

Essay

Battling Academic Corruption in Higher Education: Does External Quality Assurance Offer a Ray of Hope?

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Abstract

The post-1980s changes in the global higher education landscape have triggered a burgeoning of incidents of academic corruption in higher education institutions. Since 2000, the discourse on how to combat academic corruption has gained traction in higher education and quality assurance is advanced as one of the strategies for fighting corruption in higher education. In 2016, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation) issued a “wakeup call” to quality assurance systems to take up a leading role in the battle against academic corruption in view of the massive societal risks associated with the vice. However, there is a dearth of empirical and conceptual studies on how the quality assurance systems, in general, and external quality assurance systems, in particular, can take up a leading role in the crusade against academic corruption. This conceptual article, using the crime–punishment model as an analytical lens, discusses how the national quality assurance agencies (and systems) can exercise the leadership role in combating academic corruption. The article advances the setting of academic integrity standards, institutional and program accreditation, accreditation of academic journals, sharing information and promoting whistleblowing, monitoring of institutions, applying sanctions, and ranking of higher education institutions on the basis of integrity indicators as options that are available to quality assurance agencies to exercise their leadership role in combating academic corruption. These approaches are likely to create both incentives and disincentives for the higher education institutions and staff in connection with engaging in academic corruption. Nevertheless, the article takes cognizance of the idea that external quality assurance is necessary but not sufficient in combating corruption at the academy level.

Keywords: academic corruption, combating, higher education, quality assurance

Introduction

Academic corruption—or corruption in higher education—is a global phenomenon that is not new in higher education (Chapman & Lindner, 2016; Mohamedbhai, 2016, 2017; Osipian, 2008; van’t Land, 2017). What appears to be new in the higher education landscape is the post-1990 global attention that has been directed at the vice (Heyneman, 2013) and the transnational ramifications associated with it (Denisova-Schmidt, 2018). This assertion does not infer that the lower subsectors of the education system are islands of integrity, but it does suggest that higher education is more at risk of academic corruption than primary and secondary education. The

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susceptibility of higher education to academic corruption is explicated by, *inter alia*, the enormous benefits that accrue to the individuals from higher education and the stigma associated with failure to obtain a credential from a higher education institution (Chapman & Lindner, 2016; Hallak & Poisson, 2007a). In the 21st century, postsecondary education is perceived as a means to an end. Specifically, higher education is responsible for the “distribution of life chances and privileged access to the labour market” (Martin, 2016, p. 49; Martin & Poisson, 2015, p. 1); acts as a stepping stone to most positions of power, authority, and prestige in most societies (Hallak & Poisson, 2007a); and bolsters salary prospects (Martin, 2016). The post-1980s debate on whether higher education is a public or private good lends credence to the view that higher education pays dividends to individuals, the ripple effect on society notwithstanding.

The burgeoning incidents of academic corruption have not taken place in a vacuum. Arguably, a plethora of post-1980s trends in higher education have amplified the opportunities for academic corruption. These shifts in the higher education landscape include, but are not limited to, the emergence of open and distance learning institutions, the growth in the private provision of higher education, the deregulation of higher education, the growth of transnational higher education, increased competition among students and institutions, and the emergence of private accreditation agencies at international level (Martin, 2016; Pollak & Poisson, 2007a; Stensaker, 2013). Academic corruption at the level of the academy occurs and is often reported in teaching, student admission and recruitment, student assessment credentials and qualifications, and research and publication of theses and dissertations (Chapman & Lindner, 2016; Hallak & Poisson, 2007b; Mohamedbhai, 2016; O’Malley, 2018). The various internal stakeholders in higher education institutions—administrators, academics, and students—are both potential perpetrators of and allies in the crusade against academic corruption. From the angle of sustaining the vice, administrators at the various levels of the academy may be inclined to engage in the following corrupt practices: changing students’ grades for money or favors, basing promotions on inappropriate criteria, running sham journals, displaying nepotism or favoritism, awarding degrees in return for favors, running or collaborating in operating degree mills, and awarding sham degrees (Chapman & Lindner, 2016). Conversely, academics may be inclined to engage in unethical practices such as selling admissions, falsifying data, plagiarizing, gift authoring, and ghost authoring. The student community could be involved in paying for or giving incentives for admission, obtaining advance copies of tests and examinations, plagiarizing, and cheating.

Despite this discourse, there is lack of consensus on what constitutes corruption, generally (and academic corruption, in particular), due to variations in cultural norms across different countries and regions. What may be considered corruption in a particular context may be an acceptable practice in another (Eaton, 2016). In some cultural contexts, the common corrupt practices at the level of the academy (and in higher education systems) are viewed as “unfortunate but necessary” (Eaton, 2018, p. 9). This suggests that a one-size-fits-all approach to combating academic corruption may be counterproductive. In other words, the corruption containment strategies ought to be context sensitive. It should be noted that the practices that have been highlighted here and in which the stakeholders in higher education engage are regarded as corruption in the African higher education landscape.

Academic corruption has attracted considerable concern among the stakeholders in higher education (Chapman & Lindner, 2016). The concern stems from the realization that the vice intensifies inequities (Osipian, 2008) and threatens the “reputation of research products and graduates of the institutions” (Heyneman, 2013, p. 101) regardless of their guilt or innocence as well as the “credibility, effectiveness and quality of higher education” (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization [UNESCO] and Council for Higher Education Accreditation

[CHEA], 2016, p. 9). Furthermore, academic corruption erodes the trust of the employers and the general public in the country's higher education system, prepares underqualified professionals, teaches distorted values and culture (Rumyantseva, 2005), and undermines the cherished value of higher education (Vincent-Lancrin, 2013). Finally, corruption inadvertently sends a message, replete with danger, to the students that "personal success comes, not through merit and hard work, but through favoritism, bribery and fraud" (Chapman & Lindner, 2016, p. 248).

Corruption in higher education is a new field of research. The extant studies on the subject focus on the definitions and nature of academic corruption (Hallak & Poisson, 2007b; Heyneman, 2004; Osipian, 2007), the opportunities for academic dishonesty (Hallak & Poisson, 2007a) and the costs associated with corruption. Since 2000, empirical studies that focus on academic corruption containment approaches have burgeoned (e.g. Hallak & Poisson, 2007b; Heyneman, 2004). However, within the discourse on combating academic corruption, there has been "little attention to whether QA [quality assurance] can play a role in preventing corruption" (CHEA, 2016, p. 3) despite its high potential to prevent and detect the vice (Heyneman, 2013; Martin, 2016; Martin & Poisson, 2015). Together with CHEA, UNESCO—in a 2016 advisory statement—issued a "wake-up call" to the sector's quality assurance systems to take up a leading role in the battle against academic corruption (UNESCO & CHEA, 2016). The advisory statement has received accolades within the higher education community for "providing an opportunity to move forward and to engage this important topic" (Eaton, 2018, p. 8). Nevertheless, there is a dearth of empirical and conceptual studies on how external quality assurance systems can take up a leading role in the anti-academic corruption battle.

It is against this backdrop that this conceptual article, in a bid to add to the debate on the contribution of external quality assurance to tackling academic corruption, provides reflections on the academic corruption containment strategies at the disposal of higher education quality assurance agencies. The next section delves into the conceptual and theoretical underpinnings of the article and is followed by an exposition of the possible strategies for tackling academic corruption.

Conceptual and Theoretical Perspectives

Most publications on corruption in general (and academic corruption, in particular) have adopted either the World Bank's or Transparency International's definition of corruption. The World Bank defined corruption as "the abuse of public office for private gain" (as cited in Wei, 1999, p. 2), whereas Transparency International (2018) regarded it as "the abuse of entrusted power for private gain" (para. 1). Whether, beyond the semantics, the two definitions are fundamentally different or are different sides of the same coin is debatable. The recurrent question in the discourse relates to whether the World Bank's definition, owing to the use of the words *public office*, is applicable to both the public and private spheres in general and public and private higher education in particular. To Denisova-Schmidt (2018), if education is understood to be a public good, then the World Bank's conceptualization of corruption is applicable to both public and private higher education. However, there is no consensus on whether education (specifically, higher education) is a public or private good. Beyond this treatise, Hallak and Poisson (2002) defined corruption in education as "the systematic use of public office for private benefit, whose impact is significant on the availability and quality of educational goods and services, and, as a consequence on access, quality or equity in education" (p. 29). The definition incorporates those of the World Bank and Transparency International and also highlights the ramifications of corruption regarding access, equity, and quality.

Preventing or combating academic corruption is a strategic issue in the higher education subsystems. But are there models that provide reliable lenses to the combatants? The question can be answered in the affirmative. Gary Becker's (1968) crime–punishment model offers useful insights into the forces that sustain academic corruption and the strategies from which higher education institutions and quality assurance systems at institutional, national, and international levels can borrow to launch an onslaught on academic corruption. The >5-decade-old model, albeit fit for the current times, postulates that self-interested individuals will engage in corrupt behavior if the expected gains from corruption outweigh the expected costs (detection and punishment) associated with corrupt acts. According to this model, the level of corruption that an individual is motivated to engage in will be higher when the level of personal gain is higher, the probability of detection is lower, and the penalty is lower. Therefore, the model portrays corruption as a crime of calculation (Klitgaard, 1988).

The model can be extended to include the opportunity for corruption. Klitgaard (1988) identified three variables that affect the opportunity for corruption: discretion, monopoly, and accountability. Thus, corruption = monopoly + discretion – accountability. The greater the level of discretion an individual is given, the greater his or her window of opportunity to extract personal gain through theft, bribes, or other corrupt acts. Without accountability, the officials face little or no risk of punishment for misdeeds and are, therefore, more likely to engage in corrupt behavior (Gonzales de Asis, 2006).

In terms of corruption containment strategies, the model advocates reducing the number of transactions over which individuals have discretion, reducing the scope of gain from each transaction, increasing the probability of detection, and increasing the penalty for corrupt activities (i.e., ensuring that the deterrents outweigh any expected gains). To contain corruption under this framework, one has to have a rule-driven institution that includes strong internal controls and leaves little room for discretion by individuals while increasing their accountability (Boex, Martinex-Vazques & Arze, 2007).

Quality assurance connotes “a continuous process of evaluating (assessing, monitoring, guaranteeing, maintaining, and improving) the quality of a higher education system, institutions or programmes” (Vlăsceanu, Grünber, & Pârlea, 2007, p. 74). Quality assurance in higher education serves two purposes: accountability and improvement of education. Accountability is the *raison d'être* of external quality assurance, whereas improvement is the purpose of internal quality assurance.

External Quality Assurance and Corruption

Generally, there are two types of quality assurance in higher education: internal and external. External quality assurance connotes a form of quality assurance that is performed within state, national, or international higher education systems by bodies outside the higher education institutions. It is an extrinsic form of quality assurance in higher education and a post-1980s phenomenon. Conversely, internal quality assurance is a form of quality assurance that is exercised by the higher education institutions themselves. National quality assurance frameworks (e.g., in Uganda) require higher education institutions to establish quality assurance units.

There is no magic formula to fight academic corruption, and external quality assurance is not a panacea. However, national quality assurance regulatory agencies are uniquely placed to fight academic corruption preventively (Martin, 2016; Stensaker, 2013). The UNESCO and CHEA (2016) advisory statement offers guidance to the quality assurance agencies on the possible preventive actions in the critical areas of the teaching roles of higher education institutions, student admissions and recruitment, student assessment, credentials and qualifications, and

research, theses, and publication. The specific approaches that external quality assurance agencies can use to prevent and/or identify academic corruption can be understood from, inter alia, the purpose of external quality assurance (accountability), the functions of the quality assurance agencies, and the methodologies at the disposal of the agencies to assure the quality of higher education. What follows is an exposition of the mechanisms or approaches that external quality assurance agencies can use to combat academic corruption in higher education.

Setting Academic Integrity Standards

Higher education institutions are expected, though this is not often realized, to be epitomes of academic integrity. It is often believed that observance of academic integrity—“values of honesty, trust, respect, fairness and responsibility” (Heyneman, 2013, p. 103)—is not an endeavor in futility; it pays dividends in terms of the reputation of the institutions, influences potential students’ choice of the institutions, and has a bearing on the quality of the graduates. Academic integrity is intended to ensure that “research, teaching and learning are conducted honestly and fairly by faculty, staff and students alike” (Bretag, 2013, p. 171)—areas that are prone to academic dishonesty. In most national higher education systems in sub-Saharan Africa, the postmassification higher education legislation entrusts national higher education regulatory bodies with the responsibility of setting standards, including academic integrity standards, and monitoring their implementation at the level of the academy.

As the discourse on the role of quality assurance agencies in combating academic corruption gains traction, it is pertinent to reflect on the question: To what extent are integrity standards integral to the general standards for higher education? This question can only be answered through conducting further research. However, there is anecdotal evidence to the effect that academic integrity standards are featured among those in higher education spaces. So, to what extent can the higher education regulatory bodies capitalize on the standards-setting function to prevent and/or identify academic corruption? It should be borne in mind that academic integrity standards are necessary but not sufficient in addressing academic corruption. If the existence of standards was a panacea for academic corruption, then there would be no cases of academic dishonesty at the level of the academy. Nevertheless, academic integrity standards can prevent corruption by “signalling that there are standards and requirements to uphold” (Stensaker, 2013, p. 124).

It is possible for integrity standards to be decoupled from the practices at the institutional level. It is, therefore, pertinent that national higher education regulatory bodies prevail upon the institutions to translate academic integrity standards into institutional-level policies and codes of conduct and disseminate them widely. Just like the national standards, the policies and codes of conduct would have a signaling effect at the academy level. Standards can comprise certain preventive measures, such as appeals and complaints measures that the students can resort to in case of breach of the standards by the internal stakeholders in higher education institutions.

Accreditation of Institutions and Academic Programs

Accreditation, regardless of the form it takes, is a common external quality assurance practice in higher education. Accreditation refers to “the establishment of the status, legitimacy or appropriateness of an institution, programme or mode of study” (Stensaker, 2013, p. 125). In Uganda, accreditation refers to “public acceptance and confirmation evidenced by the grant of a charter that a University meets the requirements and standards of academic excellence set by the National Council [for Higher Education]” (Government of Uganda, 2001, p. 1). It is therefore an affirmation that “a higher education institution or its programmes comply with a set of pre-established standards and criteria” (Martin, 2016, p. 53).

The objects of accreditation are institutions (and their satellite campuses) and academic programs. Institutional accreditation can take on a voluntary basis, as is the case with the United States, and a compulsory basis or a statutory and de jure model. The statutory accreditation necessitates the accreditation of higher education institutions by the quality assurance agencies. Conversely, the de jure accreditation variant implies that higher education institutions are accredited by the law. The de jure accreditation approach is common in sub-Saharan African countries where the public higher education institutions, save for their study programs and satellite campuses, are not candidates for accreditation by the quality assurance agencies. The shortcoming with de jure accreditation of public higher education institutions is that it can inadvertently occasion institutional complacency and, thus, militate against quality improvement and adherence to academic integrity standards. In Uganda, issuance of a charter by the Head of State means that the higher education institution is “accredited and certificates, diplomas, degrees and other academic awards by the University shall be recognised as of comparable and equivalent merit with those of other accredited and Public Universities in Uganda” (Government of Uganda, 2001, Section 103[a]).

Accreditation has the potential to reduce incidents of academic corruption. The extant literature places considerable faith in accreditation as a necessary, but not sufficient, tool to either prevent or battle academic corruption. For instance, Stensaker (2013) asserted that “[a]mong the different mechanisms for QA [quality assurance], accreditation is the most suited to address corruption” (p. 125). This stance is corroborated by Martin (2016), who opined that accreditation has the “highest potential to prevent and identify corruption in higher education” (p. 54). The extant scholarship on the subject leans more toward whether it can combat corruption rather than how it does it or has done it. On the subject of how accreditation can combat corruption, Martin and Poisson (2015) opined that “accreditation can have a strong signalling effect for higher education institutions” (p. 1) and portrays an indirect message that there are standards to be adhered to. Similarly, Heyneman (2013) suggested that the mechanisms to combat academic corruption should be built into the accreditation procedures, and these may include the existence of a sound infrastructure against corruption generally—and academic corruption, in particular. The existence of a sound ethical integrity structure, policies, and practices should be a precondition for accreditation of institutions.

As an academic corruption prevention strategy, accreditation of institutions should not be in perpetuity. There are two approaches to ensuring that accreditation is not infinite: requiring accreditation renewal after a specified period and providing mechanisms for revoking accreditation. In the first approach, the academic integrity record of an institution should be stipulated as a condition for renewal of accreditation. In the second approach, higher education legislation should provide adequate mechanisms for the revocation of the accreditation in instances of demonstrable breach of academic integrity standards. The two approaches have potential to promote institutional adherence to the academic integrity standards.

Accredited higher education institutions may exhibit the tendencies of degree or diploma mills. In Uganda, the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) has often queried the capacity of some higher education institutions to turn out big numbers of doctoral students from a single intake at a single graduation ceremony. When Kampala International University, whose doctoral program was accredited in 2009, graduated 66 doctoral students in 2011 and 2012, the Ugandan quality assurance agency (i.e., NCHE) raised a red flag. An independent assessment of the doctoral theses, under the oversight of NCHE, revealed that the majority of them lacked doctorateness. This culminated in placing a moratorium on Kampala International University regarding admission to a doctoral program and the graduation of doctorates. In 2013, NCHE investigated Kampala University, another private university, over awarding a degree to Hassan

Ali Joho—a prominent Kenyan politician—under questionable circumstances. The Quality Assurance Committee set up by NCHE to probe the Bachelor of Business Administration degree awarded to the politician recommended withdrawal of the degree. The withdrawal of the degree by NCHE in 2013 marked the genesis of a protracted court battle between the university and NCHE. The issue was not whether the politician’s admission was regular or whether he met the minimum graduation requirements but whether the action of NCHE—investigation of the matter of irregular admission and graduation of the politician and withdrawal of the qualification—was *ultra vires* (i.e., beyond the express or implied powers conferred by the law). In 2014, the high court ruled in favor of the university on grounds that NCHE had usurped the powers of the university senate. The ruling of the court and the action(s) of NCHE resulted in tension between institutional autonomy and compliance with the minimum national standards and between the laws and ethics. Whereas the court’s decision met the legal test, it falls short on the ethical barometer.

Accreditation of Journals

Publication is susceptible to academic corruption. The “either publish or perish” dictum in higher education escalates pressure on academics to publish regardless of the outlet. Similarly, the policy requirement by some higher education institutions for doctoral students to publish articles from their theses has provided fertile opportunities for the mushrooming of predatory publishers and journals in the higher education landscape. These publishing outlets lack a rigorous peer-review system and publish works on condition that the author(s) pay a fee rather than basing on the quality of the works. They therefore compromise the creation and dissemination of rigorous scientific works.

Quality assurance systems and higher education institutions are now confronted with this challenge of immense proportions and are devising strategies to contain it. In South Africa, the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) accredits journals that are housed in the country and also publishes a list of indices that are recognized within the South African higher education space. In addition to the locally accredited journals, DHET recognizes the following indices as accredited journals by the DHET: International Bibliography of Social Sciences, the Science Citation Index, the Social Science Citation Index, the Arts and Humanities Citation Index, the Norwegian List, Scopus, and the Scientific Electronic Library Online South Africa.

This practice of accrediting journals reflects an extension of accreditation from institutions (and their satellite campuses) and programs to the research (and publication) mission of higher education institutions. Similarly, on an annual basis, the DHET publishes a list of recognized journals within the South African higher education space. A person ought to have published in a journal that is recognized by DHET to be eligible for a subsidy or to receive recognition for the research output. This, in effect, means that an article in a predatory journal is inadmissible in the national and institutional rewards systems, including promotion. In some higher education systems, national quality assurance agencies publish lists of predatory journals and caution researchers against publishing their works in such journals. Generally, these practices have the potential to promote academic integrity at higher education institutions because, in addition to contributing to knowledge, promotion, rewards, and recognition are among the reasons why academics publish. Therefore, quality assurance agencies should consider adopting accreditation of journals as a quality assurance strategy in the domain of research and publication.

Accreditation of journals has the potential to dissuade researchers from publishing in predatory or fake journals. Just like accredited higher education institutions that may exhibit characteristics of degree mills, accredited journals exhibit the characteristics of predatory journals.

Therefore, the regulatory bodies for higher education should ensure that the indexing and accreditation of journals are not in perpetuity. Basing accreditation on adherence to the tenets of a rigorous peer review system is likely to predispose institutions to the maintenance of academic integrity in publication.

Sharing Information and Promoting Whistleblowing

It is often argued that information is power. In this respect, the quality assurance agencies can capitalize on the power of information to fight academic corruption through empowering the stakeholders with information on, among others, the fake institutions and providing lists of accredited institutions and the respective accredited programs, admission requirements to various programs, the graduation requirements, lists of predatory journals, and the quality standards. Publication of information serves two purposes: It creates a disincentive for potential students to enroll at the institutions and to publish in the predatory journals and it provides information for whistleblowing in case of breach of the standards. Information sharing should go hand in hand with strengthening whistleblowing mechanisms that provide information about corrupt practices at institutional level.

Monitoring of Institutions

One of the ways in which external quality assurance agencies can take a leading role in tackling academic corruption is through monitoring the institutions of higher learning. However, this is constrained by the inadequate human, material, and fiscal resources. Generally, monitoring increases the chances of detection of instances of academic corruption. The chances for actors at the institutional level to engage in unethical conduct are higher if the chances of detection are lower. The monitoring function should be guided by context-specific anticorruption checklists. For monitoring to be effective, it should be regular and also have a surprise element.

Building Integrity Indicators Into Recruitment and Selection Processes

In higher education systems in transitional economies, the recruitment and selection processes for most leaders at the steering core and academic heartland are based on research excellence and the years of working experience. The integrity indicators usually take a back seat in the process. The leaders who score low on the integrity indicators are more predisposed to honor the general standards in higher education and, particularly, the academic integrity standards in breach rather than in practice. Therefore, there is a need to strengthen the gatekeeping function of who becomes a leader at the steering core and academic heartland in higher education institutions, without compromising the principle of institutional autonomy. This, in essence, suggests that integrity indicators should be built into the recruitment and selection process of senior managers of higher education institutions.

Sanctions

The operant conditioning theorists opine that behavior that receives negative consequences (punishments or sanctions) is likely to disappear on the part of the deviant actor and serves as a deterrent to others who may contemplate engaging in similar (mis)conduct. In higher education, academic integrity standards constitute best practices whose breach should, after due process, attract punitive measures such as revocation of accreditation and licenses. In Uganda, the quality assurance agency has been employing sanctions on higher education institutions over breach of academic integrity standards. In 2017, NCHE revoked the provisional license of Busoga University owing to unending irregularities such as admission of students without the requisite admission criteria, teaching unaccredited programs, and irregular graduation

of students who did not qualify. The university exhibited the tendencies of a degree mill when, within 2 months of study at a cost \$1,000 per student, awarded degrees to over 1,000 South Sudanese and Nigerian nationals. This is a manifestation of the cost of the academic dishonesty outweighing the benefits in terms of a few dollars from the foreign students. The closure of institutions sends a strong message to higher education institutions that their provisional licenses or charters are on the line in the event of nonadherence to academic integrity standards, in particular, and the standards applicable to higher education, in general. In the current discourse in Uganda, there are voices that believe that managers of institutions that honor academic integrity standards in breach rather than in practice should be held accountable for academic dishonesty through prosecution. This school of thought is based on two premises. First, fear of personal prosecution or sanctions would create a disincentive from engaging in academic impropriety. Second, it is not the higher education institutions but the behavior of the managers that leads to the closure of the institutions, and hence, the deviant behavior should attract consequences at the individual level.

Ranking Institutions Based on Integrity Indicators and Publishing the Rankings

Generally, the global ranking schemes in higher education are inclined toward prestige and status building (Oyewole, 2010). Higher education institutions are doing whatever it takes to improve their ranking in the various global ranking schemes. A ranking methodology or scheme that principally focuses on academic integrity indicators ought to be explored by quality assurance agencies in national higher education systems. Such ranking schemes can act as an incentive for higher education institutions to improve their academic integrity standing. Poor ranking on the integrity front can occasion enormous reputational damage to institutions and act as a disincentive for students to enroll at the institutions. Similarly, competition among the institutions to be at in the top league is likely to motivate institutions to work toward zero-tolerance for academic dishonesty. Finally, the higher education institutions that perform dismally on the academic integrity index would be compelled to repair the reputational damage through enhancing adherence to the academic integrity standards.

Conclusion

Academic corruption is a wicked problem in higher education. What is often reported in the media and in the numerous investigation reports appears to be on the tip of the iceberg. The burgeoning incidents of academic corruption and the faith in quality higher education as a tool with unequalled potential to promote economic growth and development provide a compelling justification for launching an onslaught on academic corruption. From the stance of the article, the question of whether external quality assurance provides a ray of hope for combating academic corruption can be answered in the affirmative. The efficacy of external quality assurance in curbing academic corruption can be enhanced by skewing it to the accountability imperative. While the prescriptions in this article should not be treated as a blueprint and, therefore, fit for all contexts, they nevertheless provide insights into the approaches that higher education quality assurance agencies could adapt to their contexts. We take cognizance of the fact that the article is not grounded in empirical data, especially on how the suggested practices have impinged on academic corruption in higher education institutions. However, this gap does not diminish the value of the article in the anticorruption discourse. In view of the limitation of the article that has been highlighted here, we recommend studies that are grounded in empirical data and that answer the question of whether and how quality assurance at the upstream has affected incidences of academic corruption in higher education institutions and systems.

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