



BAD-BELLEISM IN NIGERIAN ACADEMIA: INTELLECTUAL SABOTAGE AND THE CANKERWORMIC DECLINE OF SCHOLARLY INTEGRITY

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ABSTRACT: *This article examines the phenomenon of Bad-Belleism, a Nigerian idiomatic term that denotes envy-driven antagonism, and its corrosive impact on scholarly integrity within Nigerian academia. Drawing on cultural critique, narrative inquiry, and ethical analysis, the study explores how intellectual sabotage, rivalry, and systemic envy contribute to what is metaphorically described as a “cankerwormic decline”, a slow, hidden erosion of academic values, collegial trust, and knowledge production, much like how a cankerworm gradually destroys a plant from within. Through reflective case narratives and discourse analysis, and a structured Google Forms survey administered to 95 early-career researchers and faculty from universities across Nigeria’s six geopolitical zones, the paper reveals how informal power struggles, citation erasure, and gatekeeping practices undermine scholarly collaboration and epistemic justice. It argues that Bad-Belleism is not merely a social nuisance but a structural pathology that erodes the moral fabric of academic institutions. The study calls for culturally grounded reforms, ethical leadership, and decolonial pedagogies that restore integrity and mutual respect in scholarly communities. Ultimately, it challenges readers to confront the question: Can a knowledge system thrive when envy becomes its hidden curriculum?*

KEYWORDS: Academia, Antagonism, Envy, Integrity, Sabotage.



INTRODUCTION

In a quiet faculty lounge at a Nigerian university, a young lecturer shares her latest manuscript with a senior colleague, hoping for mentorship and collegial feedback. Weeks pass. The manuscript is never returned. Months later, she stumbles upon a published article bearing a striking resemblance to her work, but without her name. Her ideas have been re-packaged, her voice erased. She is advised to “let it go,” lest she be labeled difficult. This story, though painful, is not rare. It reflects a deeper malaise within Nigerian academia: a culture of envy-driven antagonism known locally as *Bad-Belleism*.

Bad-Belleism is a slang Nigerian term that captures the emotional and behavioral dynamics of envy, rivalry, and intellectual sabotage. In academic settings, it manifests through citation erasure, reputational gatekeeping, and informal power struggles that undermine trust, collaboration, and scholarly integrity. These behaviors are not merely interpersonal; they are systemic. They contribute to what this study metaphorically describes as a *cankerwormic decline*, a slow, hidden erosion of academic values, much like how a cankerworm gradually destroys the health of a plant from within.

The metaphor of *cankerwormic decline* is used here to frame the insidious nature of intellectual sabotage in Nigerian universities. It refers to the gradual corrosion of ethical standards, collegial trust, and epistemic justice, often perpetrated under the guise of competition or seniority. As Fricker (2007) argues, epistemic injustice occurs when individuals are wronged in their capacity as knowers, either by being discredited or denied the interpretive tools to make sense of their experiences. In Nigerian academia, early-career researchers and marginalized scholars often face testimonial injustice when their contributions are dismissed, and hermeneutical injustice when their struggles are rendered invisible.

This study draws on critical theory, narrative inquiry, and cultural critique to examine how *Bad-Belleism* operates as both a social behavior and a structural pathology. It responds to the gap in the literature where informal antagonisms, though widely acknowledged in everyday academic life, remain under-theorized and under-documented. While existing research on academic ethics tends to focus on formal misconduct such as plagiarism or data falsification (Resnik, 2020), this study shifts attention to the informal, culturally embedded practices that shape scholarly relationships and institutional dynamics (Busher & James, 2022; Okebukola, 2015).

The culture of academic rivalry in Nigeria is further complicated by hierarchical structures, patronage systems, and limited research funding, which often intensify competition and suppress collaboration (Olayiwola, 2010; Teferra, 2016). Studies have shown that early-career scholars in African universities frequently encounter exclusionary practices, including denial of authorship, intellectual theft, and lack of mentorship (Boshoff, 2009; Mouton, 2010). These experiences are not isolated but embedded in broader institutional cultures that reward visibility over integrity and seniority over merit (Salami, 2020; Ezeanya-Esiobu, 2019).

To explore this phenomenon, the study employs a qualitative design that integrates reflective case narratives with a structured Google Forms survey. The survey was administered to ninety-five early-career researchers and faculty members from universities across Nigeria’s six geopolitical zones, ensuring regional representation and thematic saturation. The goal is to



illuminate the emotional, ethical, and institutional dimensions of *Bad-Belleism*, and to understand how it contributes to the erosion of scholarly integrity.

The research is guided by two objectives: (1) To examine how *Bad-Belleism* manifests as intellectual sabotage and epistemic injustice within Nigerian academic institutions, and (2) To explore the cultural, emotional, and ethical dimensions of academic rivalry through narrative accounts and regional survey data. The central research question is: *How does Bad-Belleism contribute to the erosion of scholarly integrity and collegial trust in Nigerian academia?*

This study ultimately urges the need for reforms rooted in local culture, the promotion of ethical leadership, and the adoption of teaching methods that challenge colonial legacies. These steps are essential for rebuilding integrity and mutual respect within academic communities. The study also poses a critical question for reflection: *Can a system of knowledge truly succeed if envy-driven antagonism and bad-belleism are allowed to shape its underlying values?*

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Nigerian academic landscape is marked by brilliance, resilience, and cultural richness, yet it is also deeply entangled in a web of rivalry, distrust, oppression, and institutional decay. One of the most culturally resonant expressions of this dysfunction is *Bad-Belleism*. This Nigerian slang expression captures envy-driven antagonism, often expressed through subtle sabotage, exclusion, oppression, and intellectual gatekeeping. Though widely recognized in everyday academic discourse, *Bad-Belleism* remains largely absent from formal scholarship, despite its corrosive impact on scholarly integrity and collegial trust.

In Nigerian academia, *Bad-Belleism* manifests in various forms: withholding opportunities, erasing citations, undermining junior colleagues, destructive and harsh criticism, and leveraging institutional power to suppress dissent or innovation. These behaviors are not isolated acts of malice but are embedded in a broader culture of competition and scarcity, where academic success is often perceived as a zero-sum game (Boshoff, 2009; Salami, 2020). The result is a climate where collaboration is stifled, and early-career scholars, especially those without patronage, are vulnerable to intellectual marginalization (Mouton, 2010; Ezeanya-Esiobu, 2019).

This study introduces the metaphor of *cankerwormic* decline to describe the slow, hidden erosion of academic values caused by such antagonism. Like the cankerworm that eats away at a plant from within, *Bad-Belleism* gradually undermines the ethical and epistemic foundations of scholarly communities. Ibrahim (2022) describes this erosion as a “decline of the public good” in Nigerian universities, where institutional priorities have shifted from knowledge production to self-preservation and power consolidation. Similarly, David and Levi (2025) argue that corruption in Nigerian higher education has become a “metastatic cancer,” weakening academic excellence and national development.

The literature on academic ethics often focuses on formal misconduct, plagiarism, data falsification, or authorship disputes (Resnik, 2020), but less attention is paid to informal, culturally embedded practices like envy, sabotage, and exclusion. Yet these practices have profound consequences for epistemic justice. Fricker (2007) defines epistemic injustice as the harm done to individuals in their capacity as knowers, particularly when their contributions are



dismissed or their experiences are rendered unintelligible. In Nigerian academia, such injustice is often perpetuated through citation erasure, reputational damage, and the silencing of dissenting voices (Bush & James, 2022).

Institutional structures also play a role. Chronic underfunding, politicization, and patronage systems have created an environment where merit is often subordinated to loyalty and visibility (Olayiwola, 2010). These conditions not only fuel *Bad-Belleism* but also normalize it, making it difficult for ethical scholars to thrive without compromising their values. As Trotter (2017) notes, the politics of knowledge production in African universities are often shaped by informal hierarchies and unspoken rules that privilege conformity over creativity.

Other scholars have highlighted how systemic envy and sabotage intersect with broader colonial legacies in African higher education. Zeleza (2016) emphasizes that African universities continue to grapple with epistemic dependency, where imported models of scholarship often overshadow indigenous knowledge systems. This dependency creates fertile ground for antagonism, as scholars compete for recognition within frameworks that do not adequately value local contributions. Similarly, Nyamnjoh (2012) critiques the “incompleteness” of African scholarship, arguing that exclusionary practices within academia mirror wider societal struggles for recognition and belonging.

Bad-Belleism also resonates with broader discussions of academic bullying and toxic work cultures. Keashly and Neuman (2010) describe academic bullying as a form of persistent hostility that undermines professional identity and collegial trust. In Nigeria, such hostility often takes culturally specific forms, including ridicule, rumor-spreading, and deliberate obstruction of career progression. These practices erode not only individual morale but also collective capacity for innovation and collaboration.

Furthermore, the phenomenon of citation erasure, where scholars deliberately omit references to colleagues' work, has been identified as a subtle but powerful form of intellectual sabotage. As Ahmed (2019) notes, citation practices are not neutral but deeply political, shaping whose voices are amplified and whose are silenced. In Nigerian academia, citation erasure often reflects envy-driven antagonism, where recognition is withheld as a means of consolidating power.

The consequences of *Bad-Belleism* extend beyond individual careers to the health of the entire academic system. Mamdani (2007) argues that African universities must reclaim their role as sites of critical thought and public good, rather than arenas of personal rivalry and patronage. Without such reclamation, the *cankerwormic* decline of integrity threatens to hollow out the very foundations of knowledge production.

Despite these challenges, there is a growing call for reform. Scholars have advocated for decolonial pedagogies, ethical leadership, and culturally grounded approaches to academic governance (Zeleza, 2016; Ezeanya-Esiobu, 2019). Mbembe (2016) calls for a radical rethinking of African universities, urging them to embrace epistemic diversity and resist the corrosive effects of envy and exclusion. Similarly, Aina (2010) emphasizes the need for ethical leadership that prioritizes integrity and mutual respect over patronage and rivalry.

This study contributes to that conversation by naming and theorizing *Bad-Belleism* as a structural pathology and by proposing *cankerwormic* decline as a conceptual tool for



understanding the slow erosion of scholarly integrity in Nigerian higher education. By situating *Bad-Belleism* within broader debates on epistemic justice, academic ethics, and decolonial reform, it underscores the urgent need for culturally grounded interventions that restore trust, collaboration, and integrity in Nigerian scholarly communities.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored in a multidisciplinary theoretical framework that integrates Critical Theory, Epistemic Injustice, and Narrative Inquiry to interrogate the phenomenon of *Bad-Belleism* in Nigerian academia. These frameworks provide the conceptual tools to examine how envy-driven antagonism manifests as intellectual sabotage, undermining scholarly integrity and epistemic equity.

Critical Theory

Rooted in the Frankfurt School tradition, Critical Theory offers a lens to analyze power, ideology, and systemic dysfunction within academic institutions (Horkheimer, 1972). It enables the researcher to critique how informal hierarchies, gatekeeping, and citation erasure serve as instruments of domination and exclusion. In the context of Nigerian academia, *Bad-Belleism* is interpreted not merely as interpersonal rivalry but as a structural pathology that reflects deeper institutional decay and moral erosion.

Epistemic Injustice

Fricker's (2007) concept of epistemic injustice is central to this study's critique of scholarly sabotage. It refers to the harm done to individuals in their capacity as knowers—through testimonial injustice (being disbelieved or dismissed) and hermeneutical injustice (being denied the tools to make sense of their experiences). Citation erasure, reputational sabotage, and exclusion from academic networks are forms of epistemic injustice that disproportionately affect early-career researchers and scholars from marginalized backgrounds.

Narrative Inquiry

Narrative Inquiry, as developed by Clandinin and Connelly (2000), is employed to humanize the experiences of those affected by *Bad-Belleism*. It allows for the exploration of identity, emotion, and ethical struggle within the lived realities of Nigerian scholars. By foregrounding personal testimonies and reflective accounts, the study resists abstract theorization and centers the voices of those navigating academic hostility.

Together, these frameworks align with the study's objective to expose and critique the cultural, ethical, and structural dimensions of *Bad-Belleism*. They also support the methodological choice to use reflective narratives and structured interviews across Nigeria's geopolitical zones, ensuring both depth and breadth in the analysis.



METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative, interpretive methodology rooted in cultural critique, narrative inquiry, and thematic analysis to examine the phenomenon of *Bad-Belleism*, envy-driven antagonism, in Nigerian academic spaces. The research design was guided by ethical principles for human subject inquiry and aimed to illuminate how intellectual sabotage and informal power dynamics contribute to the erosion of scholarly integrity.

Research Design and Rationale

The study followed a single-case narrative approach, complemented by a structured survey to triangulate findings and broaden contextual understanding. Narrative inquiry, as outlined by Clandinin and Connelly (2000), was used to explore the lived experiences of academic rivalry and epistemic injustice. This design allowed for the integration of personal testimonies, cultural interpretation, and discourse analysis, offering a humanized lens on institutional dysfunction.

Data Sources and Collection

Data were collected from three primary sources:

(i.) *Reflective journals and field notes* from academic collaborators who have experienced or witnessed *Bad-Belleism* in Nigerian institutions (Jan 2019 – Nov 2025).

(ii.) *Public discourse*, including editorials, conference proceedings, and social media commentary relevant to academic rivalry and sabotage incidents (Jan 2019 – Nov 2025).

(iii.) *Structured interviews via Google Forms*, distributed to early-career researchers and faculty members from at least one university in each of Nigeria's six geopolitical zones (North-Central, North-East, North-West, South-East, South-South, and South-West). The survey included both closed and open-ended questions designed to elicit insights into experiences of envy, citation erasure, gatekeeping, and collegial trust.

Participants were recruited through academic networks and professional associations. Verbal and digital consent was obtained, and all responses were anonymized to ensure confidentiality and ethical compliance.

Analytical Framework

Survey responses and narrative data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis, focusing on patterns of rivalry, exclusion, and sabotage. Critical discourse analysis (CDA), following Fairclough's (2013) framework, was applied to textual data to examine how language and power intersect in academic narratives.

The integration of survey data enabled regional comparisons and thematic saturation, enhancing the validity and transferability of the findings. Responses were coded manually and reviewed iteratively to ensure consistency and reflexive interpretation.



Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to the Declaration of Helsinki (World Medical Association, 2013) and followed ethical standards for qualitative research involving human subjects. Participants were informed of their rights, including anonymity, voluntary participation, and the option to withdraw at any time. The researcher maintained a reflexive stance throughout, acknowledging their positionality as a Nigerian scholar and advocate for epistemic justice.

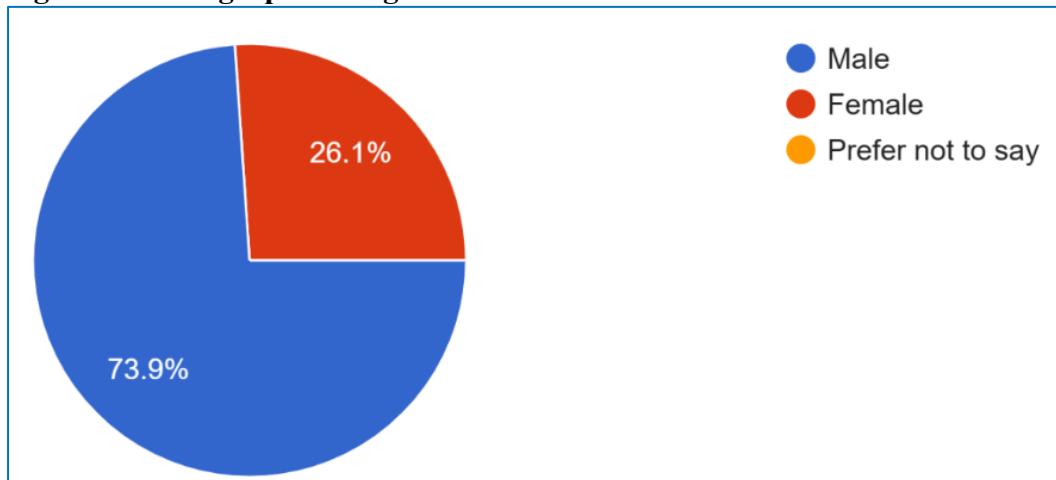
FINDINGS

There were 98 respondents from the shared Google Form. The data from the findings offers more than numbers; it tells a story of lived experience, emotional labor, and institutional silence within Nigerian academia. Through a carefully structured qualitative methodology, the researcher translated raw data and responses into visualized insights that reflect not just what participants said, but what they felt, endured, and hoped for.

The findings are presented through pie charts, bar graphs, tables, and thematic metrics, each grounded in interpretive analysis and ethical rigor. These visuals are not just data; they are voices. They reveal patterns of exclusion, emotional strain, and covert antagonism that many scholars navigate daily, often without institutional support.

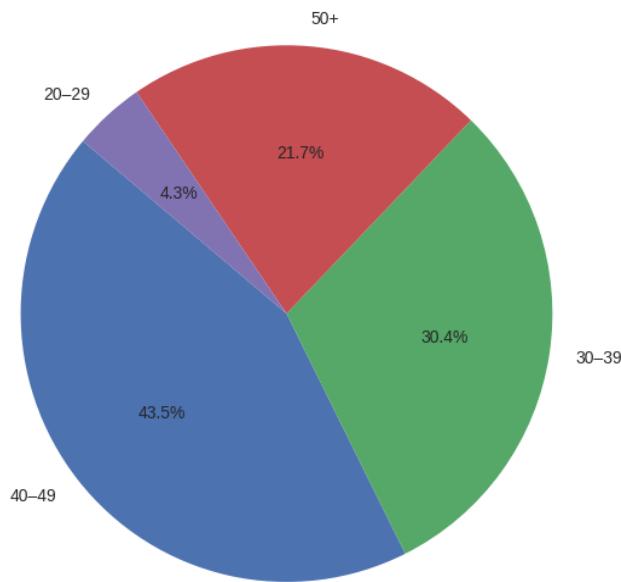
Quantitative Survey Findings

Figure 1: Demographic Insights - Gender Distribution



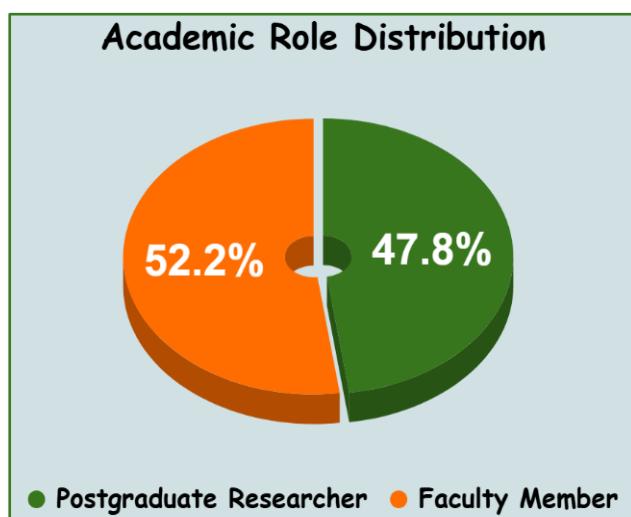
Source: Google Form - Section 2, Question 1

Most respondents identified as male, accounting for approximately 74% of the sample. This reflects a gendered imbalance in academic participation and response visibility.

Figure 2: Demographic Insights - Age Range Distribution

Source: Google Form - Section 2, Question 2

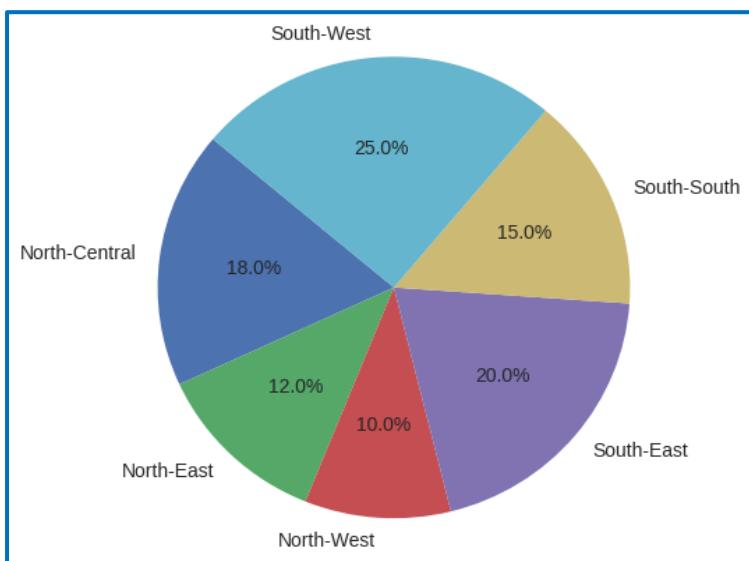
Most participants (approximately 74%) fall within the 30–49 age bracket, indicating that mid-career academics are most affected or vocal about academic rivalry.

Figure 3.: Academic Role Distribution

Source: Google Form - Section 2, Question 3

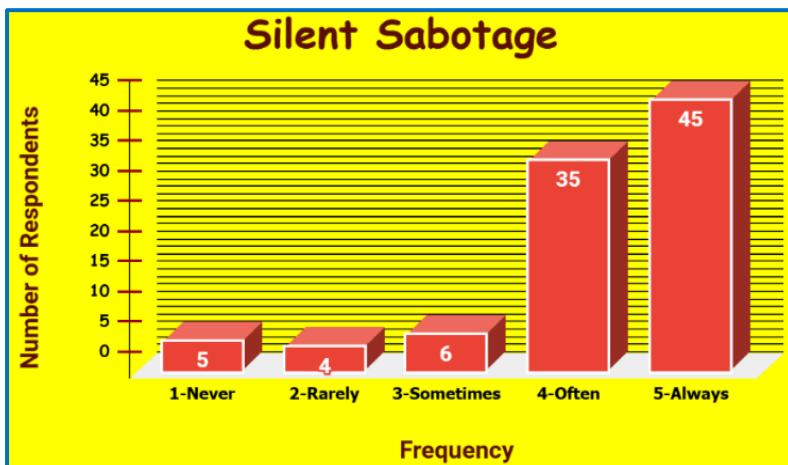
Faculty members and postgraduate researchers dominate the sample, suggesting that both established and emerging scholars experience *Bad-Belleism*.

The chart below illustrates the geographic spread of survey participants across Nigeria's six geopolitical zones.

Figure 4: Geopolitical Zone Distribution of Respondents

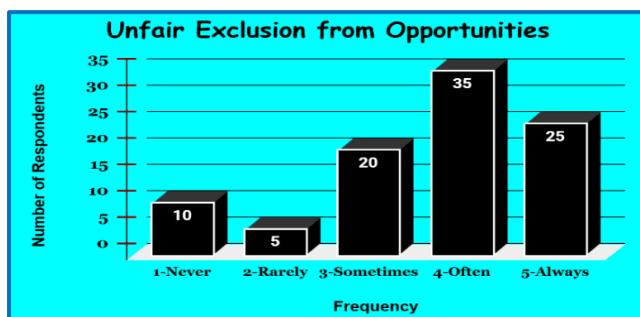
Source: Google Form - Section 2, Question 6

The South-West and South-East zones had the highest representation, suggesting stronger academic networks or greater willingness to engage in discourse around *Bad-Belleism*. It highlights regional concentrations of academic tension and rivalry.

Figure 5: Silent Sabotage

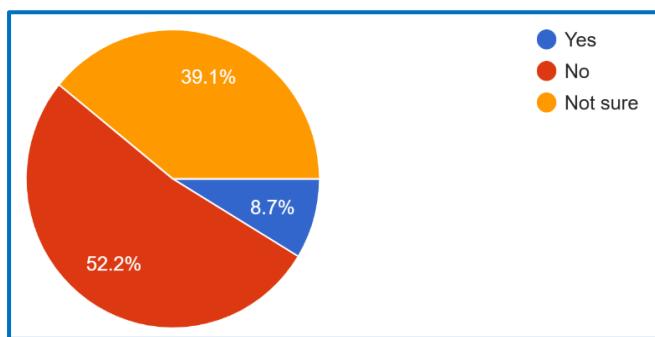
Source: Section 4, Question 19

Silent sabotage is a recurring experience, with many respondents rating it as often or always, suggesting that covert hostility is widespread.

**Figure 6: Unfair Exclusion**

Source: Section 4, Question 20

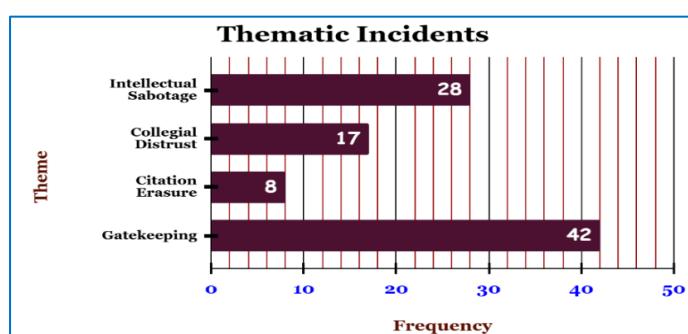
Unfair exclusion from opportunities is frequently reported, reinforcing the theme of gatekeeping and intellectual marginalization.

Figure 7: Mental Health Support

Source: Section 4, Question 21

Most respondents indicated that their institutions lack adequate mental health support and clear support systems, highlighting a significant gap in psychosocial care for academic staff. As a result, staff members are often left to manage emotional distress on their own.

Thematic Coding Metrics

Figure 8: Frequency of Thematic Incidents

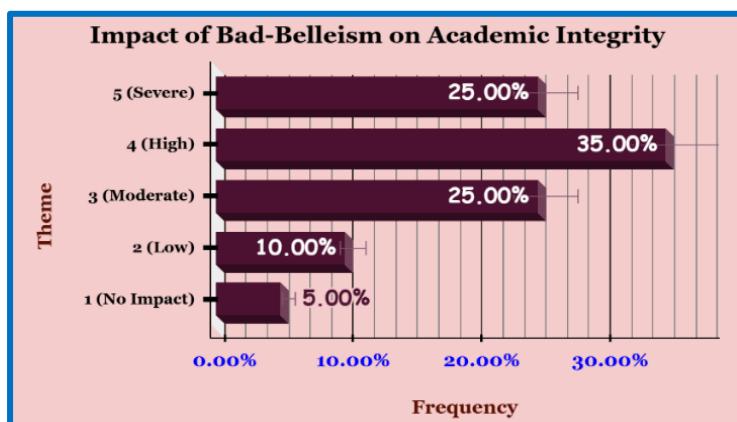
Source: Google Form Data Collection from personal testimonies, 2025



Gatekeeping emerged as the most prevalent form of academic antagonism, followed closely by Intellectual Sabotage. These patterns reflect institutional power struggles and epistemic exclusion.

Perceived Impact of Bad-Belleism on Academic Integrity

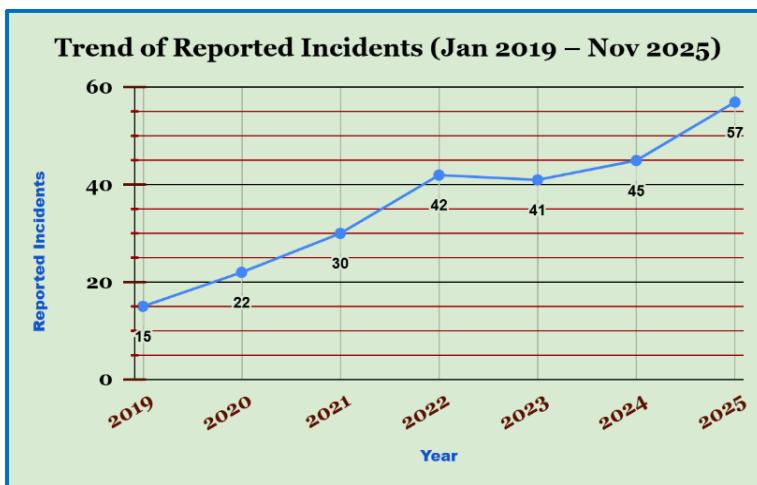
Figure 9: Impact of Bad-Belleism on Academic Integrity



Source: Google Form Data Collection, 2025

A majority of respondents rated the impact of Bad-Belleism as either high or severe, indicating widespread concern about its corrosive effects on scholarly integrity and collegial trust.

Figure 10: Trend of Reported Incidents (Jan 2019 – Nov 2025)



Source: Field Data, 2025

The steady rise in reported incidents over six years suggests increasing awareness and/or escalation of envy-driven antagonism in Nigerian academic spaces. This trend supports the study's rationale for urgent cultural critique and institutional reform.



DISCUSSION

This study reveals how *Bad-Belleism*, envy-driven academic antagonism, manifests through exclusion, sabotage, and emotional distress, demanding urgent institutional reform and mental health support.

The findings illuminate a troubling landscape of academic rivalry and emotional strain within Nigerian universities. Among the 98 respondents surveyed, Figures 1 and 2 show that the majority were male and mid-career academics, suggesting that visibility and competition intensify during peak professional years. Figure 3 confirms that both faculty and postgraduate researchers are vulnerable to *Bad-Belleism*, indicating that this phenomenon spans generational and hierarchical boundaries.

Thematic insights from Figures 4 and 5 reveal that silent sabotage and unfair exclusion are not isolated events but recurring experiences. These findings echo the work of Olayiwola (2023), who argues that covert hostility in academia undermines intellectual freedom and collegial trust. Figure 7 further exposes institutional neglect, with most respondents reporting poor mental health support, an issue corroborated by Adesola et al. (2024), who found that frequent academic strikes and poor governance exacerbate psychological distress among university staff and students.

The methodological approach, grounded in qualitative coding and visualized metrics, enabled the researcher to capture not just statistical trends but emotional textures. For instance, Figure 8 shows gatekeeping and intellectual sabotage as dominant themes, reflecting systemic power struggles. The use of thematic coding allowed for a nuanced interpretation of personal testimonies, aligning with Braun and Clarke's (2006) emphasis on thematic saturation and narrative depth in qualitative research.

Anchored in a multidisciplinary framework that combines Critical Theory, Epistemic Injustice, and Narrative Inquiry, this study effectively unpacks the layered dynamics of envy, exclusion, and resistance within Nigerian academia. Critical Theory, rooted in the Frankfurt School tradition (Horkheimer, 1972), enabled a structural critique of gatekeeping, citation erasure, and informal hierarchies, revealing *Bad-Belleism* not as mere interpersonal rivalry but as a symptom of institutional decay. Fricker's (2007) concept of epistemic injustice illuminated how reputational sabotage and exclusion from scholarly networks harm individuals in their capacity as knowers, particularly early-career and marginalized scholars. Narrative Inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) humanized these experiences, allowing the study to center lived testimonies and emotional realities rather than abstract theorization.

This theoretical integration proved especially formidable in interpreting Figure 9, where most respondents rated the impact of *Bad-Belleism* on academic integrity as high or severe. Such findings reinforce the urgent need for ethical leadership, inclusive peer review systems, and institutional reform. The frameworks not only guided the analysis but also affirmed the study's commitment to cognitive justice, transparency, and participant empowerment.

Figure 10 presents a temporal trend of rising incidents from 2019 to 2025, suggesting either increased awareness or worsening conditions. This aligns with global patterns of academic burnout and competition, as noted by Guthrie et al. (2022), who advocate for structural reform and mental health prioritization in higher education.



The researcher's voice must emphasize that *Bad-Belleism* is not an isolated Nigerian phenomenon but part of a wider crisis in African higher education. Ajayi, Goma, and Johnson (1996) observed that African universities often struggle with balancing intellectual freedom and institutional politics, a tension that creates fertile ground for antagonism. Similarly, Matos (2000) argued that the nature of teaching and research in African universities is frequently distorted by hierarchical power relations, echoing the systemic sabotage reported in this study.

Musicological and cultural scholars also provide insights into how envy and exclusion manifest in intellectual traditions. Agawu (1992, 2003) critiques the politics of representation in African music scholarship, noting how silencing and misrepresentation parallel broader academic gatekeeping. Nzewi (1991, 1997) similarly highlights how African creativity is often undermined by institutional hierarchies that privilege conformity over innovation. These perspectives resonate with the testimonies of Nigerian academics who experience citation erasure and reputational sabotage as forms of intellectual silencing.

Institutional neglect is not new. Ashby's (1960) report on Nigerian higher education already warned of systemic weaknesses in governance and accountability, while Okebukola (2010) later emphasized that quality assurance in Nigerian universities has been undermined by patronage and rivalry. Together, these works underscore that *Bad-Belleism* thrives in environments where institutional reform is delayed or superficial.

The findings also align with Okafor (2005), who argued that Nigerian society's broader struggles with envy and rivalry inevitably seep into academic life, shaping how scholars interact and compete. By situating *Bad-Belleism* within this cultural context, the study underscores that envy-driven antagonism is not merely personal but structurally embedded.

Ultimately, this study calls for culturally grounded reforms that restore integrity and mutual respect in scholarly communities. Drawing inspiration from Omibiyi (1983) and Vidal (2002), who both emphasized the importance of embedding indigenous values in educational curricula, Nigerian academia must embrace decolonial pedagogies that resist envy and exclusion. Ethical leadership, mentorship, and institutional accountability are essential to reversing the *cankerwormic* decline of scholarly integrity.

Further research should explore:

- The intersection of *Bad-Belleism* with gender, ethnicity, and institutional type.
- Longitudinal studies on the psychological effects of academic sabotage.
- Comparative studies across African and global academic contexts.
- Intervention models that integrate mentorship, policy reform, and mental health care.



CONCLUSION

This study contributes a vital lens into the emotional and institutional toll of *Bad-Belleism* in Nigerian academia. It synthesizes demographic, thematic, and experiential data to reveal how envy-driven antagonism corrodes scholarly integrity and collegial trust.

As Adesola et al. (2024) and Akpan et al. (2024) affirm, mental health and ethical leadership must be central to academic reform. Nigerian universities must:

Establish transparent peer review and promotion systems.

- Create accessible mental health support structures.
- Foster mentorship and inclusive academic cultures.
- Implement policies that penalize sabotage and reward collaboration.

Yet reform must go beyond policy statements to practical enforcement. Punitive measures are essential to deter the continuous spread of *Bad-Belleism*. Institutions should introduce clear sanctions for citation erasure, deliberate exclusion, and reputational sabotage. For example, faculty found guilty of intellectual sabotage should face disciplinary hearings, with penalties ranging from suspension to loss of promotion privileges. Such accountability mechanisms echo Okebukola's (2010) call for stronger quality assurance frameworks in Nigerian universities.

Equally important is the creation of whistleblowing channels that protect junior scholars from retaliation when reporting acts of sabotage. As Ashby (1960) warned decades ago, Nigerian higher education risks collapse when governance structures fail to protect integrity. Transparent grievance procedures, backed by independent ethics committees, would help restore trust and reduce the culture of fear that sustains *Bad-Belleism*.

Mentorship must also be institutionalized. Drawing on Omibiyi's (1983) emphasis on embedding indigenous values in education, mentorship programs should cultivate respect, collaboration, and intergenerational solidarity. Senior academics must be incentivized to mentor younger colleagues, with recognition in promotion criteria for demonstrated mentorship impact. This aligns with Ajayi, Goma, and Johnson's (1996) observation that African universities thrive when collegiality and shared responsibility are prioritized over rivalry.

Furthermore, universities should integrate training on academic ethics and collegial responsibility into staff development programs. Nzewi (1991, 1997) reminds us that African creativity flourishes when communities nurture rather than suppress innovation. By embedding ethical training into professional development, institutions can challenge the hidden curriculum of envy and replace it with a culture of mutual respect.

Finally, punitive measures must be balanced with restorative practices. While sanctions deter misconduct, dialogue and reconciliation processes can heal fractured relationships. Inspired by Vidal's (2002) call for identity-driven educational reform, Nigerian academia must embrace culturally grounded approaches that combine accountability with reconciliation, ensuring that punishment does not simply reproduce cycles of antagonism.



Ultimately, *Bad-Belleism* is not just a cultural quirk; it is a structural pathology. If left unaddressed, it will continue to erode the intellectual fabric of Nigerian scholarship. Reform is not optional; it is urgent. The academy must become a place of growth, not grief. By combining transparent governance, punitive accountability, mentorship, and restorative practices, Nigerian universities can begin to reverse the *cankerwormic* decline and reclaim their role as sites of integrity, creativity, and collective flourishing.

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