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INBREEDING IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES: MERITS AND CHALLENGES

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ABSTRACT

Inbreeding in universities is a situation whereby PhD holders or new entrants into the academia are employed in the very institution that they were trained or a student pursues a degree where he/she is currently employed. The phenomenon is becoming widespread with attendant challenges. The paper discussed the concept and dimensions of inbreeding and identified three dimensions: pure inbreed, silver-corded and non-inbreed academics. It noted that cases of inbreeding abound in Nigerian universities and highlighted factors that engender inbreeding. Merits and challenges of inbreeding were discussed. Merits include inbreeding helps to promote academic tradition, ex-students turned academics can defend the institution and its programmes, a clear way of getting highly qualified specialists to be employed so as to reduce recruitment searching process. Challenges discussed include negative impact inbreeding has on qualitative research. The paper concluded that since universities cannot completely avoid inbreeding, strategies that will ensure that the negative impacts of inbreeding on academic staff and the universities are reduced to the barest minimum should be instituted. Recommendations to check negative impact of inbreeding in Nigerian universities were made: that policies in favour of transparency in academic recruitment, credible evaluation and promotion process should be implemented to curb the tendency to inbreed, the practice of inbreeding should be limited to the barest minimum to foster vibrant academic research, lecturers that are inbred should collaborate more often with lecturers trained in other universities in Nigeria and other climes in order to exchange ideas as this would reduce the negative impact of inbreeding on the staff and university, all academics staff should endeavour to own a computer and connect to the internet, each Nigerian university should sponsor and make it mandatory that academic staff attend conferences and other academic activities locally and internationally at least once every session.
Keywords: Inbreeding, Universities, Merits, Challenges

Introduction

Inbreeding is the production of individuals or organisms that are closely related genetically. It is reproduction with those which are related and share similar or common traits or qualities. It is to generate within closely related members of a group of people, animals and plants. It is the mating of closely related individuals as cousins, sire-daughter, brother-sister or self-fertilized plants which

tends to increase the number of individuals that are homozygous for a trait and therefore increases the appearances of recessive traits (Berelson (1960), McGee (1960) and Kristensen and Sorensen, 2005). This implies that parents of inbred individuals are closely related. Furthermore, they noted that inbreeding has been known for centuries to have deleterious effects on the fitness of off-springs in animals and human beings alike.

In academics, inbreeding involves retention of a trainee as staff after graduation. The person involved works in a very familiar environment and he/she may not have the benefit of exposure to professional peers globally. Such a person is likely to have limited knowledge or experience even on professional issues and this might stunt the person's growth in terms of productivity. The non-inbred individual coming from a different training environment is likely to be more knowledgeable about his/her professional expectations and responsibilities and therefore more likely to achieve progress.

Despite these drawbacks, it is remarkably widespread across the globe. However, its predominance varies across the world, universities and disciplines. Bunis (2004) pointed out that inbreeding cut across disciplines such as law, medicine and engineering. Cruz-castro and Sanz-Menendez (2010) state that academic inbreeding is predominant in some European countries: France, Portugal, Spain and Asian countries.

They noted that China, Japan and Korea, for instance recorded more percentage of inbred individuals than the United Kingdom and United States recorded a low percentage with the exception of Ivy League schools in United States where the predominance of university inbreeding is generally much higher. McGee (1960) asserted that the initial interest in inbreeding emerged in the United States at the beginning of the 20tth century and even at the early state of the universities in spite of being considered damaging to the academic profession.

Concept of Academic Inbreeding

Academic inbreeding is the practice of employing former students of an institution as faculty members. Academic inbreeding assumes that only the PhD holders hired by the same university where they graduated and also remained there throughout their career are considered as academically inbred. It is a phenomenon where a student is recruited straight after concluding his bachelor, masters and PhD degrees to become an academic at the same graduating university.
Berelson (1960) asserted that inbreeding is the recruitment practice where institutions employ their own doctoral students after the completion of the university to work for their entire career.

This definition is based on the fact that the faculty member studied in the same university where he/she subsequently works. Horta , Veloso and Grediaga (2007) posited that inbreeding is the practice of retention of the PhDs by the university that trained them. Altbach, Yudkevick and Rumbley (2003) noted that inbreeding is a strategy of rewarding its best intellectual talent by employing them in the university system. Sivak and Yudkevick (2012) pointed out that academic inbreeding is a selection process based on personal relationship rather than the standardized evaluation of applications or the thorough analysis of individual skills.

Soler (2001) noted that inbreeding is a practice where there is a shift in the employment process away from the importance of academic productivity and tend towards the importance of social ties. Mishra and Smyth (2013) asserted that inbreeding is the practice where academic staff received all parts of their training in the university in which he/she is teaching. From the foregoing definitions, inbreeding means a situation where a student is recruited directly after concluding his bachelors, Masters and PhD degrees as an academic staff at the same graduating university.

Where there seems to be a dearth of manpower, it is natural for universities to want to retain their good graduating students as academic employees or member of faculties. The idea behind this practice seems to stem from the saying that "the devil you know is better than the angel you do not know.

Dimensions of Academic Inbreeding

There are dimensions of inbreeding; Duton (1980) presented taxonomy of academic inbreeding as follows:

- **Pure Inbred:** their education and professional experience are restricted to a single institution. It implies spending the entire learning process at one university or having one university education experience.
- **Silver-corded**: These are academics currently working in the same university where the doctoral degree was awarded but started the academic career elsewhere after the completion of the doctorate degree. These are graduates who may be back to his or her university after having a post-graduation experience elsewhere.
- **Non-inbred:** They are the academics working in a university other than the one where the doctorate degree was awarded.

Production and dissemination of new knowledge is a crucial function of the university, therefore, to achieve this sharing and circulating of scholars among universities there is need to create diversity of knowledge in the academia.

Inbreeding in Nigerian Universities

In Nigerian universities cases of inbreeding abound. Many lecturers were absorbed by their alma mater (universities) as a reward for their excellent performance at the point of graduation. Except they teach outside their immediate environment to associate with professional or colleagues from same discipline, they may find themselves unable to compete favourably with others globally on professional matters. In the past academics in Nigerian universities were hired from various parts of the world, most lecturers obtained first degree in Nigeria and afterward pursued post graduate programmes abroad.

Today, the reverse is the situation, in most universities one is likely to find cases where university staff remained in one university for their entire education and academic career since most lecturers were sponsored by their employers on agreement to serve the institutions afterward. Aluede (2009) pointed out that in the recent past, academics in Nigerian universities were drawn from across the globe and that most of them bagged first degrees within the country but pursued their graduate studies abroad later on. Of course, today, there are cases where the academics received the entire education in the same university, never performed research elsewhere, except at their own university based on the reasons such as: oath between employee and employer who trained them, academic vacancies and a few number of PhD holders, economic advantage, brain drain and geographical location or catchment areas.

Otegba (2003) a consultant Gastroenterologist in the college of Medicine maintained that their programmes were not therefore designed to train pure-breed academia even though academic inbreeding is inevitable in training of the fellows and resident doctors. Naija (2015) noted that inbreeding is actually not a real issue as far as for instance, University of Abuja is concerned as most of the people there came from other institutions across the country. The issues of concern are that when universities hire their own students, locally learned knowledge and experience are

reproduced, which narrows horizon and stifles the introduction of new ideas and alternative research directions.

Also there appears to be overemphasis on reproducing or generating locally learned knowledge and practices which were transmitted to them during the learning process. This results in slow progress or blocks new or alternative approaches to the creation of institutional knowledge, limiting institutional change and ultimately contributing to "ossification" of the institution. Increased emphasis in knowledge driven economy has led the private sector to seriously compete with institutions of higher learning for manpower. Consequently, there has been a reduction in the ability of the universities to attract and retain best graduating students. Over the years, the relatively poor university salary caused some of the best candidates from the universities to drift to industries and corporate enterprises. The universities had no option other than to inbreed or recruit less brilliant but qualified applicants at their disposal.

Factors that Engender Inbreeding in Universities

Levinson (2008), Fatunde (1995), Makanjuola (2008) pointed out that over the years hitherto, mutual co-existence and respect for each other's profession enjoyed in the 60s and 70s diminished. There is the challenge of inbreeding: there are academics that belong to the school of thought that an individual who attains his/her first degree, as well as postgraduate degrees up to PhD in the same institution will not make well rounded academic. Apart from that with increase in knowledge driven economy, the private sector has been seriously competing with institutions of higher learning for manpower.

Consequently, there has been reduction in the ability of the universities to attract, hire and retain top graduating students. Over the years, the relatively poor university salary caused some of the best candidates from the universities to drift to industries and the universities had no option than to inbreed or recruit or incorporate less intellect but qualified applicants at their disposal. Utile (2008) posited that the passion for choice of lecturing as a career in the university by the best/first class graduates in the past has been eroded by the love for money which is now widely embraced in the country, thus the institutions had to employ the willing and qualified graduates to become faculty members.

Also, in contemporary times, the change in career progression among university academic staff has been of great concern to the university authorities and faculty members. Fatunde (1995) gave the reasons for this change which include: the quality of graduates recruited, quantum and quality of scholarly publications, staff motivation and stringent condition contained in the promotion guidelines. In the past, there was conducive teaching and learning atmosphere and favourable attitude to university dons by the government probably because of their limited number.

Presently graduates prefer to work in banks, industries and multinational companies for better remuneration and fulfillment. These organizations entice them with huge salary packages and better working conditions, leaving the university community at the mercy of those who are academically average or sometimes below average. Odetunde (2004) noted that these people sometimes proceed to postgraduate studies and opt to secure a place in their department after graduation. Probably, they may be financially incapacitated to continue with their postgraduate studies thereafter. This they do with the hope of changing to the academic unit later. Braimoh (2005) stated that the aftermath of these scenarios include the reduction in the quality of graduates being produced as well as engender inbreeding in Nigerian universities.

Merits of Academic Inbreeding

Monk (2003) asserted that academic inbreeding helps to promote academic tradition. Every university prides itself in its peculiarity and uniqueness. In the course of time it establishes some traditions and would want to perpetuate it. Behind this lies a desire to forge their institutional identities and traditions. Such institutions believe that this tradition could best be maintained by former students being employed as staff because to them, it is not unfamiliar.

Academic inbreeding helps to maintain power relations and status quo. Second, among the non-inbred and silver-corded individuals, sharing of scholars among universities does not only create diversity but promote the circulation and sharing of academic traditions as well as knowledge in the academia. Third, an ex-student turned faculty member can defend the institutional programmes publicly better than a stranger from another background. Fourth, hiring an ex-student is a clear way of getting a highly qualified specialist by discipline which would otherwise follow a difficult process to find.

Bean, Cummings and Mangold (1996) affirmed that employing inbred academics reduces recruitment searching processes as universities feel that their own graduates are well trained and they understand the culture and traditions of their institutions and are competent to fill in the existing academic job vacancies in the university. From the foregoing it is evident that inbreeding is prevalent and acceptable across the world and disciplines. At some point in the development of university education, this practice might have been beneficial as it fostered a fast building of knowledge capability, research team cohesion, reinforcement of institutional identities and belonging, diminished risks including the recruitment gamble and organizational stability. In many institutions, people prefer their own staff trained by themselves because each institution should have its culture. Such cultures are better understood by those trained by those institutions.

Inbreeding and Qualitative Research

Some scholars established that inbreeding has a negative impact on some aspects of university activity. For instance, Eliot in Gorelova and Yudkevick (2015:17) stated that it is natural but not wise for universities to recruit its faculty members mostly from its own graduates. This implies that inbreeding was recognized as an unhealthy practice as far back as 18th century. Peltz and Andrew (1966) pointed out that inbred staff are less creative or innovative than staff employed from outside. This might be due to the fact that during the path of education, students acquire knowledge and learning practices from the institutions in which they studied and will use it as a reference point to instruct future students when they subsequently become faculty members. When universities hire their own students, locally or indigenous learned knowledge and experience are reproduced which stifle the introduction of new ideas and alternative research direction.

The implication is that there will be overemphasis on reproducing locally learned knowledge practices which were transmitted to them during learning processes. This results in slow progress or blocks new or alternative approaches to the creation of institutional knowledge, limiting institutional change and ultimately contributing to "ossification" of the institution. Ossification in this context refers to resistance to innovation and research in academic institution. The foregoing suggests that inbreeding is detrimental to qualitative research practices even in leading research universities. There seems to be a general perception in the university community globally and the larger society, concerning inbreeding as being a negative phenomenon and world-class higher education institutions should not encourage it. Basically, all these discussions imply that university administrator and policy formulators aiming to develop a thriving research culture

or research environments in universities should seriously consider strategies to limit inbreeding practices.

Research productivity is measured by publications in learned journals since any worthwhile research finding must ultimately be communicated either locally or globally. At the point of appraisal for promotion, that is still the major consideration. A visit to the database like the Google scholar is often necessary for the determination of a particular scholar's eligibility for promotion. Another criterion used in the measurement of productivity in universities is the number of citations of those abstracted or indexed papers. It has been observed that inbred academics do not score highly in this regard comparatively. McGee (1960) carried out an empirical analysis which concentrated on the relationship between academic inbreeding and quality of research and concluded that inbred faculty members are more productive than non-inbred faculty members.

Hargens and Farr (1973) found inbred academics to be associated with reduced quality research when compared to non-inbred academics. Wyer and Conrad (1984) used a 1977 survey of American professorate, which encompassed 160 institutions from all major academic discipline to examine the relationship between institutional origins and quality research. They found that the research productivity of inbred academic staff and non-inbred staff is very similar.

Majority of studies found out that inbreeding has a negative impact on research quality. Eisenberg and Wells (2000) in a study of Russian academics reported that inbred faculty member were more likely to publish in lower ranked local journals while those hired from outside were more likely to publish in higher-ranked national journals.

A discussion of the relationship between academic inbreeding and research productivity is important for several reasons: first, universities are central elements in the knowledge based economy and in particular have direct relevance for the national innovations. Nelson (1993) found out that academic inbreeding and university research output is related to national economic and knowledge based outcome. Second, research performance has been shown to be positively correlated with staff well-being or favourable work environment at work in universities.

Torris (2012) noted that findings such as the foregoing have implications for job satisfaction of staff hired from within and those hired from universities other than that from which they graduated. The reason why one might expect inbred staff to be better in research include: inbred staff incur less disruption to their career in the critical early stages. Inbred academic staff may have more established professional ties in the local area than non-inbred academics hired from outside. Datillo (1987) observed that inbred staff may not have to invest as much resources in developing working relationship with new colleagues and understanding the tradition and requirements. From these writing it is believed that inbred academics enjoy all these privileges from their own institutions and this may allow them the opportunity to allocate more time to research. There are however, reasons why inbred staff may not perform as well as non-inbred staff hired from outside.

Horta (2009) assessed research output using the number of papers published in scholarly reviewed journals, books, conference papers and engagement in research activities and found out that inbreeding has a negative effect on research output. Hoarse (1994) gave an analysis that confirmed that inbreeding in universities influence research output. He found out that inbred faculty members appear to be more involved in consultancy activities than non-inbred peers. In a system with limited resources, such as the Nigerian higher education system, individuals may be directing their efforts and time towards research, while inbred faculty members are relatively more devoted to consultancy and other non-research activities. These writings imply that uncontrolled inbreeding practices in universities are damaging to scholarly research activities. Hiring external

researchers into exiting environment is important for the ability of the institutions to generate and process new knowledge as well as reshape the direction of research in the universities.

Idoho (2011) stated that many of the dissertations/theses submitted by inbred staff/student may never go for Bachelors degree project as they do not make any positive impact in terms of quality and contribution to knowledge and nothing significant can be gained from such theses. Furthermore, he noted that this is not surprising as one can hardly know when these staff/students are studying for his/her degree programmes as they are seen in their offices or relaxation spots most of the time. The picture painted above could be attributed to inbreeding that has become wide spread in Nigerian Universities. Inbreeding has impacted negatively on research output in Nigerian universities.

As observed by Eisenberg and Wells (2000) this might occur if members of the selection committee are close to their own graduates or face intense lobbying from other faculty. This is true of the Nigerian Universities system as lobbying for admission and employment has become the order of the day. It is common to find husband and wife in the same department and the husband as head of department, also common is the presence of father and daughter or father and son in the same faculty or department. This state of affairs has seriously affected academic activities and particularly qualitative research in the departments and faculties.

Second, getting published in leading journal relies on the innovativeness of the research idea. Peltz and Andrew (1966) pointed out that inbred staff is less creative or innovative than non-inbred staff hired from the outside. It may be because students acquired knowledge and learning experiences from the institution in which they study and use it as reference point to inform future students when they eventually become academic staff. This is also true of the situation in Nigerian Universities where some graduate students are employed as academic staff at the level of graduate assistant and assistant lecturer. Some lecturers even use the lecture notes given to them when they were students to teach their students without updating them. This has in no small measure affected the quality of the products from Nigerian Universities.

Horta, Veloso and Grediaga (2010) argued that when universities employ their own students, locally learned knowledge practices are reproduced, which make difficult introduction of new ideas and alternative research paths. This is equally true of the situation in Nigerian Universities as students dread carrying out research in novel areas but are comfortable with carrying out research in familiar areas or topics and so only recycle and do not add new ideas.

Caplow and McGee in Horta (2012) stated that unlike inbred staff, silver-corded scholars should be highly productive and competitive academics because they proved themselves worthy elsewhere, securing the right to return to their alma mater. Hargens and Farr (1973) observed silver-corded academics to produce fewer research outputs than non-inbred staff, while Dutton (1980) found out that the research productivity of silver-corded and non-inbred staff was indistinguishable. The present authors are of the belief that the availability of computer and the internet if fully utilized will to a great extent reduce negative impacts of inbreeding in Nigerian Universities. Cases abound where inbred staff were able to publish sound academic papers having taken advantage of modern information technology which has reduced the world to a global village.

According to Eliot in Gorelova and Yudkevick (2015:17) it is natural but not wise for universities to recruit its academic staff mainly from its own graduate. It should be seen as a wake-up call for Nigerian Universities to institute strategies that can be adopted to ensure that more academic staff are recruited outside the universities they were trained.

Conclusion

Inbreeding is widely practiced in Nigerian Universities. Certain factors that exist in universities engender inbreeding. Three dimensions of inbreeding have been identified: pure inbred, silver-corded, and non-inbred academics. Inbreeding is not altogether negative but poses a number of challenges to Nigerian Universities. However, it has been observed that Nigerian Universities cannot thrive without inbreeding, therefore strategies that will ensure that the negative impact of inbreeding on staff and the entire university system should be instituted in order to control negative impact of inbreeding to the barest minimum.

Recommendations

1. Policies in favour of transparency in academic recruitment, credible evaluation and promotion processes should be implemented to curb the tendency to inbreed.
2. Administrators (decision makers) in the universities should limit the practice of inbreeding to the barest minimum in order to foster vibrant academic research.
3. Inbred faculty should endeavour to collaborate more often with lecturers trained in other universities in Nigeria and abroad so that they can exchange ideas as this would reduce the negative impact of inbreeding on inbred staff and the university.
4. All academic staff should endeavour to own a computer and connect to the internet as this will enable lecturers communicate and interact with colleagues locally and internationally in order to be abreast with recent development in methods of teaching and research.
5. Nigerian Universities should sponsor and make it mandatory for academic staff to attend workshops, conferences and other academic activities locally and internationally, at least once in every year. Such interactions will reduce the negative effect of inbreeding in Nigerian Universities.

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