical Framework**

The study employed structural-functional theory as the theoretical framework. Sociology and anthropology are where the theory originated from. It was the like of Gabriel Almond (1960) and Coleman (1960) adapted the theory to political science. The tenet of this theory is that every society consists of structures that carry out certain roles for the survival of the system. Gabriel Almond (1960) argued that the political system consists of input and output functions. The input function is like the staff and department, centres among others in the tertiary institution. On the other hand, the output function is the people that the tertiary institutions are expected to impact to ensure that the social menace called corruption is reduced. The two types of functions in tertiary institutions are performed by some structure for the survival of the system (Ayeni & Nwaorgu, 2018). Tertiary institutions are input function that ensures that academic staff serve as role models to their students while ensuring that the various centres created to solve social problems like corruption among others function to achieve their various objectives and achieve the mission and the vision of tertiary

institutions. The input and output functions are expected to influence the environment like Nigerian society, to avoid Nigerian society being affected by corruption, influencing the input function (tertiary institution).

### **Roles of Tertiary Institutions in Curtaining Corruption in Nigeria**

Tertiary institutions have critical roles in the fight against corruption in Nigeria. Nigerian tertiary institutions are established to be problem solvers. The various roles of tertiary institutions in Nigeria include; teaching on right social values, contributing to national development, researching national, state, and local government social, health and economic problems, providing community service via sensitization, establishing of centre for the studies of social problem like corruption prevention and development of professional programme on social issues like corruption prevention in Nigeria.

#### ***Teaching for the transformation of man and woman***

Teaching is the process of imparting knowledge and skills to individuals who make himself or herself available. Teaching is a programme in tertiary institutions. The teaching programme of tertiary institutions can be used to achieve a lot in society (Ogunode and Onakoya 2024). The teaching programme of tertiary institutions can be likened to an agent of socialization. It can be used to transform the society positively. Charles, Nweke, Chukwugozie and Nwoye (2016) noted that it is through the approval of a “Minimum Standard” for academic activities that, the National University Commission (NUC) launched the General Studies programme into the University's curricula. This was done to satisfy the longing for students in Nigerian Universities to be well grounded and, perhaps well rounded as well, in interdisciplinary studies to compete conveniently with their mates in other universities around the globe. Tertiary institutions in Nigeria are host to more than half of the voting population in Nigeria (Ogunode and Ndayebom, 2022). Academic staff are the implementers of the tertiary institutions' curriculum. The implementation of the curriculum involves talking to students daily. For the University of Ilorin, Nigeria, the objectives of the minimum programme are: a) to better the language and communication skills of all students and to assist them in building enough fitness in the use of English as an instrument for their now and would-be occupation; b) to aid students to grow and develop the knowledge of their social, cultural and physical milieu which automatically will equip them to operate actively in their society.

#### ***Teaching for character development***

Tertiary institution through their academic staff is expected to teach against every form of corrupt practices and advise students against getting involved in corrupt activities. Trainor and Leko (2014) noted that tertiary institutions can help students develop their character, personalities and right behavioural altitudes. This role goes beyond the traditional approach of focusing on learning and research. Character is one of the most important factors that facilitate the achievement of success in professional and personal life. Character development equips students with skills and knowledge that empower them to make informed and responsible decisions in their lives. It is one factor that connects the personal and professional aspects of their lives. Also, Tertiary institutions can teach against corruption in Nigeria through the inclusion of corruption into the GST programme offers. For the University of Ilorin, Nigeria, one of the objectives of the minimum programme is to socialize the Nigerian students to cultivate acceptable behaviours, attitudes, patriotism, nationalism and value the status of the constitution as well as create awareness in students about the roles and obligations of

Government at all levels. Saichaie and Morphew (2014) and Ivypanda (2020) agreed that life has many challenges that require social skills, critical thinking and responsible decisions. Universities need to design their curriculums in ways that encourage purposeful exploration and self-reflection to develop character that creates a foundation for distinction and respect for human dignity. Tertiary institutions should teach students to embrace lifestyles that are corruption-free.

Tertiary institutions in Nigeria can include Civic Education in their GST programme to inculcate in the youths and students the spirit and culture of peace-making during election and post-election activities. Teaching that will engage Nigerian youths on how to fight corruption and enshrine integrity, accountability, and transparency into the fabric of our society, and in our public and private sectors. Youths can be instrumental in the fight against corruption in Nigeria and using peer influence to spread values of transparency and accountability when given education. Academic staff of tertiary institutions must possess leadership integrity by practice rather than teaching alone. Leadership integrity is all about demonstrating “leadership qualities such as honesty, forward-looking, competency, inspiration, teaching, guiding, intelligence and creating a way for people to contribute to making something extraordinary happen (Ayeni 2018, p. 59). Lecturers of tertiary institutions should show leadership integrity in their various institutions because contemporary students learn faster by observing behaviours. Nigerian youths must be taught how to shun and condemn corrupt practices, imbibe good values and lead good examples in the communities, homes, campuses, hostels, workspaces, and religious and social fellowships, even as we interact with people in the various communities every day.

### ***Research***

Research involves organized activities meant to solve problems in societies. Research are programme of tertiary institutions, carried out by academic staff, students and researchers. Ogunode and Ayeni, (2024) noted that the academic staff of these tertiary institutions are compulsorily required to carry out research activities as their promotions and grading are primarily based on their research outputs. Apart from the academic staff being promoted through research publications, research activities help us to know ‘best practices in other parts of the world and also add value both to our immediate community and the larger global community. Falola (2022) noted that universities are referred to as research and development centres which means that, from a distant and close look, the university has an unending obligation to drive research and development for academic or educational upliftment and to proffer solutions to society’s core problems. Ogunode, Tseveda, and Atim (2024) observed that the traditional roles of universities include research and instruction to provide solutions to the community’s problems. It implies that tertiary institutions must address the hydra-headed muster called corruption since one of their roles is to solve society's problems. The result of tertiary institutions' research can proffer solutions to problems like gender-based violence in the country. Research in times past has led to an increase in the body of knowledge that has widened the scope of tertiary institutions concerning handling fundamental national pressing problems such as social vices, climate change and gender-based violence and corruption. Tertiary institutions through innovation and advanced research can help to solve the problems of corruption and other social problems like gender-based violence in Nigeria. A model can be developed to fight corruption in public institutions in Nigeria. Researchers in tertiary institutions should research effective monitoring and evaluation models that can be deployed to curtain corruption and strategies to modify citizen behaviour toward

corruption. Ogunode, Tseveda, and Atim (2024) believed that research results and recommendations can aid the processes of policy formulation that can influence political and policy change in Nigeria. Academic staff and researchers in tertiary institutions in Nigeria should carry out research on how young Nigerians would be harnessed into the fight against corruption as well as for propagating the values of integrity, transparency, and accountability.

#### ***Provision of community service***

Community service involves all activities to advance the socio-economic development of the institutions' host communities (Ogunode, Tseveda, and Atim 2024). Ogunode, Iyabode, and Olatunde-Aiyedun (2022) observed that the Community service programme is the third cardinal programme of tertiary institutions. A community service programme is an organized and planned service programme of higher institutions for the benefit and betterment of their host communities. Community service in higher institutions includes all kinds of services that are meant to improve the well-being of the people and society in general. Tertiary institutions should help the host community determine their roles in ensuring accountability and openness in the operations of public institutions. Tertiary institutions have roles to play in educating the masses against ill-gotten wealth.

#### **Promotion of socio-economic development**

Tertiary education is a tool for socializing students to sustain social development and traditions in addition to the modification or changing of the same in line with extant ideologies, ideological expansion or reformation. Tertiary education is seen by Ogunode and Odo (2023) and Ogunode, Cletus & Christiana (2024) as the third tier of education that is designed for the production of skilled and professionals for socio-economic and technological advancement. To achieve the above, tertiary institutions should be on the vanguard of the campaign against corruption that allowed state governments in Nigeria to deny Local Governments in their states their federal allocation – “the empowerment they needed to drive rural development” (Kayode & Ayeni, 2021, p. 171). Tertiary institutions are a micro section of the larger society. Tertiary institutions are an organized fraction of the whole society carved out for teaching programmes, research and provision of community service. The tertiary institution can also be seen as a subset of the general society that is made of a collection of different people, different cultures, different lifestyles and different values. Ogunode and Onakoya (2024); Ogunode, Ngezack and Usi (2024) and Musa (2019) concluded that tertiary institutions are established to help the communities, societies and states find solutions to the socio-economic and political problems facing them. Social and political problems like electoral violence and post-election violence, gender issues and corruption are some of the issues tertiary institutions can help the state solve. Corruption is a social problem that is calling on the tertiary institutions in Nigeria to respond by advancing various measures to tackle the greatest problem hindering the economic development of the country.

#### **Establishment of a centre for the studies of corruption prevention**

The reason for the high prevalence of corruption in Nigeria is that; “corruption is almost the second name of political office holders in Nigeria” (Muhammed & Ayeni, 2018, p. 322). The above is corroborated by Godwin, Ayeni and Peter (2021, p. 120) when they argued that the “dominant group use laws and politics to govern Nigeria to their benefit rather than the benefit of the entire country, Nigeria. Public officeholders in Nigeria use every opportunity they have to perpetrate corrupt practices. This dominant group known as the ruling elite uses law like privatisation policy to

transfer public resources to themselves”. Examples of corruption include paying electricity bills that were never supplied for use by the Power Holding Company of Nigeria (Ayeni, Oluwole & Nurudeen, 2020, p. 9). Not only that, another example of corruption is ‘nepotism’. Thus, “nepotism in Nigeria's public bureaucracy has been a source of worry over time” (Asaju & Ayeni, n.d). Therefore, it is germane that tertiary institutions in Nigeria embark on the establishment of a centre for the studies of corruption prevention since tertiary institutions are created to provide solutions to the various problems confronting the societies (Ogunode & Onakoya, 2024). A situation where tertiary institutions fail to solve society's problems through the establishment of centres for anti-corruption studies means that tertiary institutions lack integrity. The main functions of the tertiary institutions apart from the teaching programme, the other two programmes of research and community services are problem-solving inclined.

Tertiary institutions are structured to be able to establish special centres to tackle a particular project or issue considered important and that needs special studies. For instance, “the executive arm of government has integrity as far as the institution can implement laws for the wellbeing of her citizens” (Ayeni, 2018). From the above development, Nigerian tertiary institutions have integrity only when they can establish centres purposely for the studies of corruption prevention in public and private institutions in Nigeria. Conferences, seminars and symposiums can be annually held to discuss corruption issues and how to curtail it in public and private institutions across the country. Any attempt for tertiary institutions not to perform the role of fighting corruption will result in what Muhammed and Ayeni (2018, p. 312) referred to as, a “contradiction to the Nigerian National Anthem which says, ‘To serve our fatherland’ and the oath taken by political leader to that effect”. Topics such as stakeholders’ roles and involvement in the fight against corruption, deployment of technologies in the fight against corruption, political will and fight against corruption and roles of religious institutions in the fight against corruption should form major courses to be taught in ‘Centre for Corruption Studies’ in Nigeria tertiary institutions in curbing corruption in Nigeria.

#### **Development of professional programme on corruption prevention in institutions**

Capacity building is one of the core functions of tertiary institutions. Tertiary institutions can create an avenue for professionals working in anti-corruption agencies to come for further studies on corruption prevention and identification, while also ensuring that their staff lead by example. Special professional courses can be offered in the areas of monitoring, accountability, transparency and procurement openness. Ogunode and Ayeni, (2024) opined that tertiary institutions are established to solve human problems and that is why they have the power to develop academic programmes in such areas of society’s need. Abubakar (2019) affirmed that tertiary institutions are mandated to develop academic programmes that are relevant to the needs of society and to attend to the pressing needs of society by developing academic programmes that are fit to provide solutions to humanity's problems. This is why tertiary institutions must perform their role of fighting corruption to survive the society since the survival of tertiary institutions depends on the environment - society (Ayeni & Dada, 2018). Failure of tertiary institutions to perform the role of fighting corruption through their programmes and activities can have a devastating effect on society, which will later affect the survival of tertiary institutions in NIGERIA.

Consequent upon the role of solving the societal problem of which corruption is chief, it has been noted that tertiary institutions should as a matter of urgency fight corruption like vote buying,

which allows “Nigerian politicians employed vote buying as an instrument to further the exploitation of the masses in the post-election period” (Ayeni, Doosuur & Kefas, 2021, p. 112). Providing a solution to humanity's problem through a fight against corruption is no doubt one of the roles of tertiary institutions that will consequently lead to enhanced sustainable peace where everybody is better off. It should be noted that one of the challenges facing peacebuilding in Nigeria is characterised by a high level of corruption that has negative implications for the well-being of Nigerians (Ayeni & Sani, 2021, p. 157). To successfully reduce corruption in Nigeria, tertiary institutions need to develop academic and professional programmes on corruption prevention and leadership qualities to train and produce professionals that have skills and knowledge of curtaining corruption in institutions. Offering professional training for civil servants and career workers in anti-corruption agencies will help to curtail corruption in Nigeria and bring about sustainable peace where everyone is happy

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

This paper explored roles of tertiary institutions in curbing corruption in Nigeria. The paper established that tertiary institutions have a lot of roles to play in curbing corruption in Nigeria. Specifically, the paper identified teaching, research, provision of community service, establishment of a centre for the studies on anti-corruption, and development of professional programmes on corruption prevention in institutions.

Based on the findings of this study, the paper recommended that all tertiary institutions in Nigeria should set up ‘Centre for Anti-Corruption Studies’ for training of public and civil servants in grade level 8 and above, and be given a special role in the fight against corruption in Nigeria. The suggested solution will enable government workers to implement some of their suggestions and recommendations coming out of the various Centres for Anti-Corruption Studies’ in Nigeria.

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