

POINT  
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Cheating charges  
cut both ways

Allegations of cheating against a few Africans might have unfairly cast a shadow over the entire community. But many African students who come to India for studies are cheated as well, and in big numbers. Here are a few cases that are key to understanding how widespread is the problem:

“After completing one year of my course at a nursing college here and when I was about to sit for exams, my college authorities tell me that I am not eligible for pursuing General Nursing and Midwifery (GNM) course here,” says Lawal Racheal Oluwatimilehin, a student from Nigeria.

The principal of the same college had told him during admission that he was eligible for the course. “He had collected \$3,500 as tuition fee before taking my original school certificates to give me a seat. One year of my stay here in Bengaluru had gone waste as I had to again start from scratch,” rued Lawal, who came to Bengaluru in 2014 and is overstaying here since November last year.

Lawal eventually managed to get admission in a different college. But once again she felt cheated on learning that the institution was not recognised according to the Foreigners Regional Registration Office (FRRO). She is now desperately trying to extend her visa for completing her education here after finally

finding a genuine college.

But Lawal is not the only victim. Eight of 10 Africans who come to Bengaluru for education end up getting cheated by one college or the other, says Emmanuel, a student leader. “There are a lucky few who get admission to reputed colleges, but a majority of them are lured by colleges that are non-recognised and whose bonafides are unacceptable for FRRO.”

Emmanuel elaborates: “When an African back home expresses interest in studying in Bengaluru, agents there show websites of several colleges in east, north and northeast Bengaluru, showing off their infrastructure, reputation, recognition and other facilities. But when the student lands here, they discover these colleges either function from a couple of floors at some commercial complex or 3-4 bedroom houses.”

Some colleges even claim that they have hostel facilities for students. But in reality, these are rooms rented out by house-owners living nearby, he adds.

A reputable nursing college in Kumaraswamy Layout harassed a Nigerian student by forcing her to study in the college. This, despite she writing to them that her sponsor for her education had died. She had sought a No Objection Certificate (NOC) to get back to her country as she would be unable to pursue with her studies. But the college was adamant that she continue her course and is refusing to give her her original certificates and the NOC.

She had already paid \$4,000 as fee for a year, and now the college is forcing her to pay the entire course fee to relieve her.

Bellie Thomas

African students, bridging divides

Cultural stereotypes and deeds of a few bad elements have unfairly sullied the image of the community of African students in the city. But poor, hard-working students who constitute the vast majority have own stories of cheating and exploitation.

Trapped in the cross-fire of cultural divisions, are African students in Bengaluru getting stereotyped? Are local communities who complain about the misdeeds of a few students unfairly branded as racist? Or is there a genuine chance for consensus, reconciliation and better understanding?

The police, community leaders and the general public are unanimous that these tricky issues cannot be resolved in a hurry. Cordial relationships as a process is slow, yet achievable, as attempts by a few concerned officials in the law and order machinery indicate.

Having spearheaded that intervention in the recent past,



the city's former Additional Commissioner of Police (East), P Harishekharan should know better.

The issue, he says, should be approached from three perspectives, the African students, the local community and the police department. “Eighty per

cent of these students are settling in the East and South East parts of the city, in areas on the outer side of the Outer Ring Road between Hebbal junction and KR Puram,” he points out.

**Socio-cultural pressure**  
Educational institutions cater-

ing to them have sprung up in big numbers in the area. So have flats and independent houses servicing their living needs. “Consequently, a socio, cultural and economic pressure has been building up in these localities between the students and the locals.”



**JOHN JERRY**  
Student from Mali

Authorities here say that we are overstaying but they are not trying to understand the cause. Agents bring us to fraud colleges. By the time we realise this, we lose a year.



**EMMANUEL**  
Student leader

Majority of us come here to study but we are cheated by agents and colleges. They only care about making money out of us. Why is there no system in place to ensure this does not happen?



**MUSAB HASSAN**  
Entrepreneur

We might not be able to control how their experience with locals is, unless the government creates a platform for interaction. But we can make sure that at least their college offers a supporting environment.



Cheated by agents, distanced by locals

Besides seeking good education, young students from Africa come here in the hope of having an international experience, learning about a new country, its culture and people. Unfortunately, most of them end up being cheated by agents and even the local experience is unlike what they expect.

“The agent said India would be a good place to study, so I came here, even though I didn't know anyone. They told us that we would get part-time jobs here, like students do in the US

but there are no jobs for us,” a student from Nigeria, who wished to remain anonymous, said.

She says she does not feel safe in the city. “People pass comments at us. They don't see us as human beings, they treat us like animals,” she said. She said that African students are charged more for everything, from bus tickets to apartment rents.

Though her experience with locals has not been good, classmates are more accepting, she said. “I had lots of friends in my first college who were from dif-

ferent parts of India. But in my new college, my classmates usually speak Hindi because they don't know English very well. So I have not been able to make friends.”

She is not the only one who feels this way. Another student from Togo, echoed her experience. He has also been cheated by an agent who promised a college of global standards when actually it was not even accredited. “I left that college after a semester and have

joined a better college. Life here has been hard but I don't want to go back empty-handed, without a degree,” he said.

He said that, as an African student, finding accommodation is difficult and often, they have to deal with bullying owners. He pointed out, “There are lots of Indians living in Africa. We are welcoming and we respect them. Even the laws in my country to protect foreigners are strong. We expected the same kind of treatment when we came here, but we are disappointed,” he said.

Locals view them suspicious-

ly and make them feel alien, students say. “People here are racist. They don't even want to sit with us in an autorickshaw because they don't want to touch us,” said 20-year-old John Jerry, from Mali.

He does not feel safe in the city because he fears he will be attacked, even if he does not do anything wrong. “There are colleges in my country too, but I came here because I wanted the experience of being in a different country. I am disappointed. If anyone I know back home

“There are lots of Indians living in Africa. We are welcoming and we respect them. Even the laws in my country to protect foreigners are strong. We expected the same kind of treatment when we came here, but we are disappointed.”

is planning to come here, I tell them to be careful,” he said.

Musab Hassan, a young entrepreneur, said that colleges with international students should take extra measures to create an atmosphere that encourages cultural exchange. Cultural awareness can foster friendships.

“Often international students tend to be in a close-knit group with others from their own country and that leaves less room for interaction with

local students. Colleges should encourage interaction by assigning a student guide or conducting team-building activities,” he suggested.

In his college, Musab had classmates from different parts of the world. He recalled that it was a rewarding experience. “We shouldn't say no to having students from other countries because there is a lot we can learn from them, we can gain perspective and understand other cultures,” he said.

Meghana Choukkar

