Examination Malpractice in Nigerian Schools: An Obstacle to Progress in Socialization in School Environment: Causes, Effects and Remedy

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Abstract

This is a high level of interaction between the school and the society. There will be no school without the society and without the school, the society will not function well. It is the school that molds the society. The school helps to develop the society. It is through the school that the various aspects of culture are conserved and transmitted. Through the school, the society provides for itself, a formal system of education for satisfying the basic requirements for its existence. With all this, one expects the schools to be a very secured environment in which changes in behaviour can be facilitated. However, this is not always the case. Many obstacles have crept into the wheel of progress thereby making socialization to be impeded. In this paper, examination malpractice is looked at as a major social problem which constitutes an obstacle to progress in socialization in school environment.

When examinations are set, rules or a code of conduct which candidates must adhere to while participating in that examination are provided for. Principally, a candidate is not allowed to engage in any activity that will make the essence of the evaluation to be defeated. He/she is not allowed to take any material considered to be of advantage to him/her into the examination hall. He/she will also not solicit for any form of information from a colleague. Now a breach of any of the rules constitutes examination malpractice, or in other words, flouting the rules that govern the proper administration of an examination tantamount to examination malpractice.

Despite their important role within the educational system, examinations have been seriously abused by students. According to Greene and Saxe (1992), examination malpractice has even attained universal proportion.
Nature of Malpractice

There are many dimensions to examination malpractice. Ada (2000) points out that ‘examination could be three-dimensional in nature, that is it could be caused by the teacher, the student or the environment’. Obanya (1982) also sees the teacher as being a dimension in examination malpractice.

Presently, there are many methods being used by candidates to perpetrate examination malpractice. Given below are some of the methods.

1. Sourcing for and buying questions paper ahead of time,
2. Impersonation,
3. Writing answers on the question papers and exchanging with colleagues in the hall,
4. Going into the examination halls with pre-answered scripts,
5. Going into the examination halls with brain support. These are little pieces of paper on which candidates have jotted answers to perceived questions,
6. Writing answers on palms, laps, thighs, handkerchiefs underskirts etc. and taking same into examination halls,
7. Writing on desks they are likely to sit on before the examination commences,
8. Going into the examination halls with whole text books, lecture notes and other materials concealed in their dresses,
9. With the advent of ICT, many students go into examination halls with telephone handsets which they stored answers. They can even use same to browse in the hall and send and receive messages from colleagues,
10. Some students, after writing class examinations, return to the lecturers to do sorting. By this, they pay money or other things to be awarded high grades.
11. There is also the dimension known as ‘Sexually Transmitted Degrees’. Gbenga Kayode, writing in the Nation Newspaper quotes Prof Okey Ndibe, a Nigerian who teaches Fiction and African Literature in Hartford, CT, United States of America in his recent article titled ‘Sexually Transmitted Degrees’ says that there are multitudes of bankers, engineers, lawyers, accountants, economists to mention but a few who flaunt sexually transmitted degrees, diplomas and certificates that were priced and bought (probably with sex) rather than earned through diligent study.

The particular method they employ is determined by the teacher, the student, the environment or a combination of two or more factors. In any case, malpractices are not just common to Nigeria alone. Holmes and Lauwerys (1969), report that the Chinese who introduced the concept of examination for her civil servants were apparently aware of the tendency of cheat hence they subjected the candidates to rigorous search before allowing them to enter into the examination halls.
Causes

Many studies have been carried out to identify factors responsible for these malpractices. Ugwuegbu (1975), in his study, identified two major motivating factors which are:

1. To avoid failure, and
2. To consolidate one's excellent performances.

Besides these, a number of other factors have been seen as being responsible for students engaging in examination malpractice. These include:

Pressure

In his own study, Deng (1982) discovered that students involve in examination malpractices due to pressure from parents and friends for them to make good results.

Financial Greed

Another area of attention is financial greed on the part of school and examination boards officials. Looking at official WAEC statistics, in 1992, 65,874 cases of examination malpractices were recorded by WAEC in the May/June SSCE out of which 29,009 were found to have been perpetrated with the active connivance of WAEC officials. Unfortunately, the most recent results released by WAEC for 2011 May/June SSCE shows that there were at least 615,000 cases of malpractice, many of which were perpetrated by officials.

In 1993, 85,617 results of the same examination were cancelled on the grounds of examination malpractices. Then in 1994, 12 school principals, 9 supervisors and 6 WAEC officials were caught committing fraud in the May/June examination. For that year alone, statistics show that 24,439 candidates of the total number of 537,003 who wrote the examination, were involved in examination malpractice, Osayomi (1996). For 2011, four staff of WAEC were disciplined over results issues. Of this, two were summarily dismissed while the other two were compulsorily retired.

Emphasis Being Laid on Paper Qualification.

Another reason for examination malpractice is the undue emphasis being laid on paper qualification. In advertising for jobs, the emphasis is on paper qualification. Many people have been employed just because they hold a qualification which they may not be able to defend. They come into the job completely blank and without the slightest idea of what their job demands are, their qualification notwithstanding. By this, many strive just to pass the examination if only that will be used as the sole parameter for selection either for job placement or for admission into an educational institution. There are many students in English departments with a credit in English but who know next to nothing in English. A year two NCE student had given the plural of woman as “womaness”. It is evident that such a student must have been involved in examination malpractice which made him obtain the WAEC qualification without the knowledge of simple English usage.
Fear of Failure

Another major factor is fear of failure on the part of the students. Due to high failure rates, students feel threatened. Statistics show that in the recently released WAEC result of May/June 2011 SSCE, of the over one million candidates who sat for the examination, only 22% of them made five credits including English and Mathematics. 79% of them failed English. The rate of failure is alarmingly high. There are many cases where naturally intelligent students have put in their very best to prepare for examinations and had fairly attempted the questions. But when the results were published, they either we given very low grades or they failed completely whereas those who are academically poor performers but who get involved in examination malpractices come out with high grades. Those who cheat are allowed to go scot-free. Such fear has in a number of occasions pushed students to consider the option of malpractices in examination as a sure way to making good grades.

Also looking at the issue of fear of failure, Benard (1972) observes that students can cope better with anxiety than with fear of failure. He further says that fears are irrational and students can develop fear for examinations. This fear could lead to pushing students into examination malpractice.

In some private schools, students are asked to pay for ‘logistics’. The school authorities collect huge sums of money from candidates which they share with examination officials in order to aid and abet examination malpractice. They will then hire mercenaries who will come and write answers on the board for the candidates while supervisors and other examination officials look the other way. Those that refuse to pay are put in a separate classroom where they will not ‘benefit’ from the ‘aid’. When results are released, some candidates are even given credits in all subjects including even the subjects they did not enter for. The resultant effect is that the school is seen as a school that ‘makes’ results hence more students will be attracted to choose such a school as a centre come the next registration period. The unfortunate thing is that nobody stops to ask how a school without laboratories, without qualified staff and without infrastructure becomes the best performing centre. Most of those who should have asked are stakeholders in the ‘business’.

Cultism on Our Campuses and the Examination Malpractice Dimension

The genesis of cultism in Nigerian institutions of higher learning is not difficult to come by. Sometime in the sixties, a Nigerian literary student named Olawale Soyinka felt there was too much of social injustice in the Nigerian institutions of higher learning. He then thought of forming a group that will work against injustice in the Nigerian institutions. That was why he formed the pirates confraternity. However, that organization grew from the University of Ibadan to other institutions. Not long, some other students felt they should check the activities of these ‘pirates’. Such groups like the buccaneers were born. That was rather the tonic needed for the birth of many of such groups with divergent purposes, aims and activities.
Today, there are such groups as seadogs, buccaneers, Black axe, red beret, K.K, CDC, Big Axe, Ras-raskie, the Sea Snakers, Black Braziers etc. The disturbing thing however is that the aim for which the idea of cultism was conceived is no more ideal if it has ever been.

The very injustice and crimes that the pirates confraternity was set up to battle, are the very crimes being perpetuated by the cult members today. Members today engage in such crimes are arson, examination malpractice, threatening of lecturers who dare to challenge them, looting, armed robbery, murder, drug abuse, rape and every conceivable vice.

The school environment has become a very unsafe place to dwell today. In all campuses of higher learning in Nigeria, there are secret cult groups. How then can effective learning and socialization take place in such an environment in which every student and staff lives in continued fear? The girls are raped and robbed at will. Even in the examination hall, serious and brilliant students are often compelled to answer some of the questions for the so-called cult boys and girls because the cultists hardly have time to attend lectures or to study.

People fear to stay long in the classroom to read due to activities of secret cults. Even lecturers are constantly threatened by these boys. The only alternative is for the cultist to evolve and invent ways of cheating at examinations and they do it with ease, unchallenged and even aided, for if you refuse to accede to their demands, you will be doing that at your peril.

Effects of Examination Malpractices on the Socialization Process in the School Environment

There are several ways that examination malpractices adversely affects socialization. One is that the intended character molding is not achieved. The school is supposed to train people in character and learning but definitely, engaging in examination malpractice is a complete departure from the culture of the school environment.

Secondly, a student who passes through a school and gets engaged in examination malpractice has passed through the school but the school has not passed through him. For one, he has set his mind towards being mischievous and will consequently not sit down to study. The culture that was supposed to have been injected into him is no more injected. The behavioural changes expected of one who has been to school cannot take place in such a student.

As we know too, the teacher who is the custodian of cultural and social values of the society and who is expected to inculcate same into the students, if he himself gets involved in examination malpractice as they often do, what socio-cultural values will he transmit to the learners, values or dishonestly and fraud? Such actually hampers socialization.

Many schools have been de-recognized by WAEC and other examination bodies like IJMB for official misconduct during examination.
Conclusion

A survey of some of the causes of examination malpractices in our schools has been made. Solutions have also been offered to the identified problems. Parents, teachers, administrators and even students themselves should join forces to restore sanity to our citadels of learning. Only then can socialization in schools be effectively achieved.

Recommendations and Suggestions on Stopping Examination Malpractices.

A problem diagnosed is at least 20% solved. Some of the causes of examination malpractice have been identified. Some suggestions to combat the problems can now be proffered as follows:

1. First, there is the need to de-emphasize this certificate syndrome by not seeing the possession of a certificate as a mark of academic excellence.
2. Teachers should be motivated so they can do extra to cover the syllabus.
3. Secondly, parents and the society at large should not put too much pressure on their wards to make the best results at all cost. They should stop looking at failure in an examination as failure in life. Rather, students should be encouraged to pursue a course they are best suited in terms of abilities, aptitude and interest.
4. Final examinations should not be a one-shot affair. There should be mid-term exams.
5. There should be post-examination tests to confirm the scores earned by students in the various examinations.
6. Objective type examinations are easier to copy hence they should be deemphasized.
7. Those caught cheating, whether teachers, principals, examination officials or students should be severely and summarily dealt with to serve as a deterrent to others. There should be examination malpractice tribunal to try offenders.
8. Oral tests should be part of the examinations where a candidate comes one-to-one with the examiner to express himself.
9. Counseling has been very essential in tackling problems like examination malpractice since counseling aims at assisting normal people to achieve their goals or function more effectively. (cf Onyejiaku(1989), Deng(1986), and Onwuka (1995))

References


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