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IMPACT OF GRADE SORTING ON ACADEMIC MOTIVATION OF UNDERGRADUATES IN NNAMDI AZIKIWE UNIVERSITY, AWKA-NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Tertiary institutions in Nigeria including Anambra state is recently engulfed with social and moral evils ranging from among others clandestine activities, drug usage, rape, cybercrime, cyber bullying, suicide and suicide ideation, sexual harassment and grade sorting. This study adopted ex-post-facto research design to investigate the impact of grade sorting on academic motivation of undergraduates in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka-Nigeria. Four research questions were formulated to guide the study. From the population of 36, 159 undergraduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka in 2022/2023 academic session, 150 students were randomly selected for the study. Data were collected through questionnaire of 22 items to elicit the impact of grade sorting on academic motivation of undergraduate students. The instrument was validated by 3 Specialists in Education. Reliability of the instrument was determined using Cronbach Alpha and an alpha coefficient of 0.77 was obtained. Research questions were answered using frequencies, percentages and mean. Result showed the prevalence of grade sorting among undergraduates in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. It also revealed that grade sorting is associated with academic laxity, academic procrastination, low academic engagement, academic frustration and lack of resilience among others. The researchers recommend that those responsible for curriculum planning in tertiary institutions should emphasize discovery, skill acquisition and experiential learning since focusing on grades has hindered real emphasis on learning.

Keywords: Grade sorting and academic motivation.

Introduction

Tertiary institutions in Nigeria including Anambra state is recently engulfed with social and moral evils ranging from among others clandestine activities, drug usage, rape, cybercrime, cyber bullying, suicide and suicide ideation, sexual harassment and grade sorting. In recent times, grade sorting has been observed as one of the unethical practices destroying the goals and objectives of tertiary education. The academic landscape is witnessing an alarming trend in which lecturers and students are resorting to unethical practices. Grade sorting as observed by the researchers is a two sided coin. On one side of the coin are the lecturers using intimidation and coercion to lure the student for sorting either in cash or kind, directly or indirectly using agents like course

representatives. On the other side of the coin are the students willingly and desperately offering monetary incentives or engaging in bribery, offering themselves whole heartedly for sexual affairs among others.

Whichever side of the coin, the whole intent is for alteration/manipulating of academic grades/scores. Some authors and researchers have tried to explain in their own views what grade sorting implies. Offiah (2019); Chukwu and Lato (2016); Orizu (2014) and Estifesti (2013) explained grade sorting as a process where sexual affair or through monetary payment. Osunde (2012) noted that grade sorting is a means where weak students lavish their lecturers with gift items or sexual relationship to obtain good grades. Grade sorting poses a significant challenge to the integrity of grading systems and the principles of academic honesty within educational institutions. The integrity of grading systems in educational institutions has long been regarded as the bedrock of academic assessment (Schinske, & Tanner, 2014). Traditionally, these systems were conceived with the purpose of objectively evaluating students' knowledge, providing constructive feedback, and fostering a favorable learning environment. Central to this process is the measurement of academic performance, which is pivotal for assessing students' achievements and progress.

Academic performance is typically measured using grading systems that assign scores or letter grades to students based on their performance in coursework, examinations, and other assessments (York, Gibson, & Rankin, 2019). Academic performance is a vital tool for educators and institutions to gauge the effectiveness of their teaching methods, identify areas of improvement, and guide students toward continuous learning and growth. However, the landscape of grading practices has experienced a disconcerting shift in recent times, giving rise to a deeply troubling phenomenon known as grade sorting. According to Osuji (2016) grade sorting is the act of an illegal communication between a lecturer and a student targeted at creating an avenue that will lead to falsification of a student score to illicitly give him/her unmerited position. This amounts to erosion of academic integrity. It encapsulates a broader range of unethical practices where students resort to cheating, plagiarism, or other dishonest tactics to inflate their grades, thereby subverting the very essence of academic achievement (Amzalag, Shapira, &Dolev, 2022). This practice not only challenges the credibility of grading systems but also erodes the very principles of academic integrity, undermining the fundamental values of education, such as fairness and meritocracy.

The implications of grade sorting extend beyond the act of irresponsibility, rascality and dishonesty. They have far reaching consequences which include devaluation of academic performance as a true indicator of a student's abilities. The evidence of proper teaching and learning should manifest in academic achievement. Academic achievement is the hub around which teaching and learning revolve and should be the target of every student enrolled in any academic programme (Anierobi, Okeke and Etodike, 2021). Put in another way, the

purpose of every teaching and learning process is to accomplish educational goals which include impartation of knowledge, transformation, inculcation of acceptable societal values and attitudes geared towards impactful life. Giving credence to this assertion is Bray and Mcclasky (2016) who asserted that the goal of learning is about preparing learners for their future life as well as actualizing their potentials. The further explained that learning is about giving the learner a place and recognition in the society.

However, to accomplish these educational goals, students' volition to learn is paramount. It therefore becomes necessary for the classroom teacher to engage the psychological construct of motivation. Educational Psychologists has emphasized motivation as vital component of the classroom and thus one of the most important prerequisite for learning. It is paramount to state here that huge investment in education ranging from gigantic and ultra-modern buildings, sophisticated equipped libraries and workshops as well as superb staffing will amount to wasted expenditure if students do not want to learn. Teachers therefore need to have expertise knowledge and skills on ways and means of encouraging students learning and ways of motivating them to learn.

Supporting the above statement, Osiesi and Fajobi (2020) noted that students' willingness to learn must be secured if productive learning is desired. Osiesi et al went further to explain this can only be guaranteed through motivation. Thus they described motivation as the determining factor to students' success in their academic endeavour. Andrea and Melissa (2023) observed that motivation is indispensable in education. They emphasized that students' who are motivated are more likely to set academic goals for themselves and also work diligently towards accomplishing such goals. Reiterating this point is Cox and Hurst (2023) that motivation plays an indisputable role in learning because students' who are motivated tends to be goal oriented, goal accomplishment oriented and higher achievers.

Different authors and researchers have attempted definition of motivation according to their various perspectives. Ebenebe, Unachukwu and Nwosu (2021) defined motivation to include all those factors which increase and decrease the vigor of an individual activity. They opined this is what classroom teachers often refer to as effort. Ebenebe et al further noted that the volition to incorporate effort into learning is accomplished by some factors including the student personality, abilities, nature of the given learning tasks and reward for learning. Cox et al (2023) opined that motivation in the classroom context means the willingness and desire of a student to learn. They noted further that motivation is measured by four criteria/indices namely: Choice, Effort, Persistence and Level of achievement.

Researchers including Cox et al (2023), Ebenebe et al (2015) and Offiah (2019) outlined two types of motivation which are:

- Intrinsic motivation- This implies when students are motivated to learn by themselves or internally. Example passion, self-drive and enthusiasm.

- Extrinsic motivation is when outside factors/external factors motivate the student to learn. For example peers, parents, grades and positions/recognitions.

One aspect of motivation vital for academic engagement, academic resilience and academic achievement/performance is academic motivation. Ozdal (2021) asserted that academic motivation explain students' desire or enthusiasm for academic engagement and their school experience. Samat, Kamal and Rajib (2017) explained academic motivation as vital ingredient in learning and achievement. They stressed that academic motivation is an important instrument for realization of one's goal. Usher and Morris (2012) explained academic motivation as those behaviours that relate to academic functioning and success which include the students' effort, academic regulation, set goals/objectives and resilience in face of challenges.

Different Educational constructs have been used to explain academic motivation by different researchers and authors. Osiesi et al (2020) tried to explain academic motivation of students using age, gender and academic discipline. Studies have shown that the socioeconomic status of a student can affect their academic motivation. Other factors that can impact the academic motivation of students includes; Learning Styles, Study Habits, Motivation and Peer Influence. To the best of knowledge of the researchers there is paucity of research on explaining academic motivation using the variable of grade sorting. It is against this background that the researcher wants to investigate the impact of grade sorting on academic motivation of undergraduates in Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka. The study was guided by four research questions which include:

1. What is the prevalence of grade sorting among undergraduates in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka?
2. What are the perceived causes of grade sorting among undergraduates in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka?
3. What are the perceived impact of grade sorting on academic motivation of undergraduates in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka?
4. What possible measures/strategies could be adopted to curb grade sorting among undergraduates in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka?

Research Method

The study was carried out using ex-post facto research design. This type of research seeks to establish cause-effect relationships. Nworgu (2015) explained that the researcher usually has no control over the variables of interest and therefore cannot manipulate them. Indeed the researcher only attempts to link some already existing effects or observations to some variable (s) as causative agent(s). The study was carried out using undergraduates in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The population of the study comprised of 36, 159 undergraduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka in 2022/2023 academic session. There are 9 Faculties in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. Using purposive random sampling technique,

the researchers selected 5 Faculties in Awka Campus of the University (Arts, Education, Environmental Sciences, Management Sciences and Social Sciences). Simple random sampling was used to pick 3 Departments from each chosen 5 Faculties giving a total of 15 Departments. 10 students were randomly selected from each chosen Department resulting in a total of 150 students.

Researchers developed instrument titled "Grade Sorting and Academic Motivation" (GSAM) was used for data collection. The instrument had 22 items structured on a modified 4-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree to Strongly Disagree. Three experts (One in Measurement and Evaluation, Two in Educational Psychology) validated the instrument for face and content adequacy. The reliability of the instrument was established using Cronbach Alpha and an internal coefficient of 0.77 was obtained. Direct delivery approach was employed in administering the questionnaire to the chosen sample. Data collected was analyzed using percentages, frequencies and statistical weighted mean.

Presentation of Results

Table 1: Students Response on the Prevalence of Grade Sorting in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

Prevalence	Frequency	Percentage
Very Rare	Nil	Nil
Often	43	28%
Common	107	72%
Total	150	100%

Table 1 shows that 28% of students agreed that grade sorting often takes place in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka while 72% acknowledged that grade sorting is common in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

Table 2: Mean Scores of Undergraduates on the Possible Causes of Grade Sorting in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka **N** = 150

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	X	Remark
1	Moral bankruptcy	35	83	17	15	2.92	Agree
2	Peer influence	61	47	19	23	2.97	Agree
3	Poor mental ability	76	38	26	10	3.20	Agree
4	Greed	29	75	28	18	2.77	Agree
5	Desires to succeed at all cost	57	51	22	20	2.97	Agree
6	Unhealthy parental expectation	65	35	24	26	2.93	Agree
7	Institutional expectation	26	58	26	30	2.40	Agree
8	Coercion/Pressure from concerned lecture	95	25	18	20	3.41	Agree

Table 2 shows that the students with a mean score of 2.50 and above agreed that the possible causes of grade sorting among undergraduates in Nnamdi Azikiwe

University, Awka include: Moral bankruptcy, peer influence, poor mental ability, greed, desires to succeed at all cost, unhealthy parental expectation, institutional expectation and coercion/pressure from concerned lecturer.

Table 3: Mean Scores of Undergraduates on the Impact of Grade Sorting on Academic Motivation of Undergraduates in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.**N = 150**

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	X	Remark
9	Academic frustration	92	20	14	24	3.20	Agree
10	Academic procrastination	89	30	15	16	3.28	Agree
11	Hinders academic resilience	48	55	15	32	2.79	Agree
12	Encourages boycott of lectures	86	34	16	14	3.28	Agree
13	Academic anxiety	75	40	15	20	3.13	Agree
14	Academic stress	79	30	22	19	3.13	Agree
15	Hinders self-resilience	55	47	16	32	2.83	Agree
16	Breeds academic laxity	80	34	16	20	3.16	Agree

Results from table 3 above revealed that with a mean score of 2.50 and above that all the 8 items in the instrument which include academic frustration, academic procrastination, hinders academic resilience, encourages boycott of lectures, academic anxiety, academic stress, hinders self-resilience and breeds academic laxity were among the impact of grade sorting on academic motivation of undergraduates in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

Table 4: Mean Scores of Undergraduates on the Possible Measures for Curbing Grade Sorting in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka; **N = 150**

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	X	Remark
17	University authorities should emphasize skill and knowledge acquisition rather than grades.	36	58	26	30	2.67	Agree
18	Definite suspension of any involved student.	62	38	23	27	2.90	Agree
19	Defaulting lecturers should be dismissed from their appointment	48	55	15	32	2.79	Agree
20	Names of defaulting lecturers should be submitted to Nigeria Universities Commission to stop their appointment in another university.	53	58	22	17	2.98	Agree
21	Only men of integrity should constitute disciplinary panel where defaulting lecturers are probed	89	24	16	21	3.21	Agree
22	Parents should desist from imposing expectations beyond the mental ability and capacity of their children on them.	57	38	18	37	2.77	Agree

Table 4 shows the students agreement with a mean score of 2.50 and above that measures like emphasizing of skills and knowledge rather than skills, dismissal of defaulting

lecturers, termination the admission of concerned students, forwarding the names of defaulting lecturers to NUC to stop their new appointment with another university, parental expectation should align with their children's ability and only men of integrity should constitute members of disciplinary panel where defaulting lecturers are probed could be effective for curbing grade sorting in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

Discussion

The findings of the study revealed the prevalence of grade sorting among undergraduates in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. This agrees with the findings of Osuji (2016) that grade sorting is an undisputable vice that has assumed a worrisome state in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Chukwu et al (2016) also aligned with this finding that grade sorting is deeply rooted in higher institutions in Nigeria. The findings of the study is also not different from that of Osunde (2012) who asserted that recently grade sorting has been recognized as one of the corrupt practices destroying tertiary education in Nigeria.

The findings of the study showed that a number of factors have been enumerated as motivation for perpetuation of grade sorting. Supporting this finding is the research works of Osuji (2016); Estifesti (2013); Osunde (2012) and Offiah (2019) who unilaterally that students desire to get good grades, imposition/coercion/threat from concerned lecturers, low cognitive ability, greed and peer influence were some of the possible causes of students engagement in grade sorting.

The findings of the study revealed that grade sorting among students has impact on their academic motivation which includes academic laxity, academic procrastination, truancy, hinders diligence and academic self efficacy among others. This agrees with the findings of Chukwu et al (2016) and Orizu (2014) that lack of commitment and dedication to academic work, truancy, poor resilience and academic laxity are impacts of grade sorting on academic motivation of students.

Furthermore, the findings of the study revealed emphasizing of skills and knowledge rather than skills, dismissal of defaulting lecturers, termination the admission of concerned students, forwarding the names of defaulting lecturers to NUC to stop their new appointment with another university, parental expectation should align with their children's ability and only men of integrity should constitute members of disciplinary panel where defaulting lecturers are probed could be effective for curbing grade sorting in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The research work of Estifesti (2013) align with this finding that students caught in the act of grade sorting should have their admission revoked or definitely suspended. He went further to suggest that defaulting lecturers should be sacked from duty with extreme measures taken on them to ensure they were not recruited again by any university.

Conclusion

The researchers conclude as follows:

1. There is prevalence of grade sorting among undergraduates in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

2. Grade sorting has a serious impact on the academic motivation of undergraduates in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the researchers recommend as follows:

1. Those involved in curriculum planning of tertiary institutions as well as the University Authorities should emphasize discovery, skill and knowledge acquisition rather than scores/grades. This is because emphasis on grades hinders commitment and dedication to learning and learning activities which is the primary purpose of education.
2. Unhealthy parental supposition is implicated as one of the reasons for students' indulgence in grade sorting. This is because the student will look for any possible avenue to meet his/her parental desire. On this note, the researchers' advocate that every parental expectation should take into consideration the mental ability and capacity of the student.
3. Parents are advised to keep proper watch on their children, monitor the peer group/gang of your ward and give parental guidance and direction to avoid irresponsible peer gang/association.

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