

# SYSTEMIC CORRUPTION: A NIGHTMARE TO SERVICE DELIVERY IN NIGERIA PUBLIC TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS

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## ABSTRACT

The level of corruption in Nigeria public tertiary institutions is alarming and has drawn the attention of concerned individuals in both the academics and industries. The aim of this paper is to examine the effect of systemic corruption on service delivery of Nigeria public tertiary institutions. The study utilised a quantitative research approach. Data were collected from 364 staff of selected public tertiary institutions in south-eastern Nigeria using a structured questionnaire. Hypotheses were tested using International Business Machine Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (IBM-SPSS) version 27 that runs multiple regression analysis (MRA). The findings reveal that fraud, nepotism, bribery and abuse of power have significant and negative effect on the service delivery of public tertiary institutions in Nigeria. The study therefore, concluded that systemic corruption has significant and negative effect on service delivery of Nigeria public tertiary institutions. The study recommended that all cases of corruption, regardless of their nature, be handled as serious crimes, carrying lengthier and more punitive prison terms.

**KEYWORDS:** systemic corruption, service delivery, fraud, nepotism, bribery, abuse of power

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In Nigeria and around the world, systemic corruption has had a negative impact on public welfare and economic progress. State public enterprises need to have a solid framework of administrative techniques in place to manage society's needs, as corruption is primarily caused by bad governance. When formal systems of governance fall apart, it becomes more difficult to pass and implement laws and regulations that ensure accountability and transparency in the management of public activities (UNODC, 2019). Since corruption is a constantly evolving phenomenon, it is difficult to pinpoint in any given society because different countries have different norms and values, which in turn leads to different belief systems and knowledge bases. Certain behaviours that are considered abnormal in one country might not be in another. Gift-giving is, for instance, somewhat acceptable in some Asian and African nations but unacceptable in Western nations. Public officials and those holding political office should base their performance of their duties on the need to advance the welfare of the public as a whole, regardless of the differences in values, norms, and belief systems found in developing nations such as Nigeria. They shouldn't prioritise meeting the needs of the general public over their own interests (McLeod, 2018).

The prevalence of corruption in African nations varies; it can be rare, widespread (occurring in numerous public institutions but not at a systemic level), or systemic. Systemic corruption is defined as an environment in which public accountability is no longer the norm but rather the exception and where corruption is accepted as a way of life (Zinyama, 2021). When corruption is uncommon, it's simple to identify and manage. When corruption is widespread (occurs in many institutions), it can also be controlled; however, when corruption is systemic, it is difficult to detect and control, and unethical behaviour and incentives are used to keep the system in place. The purpose of institutional norms and rules of behaviour is predatory gain (Carlisle & Gruby, 2019).

Public sector corruption in Nigeria is currently systemic. It is true that there has been a breakdown in the governance of public enterprises, as the unconventional methods of conducting business there have become the norm. Public servants prioritise their own financial gain over the effects that corruption has on the general welfare of the public because they are motivated by personal enrichment (UNODC, 2019). Systemic corruption affects all governments, parastatals, and agencies. It is not limited to any one continent, region, or ethnic group. It transcends all religions and has a negative impact on the health of the economy (Okorie, 2018). Corruption can be found in many areas of public enterprise, including the ones being studied. It usually manifests itself in the provision of services, where officials receive material or monetary compensation to sway decisions regarding the approval or denial of services to the underprivileged. System corruption appears as bribery, embezzlement, fraud, extortion, abuse of power, conflict of interest, favouritism, ghosting, nepotism, and graft in the majority of Nigerian State's public enterprises (Liberty, 2019).

Conversely, public enterprises are any public organisations that possess some degree of autonomy, even though they might have to abide by specific policy directives (Popoola, 2016). The academic went on to say that since public enterprises are institutions created by specific acts or the provisions of pertinent legislation, the state assumes accountability for the operations of these institutions. Corrupt business practices, such as bid-rigging, embezzlement, abuse of power, bribery, graft, fraud, favouritism, and ghosting, are what define public enterprises in Nigeria and are indicative of a deficiency in effective governance. Public officials now disregard the fundamentals of good governance, openness, equity, accountability, responsibility, independence, justice, discipline, and respect as a result of their bad institutional unethical experiences. The public's perception of the future of public enterprises in Nigeria has been completely disoriented by these practices, which is why the educational sector is the focal point of discussion in this study.

Many people in Nigeria's educational sector, especially in public tertiary institutions, find it surprising that a nation with such abundant natural and human resources could not boast of a steady supply of electricity. Nonetheless, corruption remains a crucial component of any theory explaining why Nigeria's greatness is being delayed or slowed down, and why the majority of its people do not see democracy as a means of achieving development (Lloyd, 2018). In an effort to combat systemic corruption and fortify the economy, Nigeria began an aggressive pursuit of economic reforms in 1999. These included privatisation, banking sector reforms, anti-corruption campaigns, programs and strategies for eradicating and reducing poverty, and the creation of transparent and unambiguous fiscal standards. Researchers have all concluded that, in spite of the government's valiant efforts, these programs have failed to meet the aims and purposes for which they were designed. According to Oghuvbu and Oghuvbu (2020), corruption continues to be a threat, causing untold suffering, hardship, growth and development distortion, and strangulation. As a result, many Nigerians have lost hope, to the point where some have even given up and turned to faith, depending on God to keep them alive. In light of this, the study aim is to investigate how systemic corruption affects the provision of services in Nigeria's tertiary institutions. Fraud, nepotism, bribery, and power abuse are used in this study as operational components to measure the impact of systemic corruption on public tertiary institutions' service delivery in Nigeria.

This study is significant to the administrators of Nigeria's public tertiary institutions, offering useful insights to addressing the nation's service delivery challenges and adding to the body of knowledge regarding the goals of achieving efficiency and effectiveness in public resource management. However, this study posed a critical research question and its relative research hypothesis:

$R_q$ : How significant is the effect of systemic corruption on the delivery of services in Nigeria public tertiary institutions?

$H_o$ : There is no significant effect of systemic corruption on the delivery of services in Nigeria public tertiary institutions.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Systemic Corruption

Systemic corruption, also referred to as endemic corruption, is corruption that stems mainly from an organization's or process's shortcomings (Miller, 2024). It can be contrasted with corrupt behaviour within the system by specific officials or agents. Conflicting incentives, monopolistic or discretionary powers, a lack of transparency, low pay, and an atmosphere of impunity are some of the elements that foster systemic corruption. "Embezzlement, graft, extortion, and bribery" are examples of specific corrupt practices in a system where "corruption becomes the rule rather than the exception. Systemic corruption has a strong moral foundation, which poised to ask whether it is a concept that applies to all societies or just some? According to Kunaka and Matsheza (2001), systemic corruption is the act of engaging in dishonest behaviour or the state of having morality and integrity distorted. It is essential to comprehend ethics in the context of corruption because it is inextricably linked to the idea of ethics. Corruption at systemic levels is referred to as

systemic corruption; at this level, corrupt practices are now accepted as the norm. In other words, public accountability has become the exception rather than the rule, and unethical behaviour has become normalised or regularised (Hope & Chikulo 2000, p. 104). Situations where corrupt practices are the norm are considered to be examples of systemic corruption (Zinyama, 2021). Because systemic corruption thrives in environments where moral standards and group values are flouted, its prevalence can be used to gauge how much moral principles have been undermined in public enterprises. In order to combat systemic corruption, strategies that are developed through self-regulatory systems that offer incentives for participation in good ethical behaviour are needed (Zinyama, 2021). Australia Parliament defined systemic corruption as “instances of corrupt conduct (which may or may not constitute serious corruption) that reveal a pattern of corrupt conduct in a law enforcement agency or in law enforcement agencies.

However, systemic corruption is a concept that is loaded with values, so it might be hard to come up with a comprehensive definition, according to Kunaka and Matsheza (2001, p. 14). Plundering state funds, misusing public office and property, money laundering, patronage, embezzlement, accepting gifts, rent-seeking, asking for and taking bribes, graft, and ghosting are some examples of systemic corruption in public enterprises. Therefore, this study defines systemic corruption as a function of dishonesty, a lack of integrity and the abuse of private and/or public office for personal gain which the societies have considered as the norms of the land. For the purpose of this study, fraud, nepotism, bribery and abuse of power are operationalised as the core components for the measuring systemic corruption on service delivery of public tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

**Bribery:** The term "bribery" has raised concerns in many societies, despite the lack of a universally recognised definition for the term "bribery," all meanings include an appointed official's voluntarily betraying their trust in return for a benefit. It is not necessary to trade the benefit for cash or other payment methods. It can manifest in a variety of ways, such as giving costly presents, lavishing guests with lavish hospitality, providing resources, or lending a helping hand to friends, family, or causes you believe in. Transparency International defines bribery as offering, pledging, providing, accepting, or soliciting an advantage in return for engaging in illegal, unethical, or betrayal of trust activities. Incentives may take the form of cash, gifts, loans, fees, prizes, or other benefits (services, taxes, donations, favours, etc.).

The act of supplying, guaranteeing, or offering a bribe is referred to as active bribery. The act of seeking, accepting, or receiving a bribe is referred to as passive bribery. Both kinds, which are illegal in the majority of countries, worry institutions (Shehu, 2019). Prior to the introduction of the UK Bribery Act, the main focus of anti-bribery legislation was the active bribery of foreign public officials because of the harm it causes to societies and the way it undermines fair trading. Examples of active bribery include: (i) paying a public official a bribe in exchange for obtaining a contract that benefits the briber; (ii) using a consultant to channel bribes to obtain public contracts; (iii) giving small bribes to customs officers to speed up the clearance of cargo through a port; (iv) using the son of a public official to sway contract decisions; and (v) paying doctors inflated travel costs and sponsorship fees in an effort to persuade them to recommend a pharmaceutical company's products.

On the other hand, passive bribery occur in specific operational functions like: granting access for theft by security officers, kickback, preferential allocation of goods and services, recruitment of incompetent applicant, insider fraud to divulging customer information, illegal information brokering. Bribery in this study is defined as the offering, giving, soliciting, or receiving of any item of value as a way of influencing the actions of an individual holding a public or legal.

**Nepotism:** The term is derived from the Italian word "nepote," which means "the son," and has been used to describe the papal practice of bestowing special favours on grandchildren or their kin. According to Gjinovci(2016), nepotism is the practice of hiring relatives or close friends without regard to their qualifications or abilities, thus favouring relatives based only on family ties. Nepotism can arise in various domains of societal organisation (Uche et al., 2019). Nepotism is a global phenomenon, but it is only found in places where it is dominant in terms of politics, economy, society, and the media—in Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and even certain EU nations.

In recent times, the proliferation of nepotism and favouritism across various nations has started to impede the social and economic well-being of the country (Gjinovci, 2016). Nepotism is defined as giving siblings and other relationships preferential treatment in the workplace based on association rather than ability. It is related to the English word nephew, which is derived from Old French from Latin. The majority of research suggests that larger corporations are more likely to be involved in nepotism than smaller ventures. Few academics, however, contend that nepotism is common in smaller companies (Hayajenh, Maghrabi, & Al-Dabbagh, 1994). Studies assert that various researchers in the field have also suggested future research, with discussions on the many advantages and disadvantages of nepotism. Recent findings by Arici, Arasli and Arici (2020) revealed the impact of psychological contract violation mediation and the comprehension of nepotism and acceptance of rudeness in the workplace. Again, Baloch & Iraqi (2020) found that nepotism has a significant negative impact on employee decisions, work satisfaction, organisational engagement, and human resource management strategies. However, having considered the many definitions of nepotism, this paper defines nepotism as

the unethical use of authority to help friends or family members obtain employment or other advantages.

**Fraud:** this is an action that depends on dishonesty to generate profit is considered fraud. According to Black's Law Dictionary, fraud is defined as "knowing misrepresentation of the truth or concealment of a material fact to induce another to act to his or her detriment." At that point, it is considered a crime. According to International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (2012, p. 1) fraud is "any intentional act or omission designed to deceive others, resulting in the victim suffering a loss and/or the perpetrator achieving a gain." Fraud is further defined by the Association of Certified Fraud Examiners (2024) as the intentional misuse, misapplication, or employment of organisational resources or assets for personal enrichment through one's occupation. The fraudulent conversion and acquisition of money or property by false pretence was defined by the Yusuf, Ahmad and Razimi (2016). Legally speaking, fraud is viewed as depriving someone dishonestly of something to which they would or might be entitled, but only in order to commit fraud. According to its lexical definition, fraud is the intentional use of deception to obtain illegal benefit. Therefore, in order for an action to be considered fraudulent, it must be motivated by a dishonest desire to benefit the perpetrator at the expense of another individual or organisation (Reurink, 2016).

The Fraud Triangle is the most commonly recognised theory explaining why certain individuals perpetrate fraud. Dr. Donald Cressey, a criminologist who coined the term "trust violators" from his research on embezzlers, created the Fraud Triangle (Salinger, 2004)

**Figure 1.** Fraud Triangle



Source: Association of Certified Fraud Examiner, 2024

As per the Fraud Triangle theory, an individual is more inclined to engage in fraudulent activities if they have all three elements: unshareable financial pressure, perceived opportunity, and rationalisation.

**Perceived opportunity:** a control gap that allows fraud or corruption to occur without the perpetrators being discovered, apprehended, or facing consequences. Implementing controls such as keeping money safe, doing reconciliations, having explicit disciplinary policies that are upheld, getting the right authorization, and other similar actions can address perceived opportunity. It has been shown that the best approach to lessen fraud and corruption is to remove the perceived opportunity.

**Financial pressure:** the rationale behind a fraud or corrupt act. They can range widely and include things like maintaining a lifestyle, financial strains, gambling issues, retaliation against the organisation, emotional issues, and the like. Initiatives like open door policies, employee support programmes, and treating and paying staff fairly are a few ways to address motivation.

**Rationalisation:** The act of rationalising a deception or corrupt practice is called rationalisation. It is important to distinguish between rationalisation and moral judgement. Actually, the offender frequently knows that what they are doing is wrong, but they will justify it in their minds for whatever reason. These could be beliefs that money is just being "borrowed," that everyone does it, that no one will actually be harmed, that they are just receiving what is rightfully theirs, or that everyone else does it as well. Increasing awareness of the Code of Conduct and the detrimental effects that fraud and corruption have on the organisation and its beneficiaries, providing training on the prevention of fraud and corruption, conducting regular performance reviews, and simply treating employees fairly are some ways to combat rationalisation.

This paper defined fraud on the perspective of business as any intentional deception or manipulation done by workers, employers, or other parties for one's own benefit, to harm the company, or to obtain an unfair personal advantage.

**Abuse of Power:** In the public and private sectors nowadays, power abuse is widespread among those involved in service delivery. To abuse one's position of authority in a public office, government agency, or other setting by taking unfair advantage of others is known as power abuse. With or without resistance, power is the capacity to shape other people's actions and behaviour in order to accomplish a specific goal. It's the capacity to use power over someone else to accomplish goals, to put it simply (Gerson, 2019). Bullying that involves misusing authority figures' power at work is called abuse of power in leadership. In order to performance and the success of the company, higher ranking officials who abuse their power typically target the junior staff members. Blackballing, public censure, and mockery are examples of power abuse in leadership. In environments where superior supervision is insufficient, misuse of power is prevalent and primarily motivated by deception. School, university, college, private organisation, church, hospital, and public office are the most common locations for power harassment. Misconduct, poor administration, power harassment, corruption, incapacity, malpractice, carelessness, maltreatment, misconduct, exploitation, and so forth are other terms for the abuse of power (Hoeft & Mill, 2023). However, power can be abuse in the following ways: discrimination, bullying, sexual harassment, crime and breach of employee's right.

According to this study, abuse of power happens when an individual or group of individuals with some authority due to their position abuse that authority in an unethical or illegal way to further their own agendas at the expense of others. This conduct is frequently viewed as immoral, unfair, or detrimental to society and other people. It also typically has detrimental effects on the victims, both psychologically (such as anxiety, depression, and chronic stress) and physically (such as injury and assault). The prevention of such conduct is a top priority for law enforcement in particular as well as society at large.

## 2.2. Public enterprises

Public Enterprise is "an organization that is set up as a corporate body and as part of the government apparatus for an entrepreneurial objective" (Maiwada, Abdullahi & Mukhtar, 2018). According to Ademolekun (2002), a public enterprise is an organisation that was created when the government took on the role of an entrepreneur. In a nutshell, public enterprises are primarily privately held companies tasked with offering services that benefit the general public. Public enterprises in Nigeria include Federal Radio Corporation, Universities, Nigerian Railway Corporation, Nigeria Television Authority (NTA), and so on. Since the government founded each of these organisations, it has control over the scope of their activities and the property they own.

In Nigeria, there are a lot of public enterprises. The Nigerian Federal Government oversees approximately six hundred (600) businesses across multiple economic sectors being vital to the nation's economic development (Maiwada et al., 2018). With multiple changes in government, a good number of businesses already existed before independence and a great number more emerged after. A great deal of businesses were started, reorganised, renamed with smaller roles and scopes, and many more failed. All these represented the current state of government owned enterprises. However, numerous local, state and federal governments have established businesses for a variety of purposes.

Furthermore, this study defined public enterprise as enterprise that is controlled by a public authority and is either fully or partially owned by the state. Therefore, the study core area of investigation will center on the Nigerian public tertiary institutions which comprises of universities, polytechnics and collage of educations, whose names are withheld for confidential reasons.

## 2.3. Public Service Delivery

The concept of service delivery is a sophisticated term for providing goods and services to customers in a manner that satisfies their needs. As part of the social contract that the government has with its citizens, service delivery is also vital for the public sector. Material infrastructure such as roads, electricity grids, healthcare, education, water systems, and social protection are among the development priorities for service delivery (Agboola, 2016). The idea of service delivery and how it applies to development is ever-changing. Some academics draw a connection between socioeconomic performance and service delivery, while others highlight the political aspect of service delivery. Beyond making a profit, service delivery is how business services are carried out (World Bank, 2010).

Public service delivery is defined as "the process of meeting the needs of citizens through prompt and efficient procedures (Oronsanye, 2010, p. 31). This suggests that consumers play a crucial role in the provision of public services because of the way the public institutions and the consumers interact to ensure that their needs are met promptly. That is, the public should be viewed as the "master" and the beneficiary of improved public service performance, just as the private sector views its clients/consumers as "kings," guaranteeing the provision of high-quality services (Aladegbola & Jaiyeola, 2016).

In the paper, service delivery is defined as an operational activity for supplying products within a pre-agreed service level agreement between a service provider and customer. This means that the main goal of service delivery is to guarantee that services are provided to the level and quality that the client expects.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted positivism as the research paradigm. This study used a quantitative research design which involved all the staff of public tertiary institutions in Nigeria investigated to investigate the effect of systemic corruption on service delivery of tertiary institutions in Nigeria. The study was conducted in 2024 among staff of tertiary institutions in Nigeria. These staff comprise of both teaching and non-teaching staff in state and federal tertiary institutions. For the sensitive nature of this study, the name of the tertiary institutions were kept off from the public domain. The study adopted a stratified random sampling method to select 364 staff. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire after a pilot study. The dimensions of systematic corruption measured in this study included fraud, nepotism, bribery and abuse of power. The Likert rating scale was used to design the instrument. The questionnaire was pre-tested on a small group similar to one in the study to check its validity and reliability. The instrument was both face and content validated, while the internal consistency was realized at 0.703, indicating that it is a good fit for the study. The study utilised the test-retest method to test the reliability of the research instruments, while data were analysed using the Multiple Regression Analysis (MRA).

### 4. DATA ANALYSIS

The key components for measuring systemic corruption in this study are fraud, nepotism, bribery and abuse of power. The association coefficients between systemic corruption and service delivery in Nigeria are shown in Table 1. The EFA loading, as well as the mean score and standard deviation are also contained in the Table below.

**Table 1.** An exploratory factor analysis of teamwork measurement

Item	Mean	SD	Factor loading	Item total correlation
<b>Systemic Corruption</b>				
Fraud	4.72	.638	.729	.414
Nepotism	1.27	.513	.502	.482
Bribery	3.73	.459	.476	.343
Abuse of Power	3.85	.542	.359	.527

KMO = .628;  $\chi^2 = 263.15$ ;  $P < .001$ ; Cronbach's  $\alpha = .652$ ; DF= 4; Percentage of variance explained = 62.54%

Source: Classes of resources (IBM-SPSS version 27)

Cronbach's alpha coefficient was adopted to examine the internal consistency of components, or factors, and their related items that emerged through EFA using IBM SPSS version 27. As shown in Table 1, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for systemic corruption was 0.652. The structural model is illustrated in the Figure 1 after the items in the constructs were validated using EFA and Cronbach's alpha coefficients.

**Table 2.** Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.543a	.295	.256	.594

a. Predictors: (Constant), fraud, nepotism, bribery, abuse of power

Source: Classes of resources (IBM-SPSS version 27)

**Table 3.** Analysis of Variance

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	
1	Regression	44.741	5	7.457	21.309	.001 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	136.162	332	.410		
	Total	180.803	337			

a. dependent Variable: service delivery

b. predictors: (Constant), fraud, nepotism, bribery, abuse of power

Source: Classes of resources (IBM-SPSS version 27)

**Table 4.** Coefficients<sup>a</sup>

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.389	.278		1.396	.000
	Fraud	-.310	.076	-.264	-4.820	.001
	Nepotism	-.207	.049	-.008	-.060	.005
	Bribery	-.293	.061	-.257	-5.193	.001
	Abuse of power	-.191	.056	-.198	-3.735	.002

Dependent Variable: service delivery

Source: Classes of resources (IBM-SPSS version 27)

Table 2 above shows that the  $R^2$  (0.295) explained how strongly the independent variable influences the dependent variable. The variations in fraud, nepotism, bribery and abuse of power account for the 29.5% of the service delivery in Nigeria public tertiary institutions. Adjusted  $R^2$  of 0.256 supported it.

On the other hand, Table 3 depicts that the systemic corruption has significant and negative effect on service delivery in Nigerian public tertiary institutions, as evidenced by the F-statistics value of 21.309 and the P-value of 0.001. The outcome of this investigation demonstrated how the variations in service delivery in Nigerian public tertiary institutions may be explained by fraud, nepotism, bribery and abuse of power.

The regression model, as per Table 4, shows that systemic corruption is significant at  $p < 0.05$ . This entails that systemic corruption significantly and negatively affect service delivery in Nigeria public tertiary institutions. Remarkably, the standardised Beta and the corresponding P-values for fraud ( $\beta = -0.264$ ,  $p < .001$ ), nepotism ( $\beta = -0.008$ ,  $p < .005$ ), bribery ( $\beta = -0.257$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and abuse of power ( $\beta = -0.198$ ,  $p < .002$ ), show that fraud affect service delivery greatly in the model, followed bribery, abuse of power and then nepotism.

## 5. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

This paper examines the impact of systemic corruption on service delivery in public tertiary institutions in South-eastern Nigeria, as previously mentioned and found that systemic corruption has a significant and negative effect on service delivery. The emphasis is on how service delivery in Nigeria's public tertiary institutions is impacted by fraud, nepotism, bribery, and power abuse. However, systemic corruption is the act of engaging in corruption that permeates daily existence and political practice. This focuses on how corruption is entwined with the official and unofficial rules of the political system, going beyond it being normalised or the exception rather than the rule (Jackson, 2022).

First, the study revealed that that fraud has a significant and negative effect on service delivery in public tertiary institutions. This aligns with the study of Jev et al. (2022) found that fraud has negative effect on public service delivery system in Taraba state and has plunged the state into poverty. Akokuwebe and Idemudia (2023) also found that fraud has significant impact on healthcare delivery in Nigeria. However, the commission of a fraud is contingent upon three factors: the willingness of the perpetrators, the availability of opportunities for the fraud, and the existence of an escape route or exit from pertinent sections or institutions that forbid fraud or related deviant behaviour. Fraud is a widespread occurrence. It's not specific to the banking sector, nor is it peculiar to Nigeria alone. Due to high-level accusations and real instances of corporate fraud, as well as cases of fraud in numerous Nigerian corporations, many companies have developed codes of ethics and ethical guidelines in an effort to enhance their reputation. The primary goal of these is to guarantee that every member of the organisation, regardless of position or status, adheres to the minimal code of ethics in order to enhance the company's standing in the market, win over clients, and strengthen its competitive edge (Chimobi, Jude & Livinus, 2018). Because institutions of higher learning deliver services to their students at different levels and have been identified as autonomous, it is understandable that fraud activities are prevalent in all levels. In the current Nigerian era, many students and staff alike want to make it within the shortest period of time. Naturally, fraud takes many different forms and guises, and in most cases, it involves insiders (employees) and outsiders working together to carry out the act (Salisu, 2020).

Secondly, the study also found that nepotism has a significant and negative effect on service delivery of Nigerian public tertiary institutions. According to Shah and Alotaibi (2017), nepotism can be considered an unethical practice if it is perceived as prioritising personal interests over those of the organisation. Merit, competence, and ability to perform are the key factors that should determine who gets hired for a job. There are arguments in the literature that highlight nepotism's benefits. Dailey and Reuschling (1980), for instance, contended that nepotism benefits family businesses by providing business opportunities to family members, promoting positive family relationships, and giving preference to hiring potential employees from a small pool of family members rather than a large pool of unrelated individuals in society. In public sector and the related field of human resource management, where diversity and inclusion are valued, this argument, however, is untenable.

The management board is responsible for overseeing the daily operations of public tertiary institutions on behalf of the state and federal governments. Thus, equity, accountability, transparency, and fairness are necessary (Sarker et al., 2017). Because the people in positions of nepotism typically lack the qualifications and performance standards necessary to provide high-quality services, nepotism encourages incompetence and unethical behaviour which has called for the total failure of the educational system in Nigeria. The employees' close familial ties to the management also mean that they are unlikely to face consequences when they defy institutional norms. This tendency may compound until it becomes a hindrance to the institution's ability to operate effectively (Bature & Joseph, 2018). Giving the right job to the right person based on the necessary education, training, experience, and competence should be the primary focus of any recruitment process (McCauley & Wakefield, 2006). Recruitment and the selection of a candidate lose their objectivity and turn into an unethical matter when the candidate hired through the process of relationship with the recruitment team or management team and consideration is given to such a relationship (Nabi, Wei & Shabbir, 2015), as seen in the appointments of most vice chancellors, provosts, rectors, deans, heads of department and others.

Thirdly, the investigation shows that bribery has a significant and negative effect on service delivery in Nigeria public tertiary institutions. Globally, bribery has an impact on economic activity; however, it is illegal in most places, making it challenging to obtain reliable empirical data on these activities (Gneezy, Saccardo & Veldhuizen, 2018). Still, available data indicates that bribery is pervasive. An estimated \$1 trillion worth of bribes are exchanged annually, according to the World Bank (Kaufmann, 2005). Many businesses report needing to pay bribes to win business, with rates ranging from 15% to 20% in industrialised nations to 40% in China, Russia, and Mexico (Gneezy et al., 2018). Bribery can take many different forms: it can involve international arms deals worth billions of dollars, paying a police officer a few naira to avoid having to wait for a minor traffic infraction on the highway, or paying lecturers to "sort" their grades. Some cases involve non-monetary gifts and services rather than money, such as giving expensive gifts to top management staff prior to contract awards or sending gifts to lecturers. Therefore, bribery negatively affect the delivery of services in Nigerian public and private enterprises.



Finally, it is evident that public officers in public tertiary institutions abuse powers bestowed on them and these negatively affects the delivery of services in those institutions. This conformed with the study of Hoeft and Mill (2023) that abuse of power has significantly affected transparency. This entails that many officers appointed into public office in Nigeria and beyond have literally abuse the positions the occupy in their respective levels, thus limiting the manner at which the delivery of services in the organisation is promoted.

## 6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The aim of this paper is to examine the effect of systemic corruption on the delivery of services in the Nigerian public tertiary institutions. Going by the investigation, it is evident that the systemic corruption in Nigerian public tertiary institutions' is a complicated and multifaceted problem that calls for multilevel approaches that consider the corruption's economic, social, cultural, and political aspects. The staff at many Nigerian tertiary institutions prioritises corruption in their service delivery and views it as the standard within the institution, which is why many of these institutions have failed to achieve remarkable academic excellence. The officials in charge of upholding these moral principles are also the main sources of institutional fraud, nepotism, power abuse, and bribery, so the conventional strategies (improving enforcement, reducing discretion, and strengthening accountability mechanisms) may not be very effective in this situation.

Given the aforementioned findings, it is recommended that all cases of corruption, regardless of their nature, be handled as serious crimes, carrying lengthier and more punitive prison terms. Since most corrupt activities in Nigeria tertiary institutions currently result in very light charges in Nigerian courts of law, it is actually necessary to establish special courts that deal with corruption. Certain corrupt practices are not even prohibited by law, meaning that those who engage in them go free because they cannot be held accountable.

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## SUSTAVNA KORUPCIJA: NOĆNA MORA ZA PRUŽANJE USLUGA U JAVNIM TERCIJARNIM USTANOVAMA U NIGERIJU

### SAŽETAK

Razina korupcije u nigerijskim javnim visokoškolskim ustanovama alarmantna je i privukla je pozornost zabrinutih pojedinaca u akademskoj zajednici, ali i u industriji. Cilj ovog rada je ispitati učinak systemske korupcije na pružanje usluga javnih visokoškolskih ustanova u Nigeriji. Studija je koristila pristup kvantitativnog istraživanja. Podaci su prikupljeni od 364 djelatnika odabranih javnih visokoškolskih ustanova u jugoistočnoj Nigeriji korištenjem strukturiranog upitnika. Hipoteze su testirane korištenjem International Business Machine Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (IBM-SPSS) verzija 27 koja pokreće višestruku regresijsku analizu (MRA). Rezultati otkrivaju da prijevara, nepotizam, podmićivanje i zlouporaba ovlasti imaju značajan i negativan učinak na pružanje usluga javnih visokoškolskih ustanova u Nigeriji. Studija je stoga zaključila da sustavna korupcija ima značajan i negativan učinak na pružanje usluga javnih visokoškolskih ustanova u Nigeriji. Studija predlaže da se svi slučajevi korupcije, bez obzira na njihovu prirodu, tretiraju kao ozbiljna kaznena djela, s duljim i strožim zatvorskim kaznama.

**KLJUČNE RIJEČI:** sustavna korupcija, pružanje usluga, prijevara, nepotizam, mito, zlouporaba ovlasti