

Trends in Examination Malpractice in Nigerian Educational System and its Effects on the Socio-Economic and Political Development of Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper examined the trends and effects of examination malpractice at various levels of Nigerian educational system. The methods, causes and strategies towards curbing examination malpractice were discussed. Factors such as moral decadence, emphasis on paper qualification, inadequate teaching/learning facilities encouraging examination malpractice were discussed. The effects of this vice such as dismissal, loss of position, self confidence and credibility were identified among others. Therefore the paper recommends intensified continuous assessment, severe penalties for culprits, counselling of moral values not only to students, but also to parents, supervisors, teachers, invigilators, computer operators and other stakeholders to minimize examination malpractice.

Keywords: Examination malpractice; Educational system; Causes; Strategies

1.Introduction

Examination malpractice is not a new phenomenon in Nigeria. Maduemezia (1998) reported that the first examination malpractice in Nigeria occurred in 1914 during the Senior Cambridge Local Examination papers which were leaked before the scheduled date of examination. Thus, examination malpractice which started at a low trend became more pronounced in 1970, involving persons other than the candidates. Since then examination malpractice became more advanced and sophisticated. However, 1977 marked a watershed in the history of examination malpractice as there was an outcry in Nigeria on the credibility of West African Examination Council (WAEC), which was the only organ saddled with the responsibility of conducting public examination in Nigeria. Consequently, a Judicial Commission of enquiry headed by Justice Sogbetun was set up to look into the affairs of the WAEC in relation to the problems of efficient conduct of examinations and prompt release of results. The report acknowledged the excessive workload of WAEC and recommended reduction of its workload by establishing other examination bodies to take over some of its examinations.

Examination is defined as a formal test of one's knowledge or ability in a particular subject especially by means of answering questions or practical exercises. Therefore, it is through examination that students are evaluated or tested to find out the quality of knowledge they have acquired within a specific period. Thus, examination could be either internal, external, oral, written or both. Continuous assessment scores, terminal,

semester, annual or promotion examinations are examples of internal examinations. (Benard,1988). The external (public) examinations include Common Entrance Examinations for admission into Secondary Schools, School Certificate Examinations which are conducted by West African Examination Council (WAEC), National Examination Council (NECO). The Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) now conduct the Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME). The National Teachers' Institute (NTI), National Business and Technical Examination Board (NABTEB) conduct examinations for teachers and technicians respectively.

Although students' performance in examination may not be the true reflection of their ability, till date however, examination still remains the best tool for an objective assessment and evaluation of what a learner has achieved after a period of schooling/training. In fact, it is one of the most reliable indicators used to determine the extent of students' performance in a given training.

Awanbor (2004) therefore, defined examination malpractice as an illegal act committed by a single student or in collaboration with others like fellow students, parents, teachers, supervisors, invigilators, computer operators or secretarial staff and anybody or group of people before, during, or after examination in order to obtain undeserved marks or grades.

2. Trends in Examination Malpractice

Over the years, the conduct of examinations by WAEC, NECO, and JAMB have been trailed with complaints of examination malpractices and various organizational, administrative and bureaucratic irregularities. These problems have become perennial and institutionalized and reflect a gradual decline on the quality of Nigeria ' s educational system. In fact examination malpractice has attained a frightening, sophisticated proportion and has become so widespread that there is virtually no examination anywhere at all levels within and outside the formal school system that has not experienced one form of malpractice or the other. The incidences of examination malpractice are common everywhere and every examination season witnesses the emergence of new ingenious way of cheating.

The former Minister of Education, Prof. Ruqqayatu Ahmed Rufa'i, at her keynote address delivered at the National Examination Summit held in Abuja on the 24th May, 2010 presented an increasing trend in cases of examination malpractice in WAEC SSCE between 2005-2009 (Table 1). In addition, she reported that NECO in its 2009 Nov./Dec. Examination recorded malpractice cases of over 263,000 and over one million cases in the 2009 June/July schools examination.

TABLE 1: Candidates involved in malpractice cases in WAEC SSCE (2005-2009) (Ruqqayatu, 2010)

YEAR	NO. OF CANDIDATES INVOLVED	%
2005	73,050	6.86
2006	82,941	7.19
2007	74,734	5.97
2008	100,428	7.88
2009	118,608	8.74

Furthermore, WAEC in 2011 withheld 39,066 results of candidates who wrote November/December West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) while in 2012, 47,289 results were withheld as a result of malpractices.

In 2006, the Federal Ministry of Education (FME) blacklisted and derecognized 324 secondary schools across the nation as centres for conducting public examination from 2007 to 2010 (Table 2).

Table 2: Examination Malpractice in Nigerian Secondary Schools (Weekend Times, 2007)

GEO-POLITICAL ZONE	NO. OF SCHOOLS INVOLVED	%
North-Central	54	16.6
North –East	08	2.5
North –West	12	3.6
South-East	48	14.8
South-South	116	36.0
South-West	86	26.5
Total	324	100.00

The statistics above revealed that those involved in examination malpractice have increased over the years compared to the record of previous years.

3. Methods of Examination Malpractice

In recent times, examination malpractice has gone from simple ‘giraffing’ where students occasionally stretch their necks to catch glimpse of what they want to copy from other students’ scripts to a variety of sophisticated ones. These include; (a) use of ‘Micro-chip’; writing very tiny summaries on pieces of paper, parts of the body, or on materials found within the venue. (b) sorting’; in which students negotiate with corrupt lecturers for scores by rewarding’ the lecturers in cash or kind (c) ECOMOG/ECOWAS/OAU’; which is an alliance among classmates, to communicate via coded language (d) Handheld smart devices such as modern cell phones.

The West African Examination Council in over sixty years of her existence has been able to detect various forms of malpractice perpetrated by candidates and their accomplices in its examinations. They include (a) bringing foreign materials into the examination, (b) Irregular activities inside or outside examination hall, (c) Collusion, (d) Impersonation, (e) Fore-knowledge of examination questions, (f) Leakage of question papers traceable to the printing press or other persons associated with the custody of the papers, (g) mass cheating and (h) Insult/ Assault on supervisors/ invigilators /inspectors by candidates (Nwadiani, 2005).

It is clear from the various forms of examination malpractice that it is not limited to the time and place of examination. In fact malpractices occur either before, during or after examination. One important example of pre-examination malpractice is in the process of registering candidates for examinations. Ojerinde (2004), reported that one of the commonest forms is the registration of non-school candidates for school examination by Principals in spite of very clear instructions against this practice. What they do is to register candidates who are

not in SS3 (the final years), often referred to as private candidates. Many of such candidates who are from the urban areas, prefer to register in less urban centres (aka miracle centres) where monitoring is not likely to be strict. These candidates do not have any record of continuous assessment which is a compulsory requirement for Secondary School Certificate Examination (SSCE). The Principals falsify continuous assessment results for the candidates depending on how much money the candidates they can afford.

Another aspect of pre-examination malpractice is that some Principals inflate the continuous assessment of their regular candidates which is likely to increase the number of passes in the school. They do this to present fantastic information about the school as one of the best schools in order to be in good book of the Ministry of Education (Gbenga, 2005).

The introduction of the Global System for Mobile communication (GSM) in the country has revolutionized examination malpractice in the school system. The emergence of these technological devices has provided the candidates new methods of cheating during examination. A lot of academic information is now stored in these electronic devices for direct use in examination halls or for onward transfer via Short Message Service(SMS) to other students anywhere in the country. This way, a candidate can smuggle out a question paper especially the objective test to the mercenary outside the examination hall who could text correct option to candidates inside. This could be done without attracting much attention. Post examination malpractices include such activities occurring after examination, for example, candidates tracing their paper to marking centres. In other cases a candidate could trace his paper, for e.g. from Enugu to Kano, and another from Kano to Ibadan. Some examiners also could trace the candidate if they know how influential the parents of such a candidate are. In extreme cases, some candidates especially girls enclose money and photographs describing how they could be traced in case their papers happen to be handled by men considered to be moral perverts. In higher institutions, post examination malpractice could take the form of lobbying the examiners for marks by begging and sending close friends and senior colleagues to the examiner to be lenient while marking, while on the other hand some lecturers go to the extent of changing marks for reasons best known to them.

4.Factors Encouraging Examination Malpractice

The root causes of examination malpractice in Nigeria include the following:

1.Nigeria has a deplorable value system, therefore immoral acts such as cheating, dishonesty including embezzlement and stealing of public funds and properties do not attract the condemnation and punishment they deserve.

2.The emphasis on paper qualification or certificate is another cause of examination malpractice. Nigeria's educational system places so much value and emphasis on certificate instead of knowledge, skills and competence. The effects of this cankerworm can be seen in many school leavers who cannot defend their certificates. This is why examination malpractices are increasing day after day for the rush to get paper qualification for jobs without the right skills to perform. The emphasis on certificates over skills and competence is so pronounced, prompting remarks by former President Obasanjo that students perceived education only as a means of getting a meal ticket and getting a job. The former President had argued that such

perception or orientation must change so that students would appreciate the intrinsic value of education, which is the total development of the individual to be able to make meaningful contribution to the society.

3. Another major cause of examination malpractice is inadequate teaching and learning facilities such as classrooms, libraries, laboratories and even teachers compared to the population of students. These inadequate resources affect effective teaching and learning.

4. Other students' vices such as cultism, drug abuse, sexual promiscuity and truancy are also encouraging examination malpractice on our campuses as students devote more time to them than their studies.

5. Moral upbringing of some of the youths by parents has been very poor. In most cases parents pay mercenaries to write exams for their wards, children. There are reports that parents sometimes influence WAEC, NECO to even relocate their children to new schools considered to be less strict in search of miracles during exams.

6. Lack of confidence as a result of inadequate preparation. These days, students are no longer hard working and dedicated towards their academic endeavours. No matter what, a student who is not well prepared would cheat in examination hall in order to pass.

7. Students nowadays are characterized by quick emphasis on success and wealth without a corresponding emphasis on legitimate means and avenues to be used positively in achieving such success.

8. Others include;

- (a) low moral standard in schools
- (b) peer/ societal influence,
- (c) incessant strikes,
- (d) admission of unqualified candidates

5. Strategies Towards Curbing Examination Malpractice

The Federal Military Government in its bid to curb examination malpractice promulgated Decree 20 of 1984 part of which reads thus:

Any person who fraudulently or with intent to cheat or secure any unfair advantage to himself or any other person or in abuse of his office, produces, sells or buys or otherwise deals with any question paper intended for the examination of persons at any examination or commits any of the offences specified in section 3 (27) (c) of this decree, shall be guilty of an offence and on conviction be sentenced to 21 years imprisonment.

However, Examination /Malpractice Act 33 of 1999 reversed the above decree but stipulates punishment ranging from a fine of N50, 000 to N100, 000 and imprisonment for a term of 3-4 years with or without option of fine. This development was due to the inability of appropriate authorities to enforce the old decree 20. Despite the provision of this law, examination malpractice has been on the increase and this is partly due to non-implementation of the law. Disturbed by increasing trend of this criminal act, the Federal Government at her Executive Council meeting held on 4/9/13 approved a proposal to amend the West African Examination Council(WAEC) Act for culprits to spend five(5) years in jail or pay a fine of N250,000

Besides Decree 20 of 1984 and later Act 33 of 1999 aimed at minimizing examination malpractice; WAEC has also embarked on public campaigns on effects of examination malpractice, the punishments attached to such offences using handbills, posters, jingles; seminars and workshops. NECO also conducted similar campaigns at

various times. A Non-Government Organization (NGO) known as Exam Ethics project has been working tirelessly in fighting examination malpractice.

All along Government and NGOs have taken measures to minimise examination malpractice and these include;

(a) To maintain standards and avoid collaboration, senior officials of Ministries of Education on inspection of examination centres are often redeployed.

(b) To ensure compliance with guidelines by WAEC, NECO, enrolment of candidates for these school examinations are monitored strictly.

(c) Sanctioning of erring schools, principals, supervisors and other examination officers.

In 2001, JAMB, worried by increased cases of malpractice introduced variation in the numeration of questions for candidates sitting for the same matriculation examination. That year, candidates' performance in JAMB examinations was very poor. But it did not take long for the syndicates to devise other means to beat JAMB's innovation and without gainsay was with the collaboration and connivance of some unscrupulous JAMB officials.

Further determined to minimize irregularities, JAMB and NECO introduced the Biometric Data Capturing Machines to verify authenticity of candidates. With the use of the machines, candidates, for example not registered at a particular centre could not be captured thus allowing only the right candidates to sit for the examination. No doubt, the benefit to be derived from this concept is huge only if the policy is sustained, sensitized and mobilized while the machines should be well maintained by skilled professionals. Otherwise, the idea would only be a waste of resources just like other notable innovations in the past.

6. Effects of Examination Malpractice

a) Examination malpractice has grave consequences on the individuals and institutions of learning, communities and the country as a whole. Dismissal, termination, loss of position and self-confidence are effects and have brought much embarrassment and suffering to individuals, families and communities. The guilty ones who are not caught and punished cannot defend their certificates issued to them not to talk of such people performing their duties effectively.

b) Examination malpractices lead to irreversible loss of credibility. A country that is ranked high in examination malpractices loses international credibility. The implication is that certificates/documents emanating from such country's educational system will be treated with suspicion and doubt. Since certificates are becoming valueless in Nigeria, our educational institutions are dead as far as international cooperation in education is concerned.

c) As long as Examination malpractices are prevailing, we will end up producing Doctors who will forget scissors and towel in the stomach after surgical operation. This vice will continue to produce students with distinctions in our examinations, without quality knowledge in any definite course or subject. In addition, we will continue to have teachers, who cannot impart knowledge to the students, as well as produce Lawyers who cannot differentiate between an accused person and the complainant.

d)Furthermore, production and indiscriminate sales of fake drugs by pharmacists and massive fraud in commercial banks are linked to examination malpractices.

7. Conclusion

Since examination malpractice sows seed of fraud and criminal values in our society, this vice cannot allow us to realize our future greatness because it renders our certificates useless and debases the foundation for assessing our skills and capacity. Examination malpractice not only promotes breakdown of moral and ethical standards in our society but it also prevents achievement of meaningful and sustainable development for example in our aspiration to become one of the top twenty economies in the world by the year 20:2020. Therefore, to resolve this perennial problem of cheating in examinations, the following recommendations could assist in stemming the tide:

a)The need for intensified continuous assessment and aptitude test at various stages of our educational system.

b)Ban the sale of handouts particularly in higher institutions to minimize incessant cases of examination malpractice as many students had been apprehended with handouts in examination halls.

c)There may be the need for new measurement and evaluation criteria that will reduce the burden on examination as the only yardstick for academic progress, ranking and ability.

d)While the students must be blamed for poor preparation of examination, the cases of examination malpractice may be reduced through intensive counselling.

e)Examination bodies, government, stakeholders, must confront this' challenge by reducing or eliminating the administrative, institutional, attitudinal and logistic problems encouraging examination malpractices.

f)There must be a major and comprehensive overhaul of the educational system in the country since education is the best legacy that any parent or nation' could bequeath to its younger generation. This is more so that no individual or country in this contemporary world would develop with a flawed educational system.

g)Adequate facilities such as classrooms or lecture halls and laboratories to make the environment conducive not only for teaching and learning but also to ensure effective check and control of candidates during examinations.

h)Candidates found guilty of the crime of examination malpractice should be punished severely to serve as deterrent to others.

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