Changing the Old Narratives and Approaches in Curbing Corruption[1]

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Abstract:

This paper examines the perspective of public officials in Nigeria about corruption and why corruption continues despite numerous efforts to curtail it. The study conducts a survey among a range of public officials in Nigeria. The paper finds that individuals tend to normalize corruption as they grow older. The results also indicate a slight difference regarding the beliefs of economic versus moral harm of corruption between different religious backgrounds of the public officials. The study concludes that establishing an alternative narrative at younger ages by raising awareness and education among school aged children could assist in preventing and normalizing corruption in later years.

Introduction

In Nigeria, corruption is widely prevalent, which is a significant cause of social conflicts, destitution, low economic development, insecurity, and poverty among Nigeria's population (Fiyin, 2017). Corruption is 'dismembering' the Nigerian state because corruption in Nigeria has spread across various political institutions, police, health sectors, the judiciary, educational institutions, and business boardrooms (Fiyin, 2017). Corruption hindered "the wheel of progress in Nigeria" making it difficult to realize Nigeria's national policies despite Nigeria's vast human and national resources (Mahmoud, 2023). In addition, there is a high value placed on corruption in Nigeria, of which some Nigerians cherish and promote a corrupt culture; hence, some Nigerians see corruption as a usual way to attain their daily living (Nomishan et al., 2022). Reducing corruption in Nigeria will raise Nigeria's domestic savings over a long period (Abu and Staniewski, 2022), and make significant progress toward achieving sustainable development (Das and Drine, 2020). Despite the attention to the pervasive corruption in Nigeria, the country struggles in policies designed to reduce corruption. Nigeria has been called, 'Africa's economic giant,' (Williams, Adeniran, and Ordu, 2023), but cannot fully accept such a role without further reduction to nationwide corruption across a number of economic and political sectors. Consistent high perceived corruption ranks further make it difficult to address politically and reduce economic investment from other nations (Abu and Karim, 2021; Abu and Staniewski, 2022). Practitioners have adjudged corruption as the most significant obstacle preventing Nigeria from realizing greater potential (Matthew, 2018). For example, Transparency International (2020) indicates that Nigeria has remained at the bottom quartile of the Global Corruption Perception Index ranking since 1999.

In Nigeria, there is considerable reliance on public goods by the country's population. The citizens entrust the government to provide public services to meet their daily needs due to large amounts of poverty and underdevelopment. One of the difficulties in providing such public services involves the acts of corrupt policies that benefit public officials to the detriment of the public. Corruption drains a significant number of resources each year and derails development; also, corruption weakens the social contract or trust which exists between the public and the officials (Matthew, 2018). Sometimes this erosion of trust leads to social unrest, such as the "#EndSARS protest," Boko Haram, social agitations, and insecurity. Corruption is a general burden on society and is an important area to study in order to reduce corruption and prevent it in other countries. According to Daniel Jordan Smith (2010), everyday experiences help determine the depth, scope, and corrupt behaviors among Nigerians. When individuals experience corruption as a regular part of their lives, for example, getting a driver's license or applying for a loan, corruption becomes normalized for the population and deepened part of societal life.

Much of the discussion about corruption within Nigeria falls within two primary opinions, excusing and justifying it versus complaining about it (Smith, 2010). Individuals who experience corruption and complain about it regularly, unfortunately, feel impotent to make any changes, while others take part in the corruption due to the necessity of participating in certain tasks in society. For example, Nigeria's corruption extends into different sectors, including economic, petroleum, legislative, and electoral corruption (Matthew, 2018). Sometimes, individuals must participate as victims of corruption at police checkpoints, where commuters pass each day and must bribe the officials in order to continue to their destinations (Smith, 2010).

This paper examines corruption in Nigeria's public sector and outlines modalities towards a narrative change in curbing the menace. This approach addresses corruption at a root level through educational and discursive practices rather than at the policy and enforcement level, which have thus far been relatively ineffective. The next section of the paper discusses corruption in the Nigerian context, followed by a review of the economic implications of corruption, outlining its effect and implication on tax revenue and foreign direct investment (FDI), health, and education. Also, the subsequent section emphasizes Nigeria's effort to curb corruption. Following this discussion, the paper also discusses the methodology used for the surveys, and the results, and concludes that changing the narrative of the corruption approach will assist Nigeria in curtailing corrupt practices by institutionalizing early age corruption awareness and education among <18-years old populations in schools and religious places.

Nigerian Corruption

This section highlights the depth of corruption in Nigeria and how the consistent practices contributed to its normalization. Also, the section discusses different unethical, corrupt practices that compromises public service procurement regulations across Nigeria's public sector. Although efforts to reduce corruption include establishing anti-corruption agencies in 2000 and 2003, the practice continues. Corruption in Nigeria generally involves public official's use of their offices and positions to achieve private gain to which they are otherwise not entitled. However, there is some discussion as to the depth and extent of corruption within Nigerian society. Generally speaking, corruption can be found in all public institutions and many areas of private life, contributing to poverty and poor economic development (Fiyin, 2017).

On one side, scholars argue that corruption in Nigeria is "polyvalent" with multifaceted proportions (Pierce, 2016). This suggests that corruption within Nigeria extends beyond public office and occurs in a variety of contexts. If we assume that Nigerian corruption extends beyond public offices, it is important to note that this suggests corruption is a norm within society. In other words, corruption is an accepted part of interaction in both the private and public spheres. Pierce traces the evolution of

corruption conception in Nigerian society to over 150 years suggesting the impossibility of understand Nigerian statecraft without conceptualizing the role of corruption (Pierce, 2016). Corruption accusations are an essential political tool within Nigeria's public sphere even as the country struggles for "development" (Pierce, 2016). Also, the culture of corruption in Nigeria has allowed Nigerians to both "demand and condemn" corruption (Pierce, 2016).

On the other hand, Joseph (1987) describes corruption in Nigeria as "prebendalism" — emphasizing how public officials in Nigeria use their office for private gain purposes. This not only places corruption firmly in places of public office but also suggests that public officials feel entitled to private gain after gaining office. As such, the quest for personal gain is rife in public procurements, where Nigeria's most significant corruption activities occur (Fagbadebo and Mbada, 2021). Arguably, the pervasiveness is visible in several abandoned and incomplete public projects and infrastructures with no trace of the allocated resources for deserted projects. For instance, according to project tracking reports, between 1962 and 2012, there were over 11,000 estimated abandoned public projects across Nigeria (BudgIT Nigeria, 2019). A recent report indicates that Nigeria's number of abandoned public projects is now more than 55,000; these include schools, hospitals, roads, and other critical public infrastructures worth N12 trillion ($28.8 billion in 2022 US dollars) (Vanguard News, 2021).

In general, different unethical practices compromise procurement regulations, effective public service delivery, and due process in Nigeria's public sector. Hence, it hinders citizens' socio-economic aspirations, although government efforts to curtail these malfeasances and ensure good use of public resources have not yielded the desired results (Fagbadebo and Mbada, 2021). These different proportions and nuances of corruption in Nigeria include contract fraud to petty societal bribery. More specifically, corrupt practices include public resource embezzlement and more complicated money laundering schemes which occur in connivance with corporate entities—pocketing of "ghost workers" salaries by top public executives to trading in influence and acts of clientelism/nepotism in public office recruitments.

Interestingly, successive Nigerian governments, notably since the country returned to democratic governance in 1999, took measures to curb corruption without success. In 2000 and 2003, respectively, then President Olusegun Obasanjo established anti-corruption agencies, "the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC), and Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC)" (Human Rights Watch, 2011). The government designated these two anti-corruption agencies specifically to prevent corrupt practices. Available data shows that between 2010 and 2019, EFCC has received over 70,000 corruption petitions; however, the agency investigated only about 5000 cases, and achieved 2,544 convictions (Anaba, Ojelu and Dania, 2022). The figure shows the difficulty in investigation and insufficient prosecuting capacity by the anti-corruption agency. In other words, it is arguable to contend that the anti-corruption agency is overwhelmed by the numerous corruption petitions. Due to lack of adequate

funding, or other unspecified reasons, the anti-corruption agency prefers selective investigation and prosecution.

Although the anti-corruption agencies are doing their best to curtail corruption, considering over 2000 convictions it achieved over ten years, Nigeria continues to witness high incidents of corruption. For instance, the Transparency International Corruption Perception Index (CPI) shows that Nigeria is falling back compared to its previous CPI results. In 2019 Nigeria's CPI score had dropped from 26 in 2019 to 25 in 2020, whereas in 2021, the score dropped further to 24 (Ojo, 2022). These indices imply rising and continuing corrupt practices across Nigeria. Notwithstanding massive human and national resources to have a functional and productive state, Nigeria continues to battle high levels of corrupt practices (Mahmoud, 2023).

The Economic Implication of Corruption

The previous section demonstrated the extent to which corruption is widespread in Nigeria throughout public and private sectors. This section examines the effects of corruption on the economic sector, primarily in the areas of tax revenue, FDI and natural resources, health, and education. In addition, this section addresses the argument made by some scholars that corruption can act as a way to increase speed of action in some economic systems.

Although many scholars discuss the important negative consequences corruption contributes to economic conditions, some scholars suggest that corruption produces positive effects by "greasing" the economic "wheels" in highly regulated countries. Essentially, these highly regulated countries often lack effective governance systems; therefore, corruption helps in compensating for institutional deficiencies (Chêne, 2014). This argument extends to political systems with highly developed bureaucratic systems that might be slow moving with many procedural hurdles. In these developed economies, corruption can increase the speed and likelihood of proceeding this contributes to economic growth by removing bureaucratic barriers and inefficient regulations (Méon and Sekkat, 2005). Thus, some developed economies are said to improve their economic conditions through corrupt practices by potentially removing some bureaucratic barriers and increasing the speed of changes in highly developed countries with strong and developed bureaucratic systems. This argument, however, is generally limited to countries with highly developed and strong bureaucratic systems rather than underdeveloped political systems, making these arguments less applicable to countries like Nigeria.

It is critical to note that even if corruption "greases" economic "wheels" by penetrating over-regulated public institutions, this does not translate to economic growth (Dreher and Gassebner, 2013). According to Osterfeld (1992), two specific behaviors often divide corrupt actions, "economically restrictive and economically

expansionary." Corruption is restrictive when firms, for instance, seek government protection from competitors. In contrast, corruption expands economic activities when citizens bribe public officials to penetrate over-regulated or restrictive bureaucracies (Houston, 2007). Notwithstanding, the quality of political administration, even though often regime-specific, is essential in determining corruption's impact on economic growth (Méndez and Sepúlveda, 2006). Also, whether "restrictive" or "expansionary," some suggest that contextual factors such as governance quality and level of development can mitigate these effects of corruption (Ugur and Dasgupta, 2011).

In particular, the quality of political regimes and public governance determines the degree of corruption's harmful effects (Houston, 2007; Meon and Weill, 2010). Corruption will be less harmful when personal and property rights are well-protected by law through quality political regimes and governance. However, the same cannot hold in countries with weak political regimes and corrupt public governance (Houston, 2007). Although Samuel Huntington (1968) argued that corruption is a valuable substitute for weak political regimes and corrupt public governance because the value of behaving corruptly outweighs the worth of productive and legitimate transactions. These circumstances are more likely where and when legal options and incentives are scarce or severely constrained for doing business (Houston, 2007).

The "restrictive" nor "expansionary" proceeds of corruption influence the economic and political systems because there is limited control on how corrupt individuals can use such illicit resources. However, different scholars and practitioners have attributed various causes to why a multifaceted economic implication of corruption is detrimental to economic growth and development. For instance, Chêne (2014) opined that corruption is economically damaging because of its diverse proportions and unpredictability. The multifarious nature of corruption and its uncertainty damages market incentives by distorting the allocation of resources to legitimate commerce. Additionally, it diverts human resources from productive and legitimate ventures to rent-seeking activities (Mauro, 1995).

On the other hand, corruption permits the diversion of public resources for personal gain purposes and ultimately increases income inequality (Gyimah-Brempong, 2002). However, the consistent diversion of public resources increases the overall rate of corruption, necessitating different corrupt activities over time. As corrupt activities increase, income inequality also increases reducing investment in physical capital. Hence, the declined investment combined with the income disparity decreases income growth and increases inequality; ultimately, these consequences mainly affect the poor (Gyimah-Brempong, 2002). These negative corruption trends increase the effects on economic growth and stymie development (Egunjobi, 2013).

In this regard, the upsurge in income inequality reduces economic efficiency and increases political and social instability (Leite and Weidmann, 1999; Mo, 2001). On different occasions, income inequality divides opinion among citizens about corruption

as people struggle for daily survival, hence delving into various corrupt activities to sustain their livelihood. Arguably, corruption is the primary driver of most social instability emanating from meagre resource agitation among growing populations and the desire to accumulate more wealth among the corrupt political elite. Corruption in an unstable society correlates with lower economic growth and negatively influences other social and political vices (Rothstein and Holmberg, 2011). These instabilities generally distort economic growth and increase unaccountability in public service (Ugur and Dasgupta, 2011). Some of this unaccountability reflects heavily in poor tax revenue collection and dysfunctional inflow of foreign investments.

Tax Revenue and FDI

Corruption can cause a decrease in tax revenue for the state, thus reducing the effectiveness of state governance. There are two mechanisms by which this influence occurs. In one case, corruption at higher government levels lowers the propensity of individuals to follow tax regulations and pay taxes appropriately (Attila, 2008; Nawaz, 2010). In other cases, corruption can lower the tax to gross domestic product (GDP) ratio (Nawaz, 2010).

For the first mechanism, Tanzi and Davoodi (2000) discovered a statistically significant negative link to growth in tax bargains between individual taxpayers and corrupt tax inspectors, subsequently reducing GPD. The authors identified that when an individual negotiates their income tax liability with corrupt tax inspectors, the mutual interest of both parties creates underreporting tax revenue from inadequate tax collection. In this instance, a bribe bargain is created between the taxpayer and the tax inspector specifying the desired bribe amount to be paid in relation to the tax rate. Such a tax system of bribe bargains increases corruption and reduces income taxes. This effect continues and can spiral into additional loss in tax collection amounts increasing bribe gains to the tax inspectors. The increase in bribes emboldens tax inspectors to persist in extorting taxpayers to collect higher amounts (Hindricks, Michael, and Abinay, 1999).

Tax corruption can also have a ripple effect on other tax categories, for example, the value-added tax (VAT) or turnover and sales tax. Individuals and businesses increasingly evade tax payments in a densely corrupt environment. Also, even when these affected individuals and businesses pay inaccurate tax amounts, these illegal behaviors reduce the country's tax revenue (Fuest, Maffini, and Riedel, 2010). In addition, many small and medium-sized firms operating in such corrupt atmospheres exploit such gaps intentionally to reduce their tax burden (Fuest, Maffini and Riedel, 2010).

For the second mechanism, the World Bank suggests that densely corrupt countries collect fewer tax revenues in ratio to their GDP (World Bank, 2022b), while less corrupt countries can sustain high tax revenues (Kaufmann, et al., 2000). This is

possible because there is a limited efficient tax regulatory system in a corrupt environment. In addition, some large multinational corporations exit to other investment destinations once they sense a densely corrupt environment (Kaufmann et al., 2000). Meanwhile, collecting less than 15% of GDP in taxes due to corruption, particularly in fragile states, drains the government revenue and capacity to meet the citizens' basic needs (World Bank, 2022b). Accurate tax collection is a critical tipping point that makes a state viable for economic growth (World Bank, 2022b).

Economic corruption also discourages foreign direct investments (FDI), hinders local business growth, and prevents investments in entrepreneurship (Chêne, 2014), which all contribute to lower GDP. For instance, investors are skeptical of investing in corrupt prone countries (Żurawicki and Habib, 2010), which can lead to a significant reduction in FDI in most countries (Wei, 2001). United States of America FDI outflows revealed that countries with widespread corruption attract limited investments from firms (Sanyal and Samanta, 2008). FDI is closely coupled with corruption indicators and the rule of law (Gani, 2007).

Overall, the corruption level indices show that Nigeria has continued to rank low in the Global Corruption Perception Index since 1999 (Transparency International, 2020). The index report shows that Nigeria has struggled to curtail corruption for the past two decades, which may have severely affected its FDI investment growth. Notably, the opportunity to attract reasonable FDI will be limited if the corruption perception ranking continues to diminish. Taxes have a pivotal role in making growth sustainable and equitable. Because corruption continues to hinder tax collection, countries like Nigeria struggle to finance their development. Hence government must deduce means that will improve competitiveness in tax collection because overly complicated tax systems allow corruption, tax evasion, and other informal tax collecting means to thrive.

Health and Education

In addition to direct effects on taxes and investment, corruption has spillover effects into other areas, which compound and spiral into adverse economic effects in the longer term. The ripple economic effects raise the cost of doing business and reduce revenue on investment and the investment-to-GDP ratio (Mauro, 1995). Corruption, through the previously discussed negative economic effects, can decrease government income, and reduce public spending on health care and education, creating further harm to economic growth (Tanzi and Davoodi, 1997). Also, in a corrupt political environment, achieving a stable mobilization of resources to meet the medical and educational needs of society becomes more difficult, further compounding the negative effects of corruption on society (Tormusa and Idom, 2016). Corruption occurs even within the

Nigerian healthcare sector, causing additional economic and compounding effects (Tormusa and Idom, 2016).

Individual interests within the health industry weaken public healthcare regulations, and such interest causes absenteeism from duty and nepotism. Often, healthcare workers are not accountable to the regulatory authority and take advantage of the corrupt environment to gain personal benefits (Tormusa and Idom, 2016). These issues in Nigeria are similar to issues in other regions, such as Ghana, where corruption exists in different healthcare units; thus, it has cost many human lives (Agbenorku, 2012). Also, in Ghana, the health sector's challenges have promoted the underutilization of public resources due to corruption, and the poor are most affected (Agbenorku, 2012). The challenge is that West African countries are generally ranked low in the global corruption perception index.

Some of the corrupt practices include diverting patients from a public hospital to privately owned health facilities, the misappropriation of the health budget through procurement, drug theft, and improper supplies of drugs to the hospital (Onwujekwe et al., 2019). One challenge to curtailing health related corruption in some of the affected West African countries emanate from lack of thorough empirical investigations (Onwujekwe et al., 2019).

Overall, the healthcare situation in Nigeria is in decline, with a life expectancy declining from 47 to 43 years in 2015 (World Health Organization, 2015). However, according to recent data, life expectancy in Nigeria has increased to 55 years in 2019 (World Bank, 2019). There is no clear reason for this increase; though the World Health Organization's vital priorities in assisting member states are critical factors that enhance global health standards. The World Health Organization helps member states improve their health care through research and technical support (World Health Organization, 2019). However, the adverse effects of corruption locally could derail some of these efforts of the World Health Organization. On the other hand, the infant mortality ratio shows 114 deaths per 1000 live births in Nigeria (World Bank, 2022a). This high number of deaths per birth ratio is also partially attributed to the high level of corruption in public health care.

Education is another important sector that has also faced a series of corruption challenges. As such, Nigeria's education sector battles severe corruption challenges, draining quality and sustainable development (Nwaokugha and Ezeugwu, 2017). Conversely, corruption in Nigeria's education sector has negatively affected social equality, competence, and merit-based recruitment (Nwaokugha and Ezeugwu, 2017). In addition, the lack of educational strategy for the population permits inadequate economic and job opportunities, which in turn increases insurgency, terrorism, kidnapping, and other criminal activities (Abraham, 2011).

Corruption in critical social sectors ads to the burden of corruption in the economic sectors. The multifaceted economic implications impede significant economic growth and development drivers such as tax revenue, FDI, health, and education. Therefore, it is necessary to seek ways to curtail political and economic corruption. The previous discussion highlights the importance of corruption eradication in Nigerian society and the negative effects of the widespread practice of corruption. The discussion also shows that corruption within Nigeria is widespread and part of the normal operations of society. These two points are important for examining the narrative around corruption and altering the narrative to reduce the levels of corruption among later generations of workers in government and other fields. The next section further develops our understanding of corrupt practices in Nigeria by examining Nigeria's efforts to curb corruption. Following this discussion, the paper then examines an avenue to introduce an alternative narrative to reduce corruption.

Nigeria's Effort to Curb Corruption

Nigeria has applied different mechanisms such as establishing anti-corruption institutions and agencies to curb corruption. Nigeria's expansive corruption issues require a framework to understand the phenomenon, yet there is no common ground for such knowledge. Citizens understand the impact of corruption and how it has contributed immensely to the country's high economic and social instability. The continuing mistrust between the political class and the citizens about the government's commitment to eradicate or curtail corruption may also reduce effectiveness of any anti-corruption policies. However, the roles of the public institution are essential in grasping corruption's implications and how to tackle the problem. This section shows the role and efforts of Nigeria's anti-corruption agencies toward curbing corruption.

The three leading anti-corruption agencies (i.e.) the EFCC, the ICPC, and "the Code of Conduct Bureau" are responsible for fighting corruption though they have also been accused of corrupt practices (Matthew, 2018). For instance, in 2011, the then Nigerian attorney general, alongside the chairperson of EFCC, faced accusations of undermining and obstructing the prosecution of public officials because of personal affiliation and interest (Albin-Lackey and Guttschuss, 2011). Also, the same Nigerian attorney general reportedly thwarted the United Kingdom's effort to recover looted public funds from a former Nigerian state governor (Coulson, 2007). In addition, the chairperson of the EFCC undermined the same institution's prosecution and investigative efforts, which orchestrated the United States of America's suspension of its assistance to the agency (Saharareporters News, 2011). Again, in 2015 and 2020, respectively, the chairpersons of EFCC, Ibrahim Lamorde, and Ibrahim Magu, were suspended from office due to corruption allegations (British Broadcasting Corporation ,2015 and State House News, 2020). These instances of corruption and corruption accusations within the anti-corruption institutions in Nigeria point to the pervasiveness of the practice

throughout society, normalizing the practice among a variety of individuals spread throughout the government.

Corruption peddling among the top hierarchy of the anti-corruption agencies, weak government institutions, and a lack of robust legal framework has necessitated lengthy investigation and prosecution of corrupt cases (UNODC, 2019). In addition to the internal corruption allegations, critics accuse the Nigerian anti-corruption agencies of turning a blind eye to the allies of the incumbent president over their respective corrupt deeds. For instance, a member of the parliament indicted President Muhammadu Buhari for using anti-corruption agencies lopsidedly to target his political rivals (Daniel, 2018). Also, critics blamed successive Nigerian presidents for using the anti-corruption agencies to fight politically perceived enemies and opponents (Daniel, 2018). This back-and-forth has since derailed Nigeria's public institutions' capacity to discharge their duties "without fear or favor."

When the institutions responsible for fighting corruption are also corrupt, this increases the delay in the prosecution and enforcement of corruption laws. The lengthy prosecution of corruption cases in Nigeria is of most concern because delayed judgment incurs additional costs for prosecuting government agencies. For instance, some corruption cases in Nigeria take a prolonged duration to conclude, costing enormous public resources. Some include [EFCC vs. Joshua Dariye 2007 ~ 2021, completed and convicted], [EFCC vs. Orji Uzor Kalu 2007 ~ 2021, inconclusive], and so many other corruption litigations facing a similar fate (TheCable News 2020, 2021). The lengthy prosecution of these corruption cases indicates that corrupt activities occur mainly in secret, necessitating enough evidence to obtain judgments (Peter and Nick, 2013).

Unfortunately, the good intention to establish anti-corruption agencies does not produce the desired results because of the internal corruption practices of top agency officials. The main challenge of corrupt practices in Nigeria is normalization of corruption in society. The challenges facing anti-corruption agencies in Nigeria lead to issues of corruption among its top executives and sabotaging prosecution of public officials because of vested interest. Also, lengthy investigations and prosecution of alleged corrupt individuals in Nigeria are expensive, can obstruct justice, and weaken the judicial system. It is paramount to achieve a paradigm shift towards a less corrupt Nigerian society and reduce the normalization of the behavior and pervasiveness across a variety of institutions and individuals that can also alter the corrupt practices within the anti-corruption agencies responsible for fighting corruption. The previous efforts to combat corruption have not considered the degree to which corruption is normalized within society. This paper explores current beliefs about corruption in Nigeria using survey methods and describes a new narrative to help reduce corruption in Nigeria, with particular attention to corrupt practices in public service. The new approach provides a different view regarding corruption reduction and prevention in Nigeria. Hence, the paper used primary data to ascertain public officials' perspectives and

adumbrates possible remedies through a narrative driving discursive policy approach derived from constructivist theory.

The task of altering the narrative and normalization of corruption in a densely corrupt environment is a difficult, though necessary change. If society continues to foster such corrupt practices, altering course becomes increasing difficult as corruption becomes further normalized into more sectors. Therefore, the mutually constitutive relationship between state institutions, the nature and normalization of corruption, the anti-corruption agencies, and the citizens are central, as the constructivist theoretical approach might suggest (Adler, 2002). The belief that state institutional structures are designed to mitigate citizens' challenges often does not correspond with the daily realities of citizens in a corrupt society. Structural change demands emanate from the dissatisfaction of any group in the mutually constitutive relationship. In other words, the corrupt environment is both defined by the citizens and practitioners in this environment along with the institutional norms in society. However, citizens, the primary stakeholders in the mutually exclusive relationship, are expected to adhere to the constancy practice of the agent as stipulated by the institutional or structural rules and norms. The expectation is that citizens' adherence is based on state governing principles; hence, they demand a change once they are dissatisfied with the agent practices. Nevertheless, to address the citizen's demand for change and presumably the problems associated with such proposed change, there is a need to examine concepts of socialization within social processes of interaction between citizens and state agents (Wendt, 1987).

In addition, the structure is not just material but an idea (Wendt, 1999), constituted partly by the practices of those who interact with and within the institution. Change occurs not through a top-down approach of institutional rule implementation, but rather when agents alter the rules and norms through performance and constitutive interaction (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998: 887–917; see also Spandler, 2015: 601–622). According to Adler (2002), "if constructivism is about anything, it is about change." If the world is what we make of it, as Wendt (1999) suggested; individuals, including state agents and citizens, can also un-make any dysfunctional practices such as corruption. Hence, we explored the fundamental premise for change through the formation of a new narrative. Although change occurs at least partly through the agents, Flockhart (2016) suggests that the constructivist concept of change focuses mainly on the structure and its stability instead of agents and change.

As discussed above, we argue that public institutions' consistent predictability is critical in overcoming some of the daunting challenges, including influence peddling, nepotistic tendencies, and agent-citizens conflicts. Also, any new narrative must entail specific actions necessary to curtail corruption activities. These specific actions must not be cumbersome or complicated for average citizens to understand. The common practice must be introduced early enough among individuals of all ages, particularly at a younger age, through education and awareness of corruption implications. In this

regard, a new narrative will suffice through consistent actions and practices. In addition, public enlightenment through communication, education, interrelation, and investigation is critical to achieving the desired results.

This paper argues that agent-led or institutional change against corruption in Nigeria may not work if the country continues on the same trajectory. Hence, we argue that to make change happen in Nigeria fight against corruption, it is necessary to change the narrative in curbing corruption through early education and awareness of corruption implications as a common practice among all individuals in Nigeria. We also posit that a deliberate preventive strategy against corruption is vital to curtail corruption's lengthy investigation and prosecution. Synergies must be directed toward education and prevention because unscrupulous individuals operating in a corrupt environment will attempt to prevent corruption investigations (Peter and Nick, 2013). In order to establish new narratives to fight corruption in Nigeria, we must first determine the current narratives emerging within the population. The next section outlines the methodology used to survey the population and understand current narrative forms.

Research Methods

In order to understand the widespread and normalized view of corruption among public officials, this research utilizes a survey approach. If the survey shows that a narrative or normalized presence of corruption exists among public officials, this supports the conclusion that corruption is a normalized practice and a barrier to reducing corrupt practices beyond institutional controls. A divergent view of corruption among different groups of public officials based on different cultural approaches suggests that a cultural and narrative approach can be helpful in reducing corruption in Nigeria. Although there are several data collection methods, survey method is a strong approach to understand a general belief among the population and is an appropriate research method to answer the research questions (Ponto, 2015). In addition, using a survey for data collection allows sampling over diverse individuals' opinions (Check and Schutt, 2012, p. 160). However, some challenges are associated with the survey method, such as 'coverage error, sampling error, measurement error, and nonresponse error' (Dillman et al., 2014; Singleton and Straits, 2009; Check and Schutt, 2012). This study ensures that it mitigates those errors by providing expansive data collection coverage using SurveyMonkey. SurveyMonkey helps to specify the categories of public officials that are targeted participants, thereby reducing sampling error. The study ensures that the survey questions concisely reflect the study's aims and that a significant percentage of the respondents (92.6%) participated in the data collection, reducing measurement error and nonresponse error.

The data collection was among three categories of the federal civil service in Nigeria: career bureaucrats, elected federal public officials, and appointed federal public

officials. The data sampling ensured mixed gender, age, and religion. The sample (n = 151, 92.6%) included participants from three varieties of federal civil service, comprising a public service population size of 46,488, a 95% confidence level, and a 7% margin of error, indicating 196 potential respondents. Nevertheless, 151 (n = 151, 92.6%) participated in the survey, which is satisfactory for the data analysis.

Data Analysis

This study uses two specific independent variables to examine two dependent variables. Data collected by SurveyMonkey targeted audience responses administered between 9 ~ 11 December 2021, among 151 individuals working in Nigeria's public sector. The survey asked the public officials for their opinion on corruption in public service. The respondents were asked two substantive questions related to corruption; "what best reflects your view on corruption?" and "why do you think corruption continues to exist in public service despite numerous government efforts to prevent it?"

The survey used other survey questions to control for factors which might influence opinions on public sector corruption, such as "age" and "religion" to establish a proxy of the cultural narrative of the respondents. The respondents were public servants aged between <30 and 60 from the two dominant religions in Nigeria, Christians and Muslims. The result shows that most public servants in Nigeria differ in perspectives about corruption in particular, based on age and religion. The data are presented in Table 1 showing the "Age distribution of participants" and in Table 2 below indicating the "Religion of participants." Out of the 151 respondents, 71.33% were males, while 28.67% were females.

Table. 1 Age distribution of participants

Age	Frequency	Percentage
<30	34	22.51%
31~40	73	48.34%
41~50	34	22.51%
51~60	10	6.62%
Total	151	99.98%

Source: SurveyMonkey target audience responses administered between 9 ~ 11 December 2021, among Nigeria's public sector officials.

The data indicates opinion disparities amongst different ages of Nigerian public servants on "what best reflects" their "view on corruption." It shows no consensus among all ages on what corruption in public service entails, whereas the majority (75.5%) agreed that "corruption causes economic harm." The exception is that (19.9%) agreed that "corruption is immoral." In particular, public officials aged <30 ~ 40 have vast disparities in their views regarding corruption. The most intriguing factor is that public officials aged 51~60 (6.6%), with no exception amongst them, agreed that "corruption causes economic harm." It shows that as individuals grow old, they tend to accept the consequences of corruption. Because younger individuals are relatively unaware of corruption and the consequences, they become more aware as they age and participate in the public institutions in Nigeria.

Although another essential finding is that respondents within the young age of <30 ~ 40, totaling about 3.3%, opined that corruption is "good for everyone" and that corruption helps them to "get things done faster." Whereas in the older age bracket, 41 ~ 60, 0.00% responded with such a sentiment. As public officials grow older with work experience and a good number of years in public service, the 41 ~ 60 bracket (23.17%) realize that "corruption causes economic harm." This suggests that corrupt practices take place before these public officials became aware of corruption's economic harmful effects. Since the cost of education and changing the norms at older ages is higher, educating younger people early enough about corruption before they join public service jobs can prevent the severe effects of corruption. To further investigate the respondent's views on corruption and how different segments of the population see corruption in their lives, we examined the relationship between religion and their views, presented in Table 2 Religion of participants.

Table. 2 Religion of participants

Religion	Frequency	Percentage
Christians	109	72.19%
Muslims	42	27.81%
Total	151	100%

Source: SurveyMonkey target audience responses administered between 9 ~ 11 December 2021, among Nigeria's public sector officials.

Most of the respondents were Christians, 72.2%, while 27.8% were Muslims. The result shows no standard view on corruption within any religion. Muslims 22.5% and Christians 52.98% agreed that "corruption causes economic harm." Whereas Muslims 5.29% and Christians 14.56% opined that "corruption is immoral." These

results suggest that there is a difference in the way different religions in Nigeria view corruption. A much higher percentage of Christians in both questions had stronger views against corruption. The causes and effects of these differences within each religious group should be examined in further studies in the future.

In response to why they "think corruption continues to exist in public service despite numerous government efforts to prevent it?" again we see some differences. The Christian group of respondents responded much higher than the Muslim group that the government is not doing enough to stop corruption and that corruption is deep rooted in society. In particular, 18.54% of Muslims and 45.03% of Christians, asserted that "corruption is deeply rooted," while 7.28% of Muslims and 25.16% of Christians agreed that "governments are not doing enough" to curb corruption. Although both groups feel strongly in some capacity about the existence of corruption and the government weakness to fight against the corruption, more Christian respondents believe in these assertions. It is worth considering the importance of religions in beliefs about corruption in future studies. In addition, when composing and implementing educational programs to change narrative understandings, these two groups might be approached differently. Since beliefs vary between the groups, the educational programs may necessitate different implementation strategies.

Discussions

This study examined the widespread corruption in Nigeria's public service through an examination of the current literature in the field. The government of Nigeria acknowledged the vast existence of corruption in the public sector by establishing three leading anti-corruption agencies, (see Human Rights Watch, 2011), though these agencies are largely ineffective somewhat due to their own internal corrupt practices. The issues surrounding lengthy corruption prosecution in Nigeria have influenced some public officials to engage in corruption, considering that it may take a long time before state institutions in Nigeria can obtain judgment over corrupt cases. While some cases may take extended periods to resolve, other cases remain inconclusive, costing prosecuting state agencies enormous public resources. Notwithstanding the cost of prosecution, the lengthy duration of litigation emboldens other public officials to engage in corrupt practices, knowing that it will take longer or never to adjudicate, (see TheCable 2020, 2021).

The survey study showed that the Nigerian state hires individuals relatively unaware of corruption effects and implications at younger ages. From the respondents varying opinions, we find that common knowledge of corruption among public officials comes in later years of public service. This suggests that corruption is more likely to occur prior to becoming aware of the damaging effects. The disparity in the views of public servants shows the depth of normalization and how deeply rooted it has become

in Nigeria's public space. Unfortunately, most public servants in Nigeria are unaware of corruption effects and its implications before joining public service, and this is one of the major problems of corruption in Nigeria's public sector.

Most respondents suggested that the government is not doing enough to curtail corruption and that corruption causes economic harm. Despite the common thread within the survey results, lack of regulation or government involvement preventing corruption has not been very successful in the past. Thus, a new educational narrative developed earlier can help increase understanding and knowledge about corruption, reducing the practice from younger ages. In addition, the government can do better by ensuring transparency in corruption prosecution and reducing lengthy corruption prosecution. Nevertheless, both the government and the public must ensure early awareness among all individuals about corruption effects and implications before joining public service.

Conclusion

It is important to reiterate the overview of our earlier submission about the effects and implications of corruption. As highlighted above, some of these effects include that corruption impedes development and causes economic and moral harm in Nigeria. We also submit that individuals tend to normalize corruption as they grow older due to certain work conditions in Nigeria's public service. Hence, we conclude that having an alternative narrative at younger ages by raising early awareness and education will assist Nigeria tremendously in curbing corruption.

We arrived at this conclusion based on the analysis of public servants' opinions about corruption in Nigeria. For instance, responses to the first question indicate that the understanding of corruption as "immoral" increases among people aged 31~40 (11.3%), while the same view was not prominent amongst people aged 41~50 (5.9%). Meanwhile, people aged 51~60 (0.0%) completely disregarded such a notion. In contrast, individuals aged 51~60 all agreed 10/10 (i.e., 100%) that "corruption causes economic harm." This outcome indicates that age is a significant factor in understanding corruption in Nigerian public service. Therefore, an emphasis on early age education to establish a consensus and framework on what corruption entails, its implications, and how to curb the phenomenon is an important approach to maintain a clear normalized narrative from early to later years in life.

For instance, Nelson Mandela once opined that "education is the most powerful weapon that can be used to change the world" (Fiyin, 2017). Specifically, in some developed countries, citizens must attain compulsory education until age 16; this shows the significance of education toward civic responsibility and compliance with social contract and social cohesion (Fiyin, 2017). More so, Ekechukwu (2021) asserted that curbing corruption through education becomes necessary because education helps to

facilitate a national re-orientation and change of mindset towards corruption. Awajiokinor and Muhammad (2022) took a step further to determine the impact of introducing an anti-corruption education curriculum on curbing corruption in Nigeria, particularly at the basic education level. The authors ascertained that including anti-corruption education in the academic curriculum for the primary education level will have a long-term impact on corruption reduction in Nigeria. In addition, Ekechukwu (2021) maintained that anti-corruption education would help the Nigerian state champion severe penalties for corrupt public officials. Thus, using educational systems to name, shame, and publish a comprehensive list of corrupt public officials will severely deter others from engaging in corrupt practices (Ekechukwu, 2021). Thus, such an educational approach will influence attitudinal change among Nigerians towards corruption, considering the early effect of anti-corruption education at the primary level (Awajiokinor and Muhammad, 2022).

Corruption awareness among <18-years old will contribute more significantly to reducing corruption in later years. The data show that individuals >18 years old exhibit mixed views about corruption; perhaps their opinions are aligned from age 51 to 60 years old. The implication is that if people are not fully aware of corruption at <18, there is a high possibility that the menace would have become widespread among different individuals at >18 ~ 50. Accordingly, conscious, and consistent citizen early corruption awareness and education will give Nigeria's public sector the desired results in curtailing its pervasive corruption. We recommend that a bottom-up approach through early age education will empower people from diverse backgrounds to develop similar perspectives about corruption. Although the success of "any" preventive strategy remains with the citizen's commitment, further research is necessary to develop implementation strategies and effectiveness on changing the frames and narrative among the youth through education programs.

Since Nigeria's traditional means of curbing corruption through anti-corruption agencies, prosecutions, legislation, and other international and regional initiatives have not helped to "stem the tide" of corruption in its public service, a new approach is required. Changing the narrative of the corruption approach will assist Nigeria in curtailing corrupt practices by institutionalizing early age corruption awareness and education among <18-years old populations in schools and religious places. Applying this early-age corruption awareness and education among young populations in schools and religious places across densely corrupt countries will assist them in reducing the effects of corruption in their national development and cooperate social existence. Developing educational programs must generally be suited to the different cultures and practices of each nation, however. Though these results may apply widely to a variety of countries with densely corrupt institutions and deeply normalized corrupt routines, changing these narratives and educational practices must be tailored to different cultures and educational practices and norms. Research on different implementation strategies

must take into account these different cultural norms to determine what strategies are best suited to each country.

Conflict of Interest

This paper received research subsidy support for graduate students from "Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University, Beppu Oita, Japan." Declaration of Conflicting Interest: The authors have no competing interests.

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