

EXAMINATION MALPRACTICE IN NIGERIA: THE BANE OF COMMERCIALIZING EDUCATION IN A DWINDLING ECONOMY

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Abstract

This paper perceives examination malpractice as a social malaise that is learnt and has affected the quality of our educational system. The various forms and causes have kept metamorphosing that there seem to be no one single known solution to it. The paper observed that the effect is too alarming to invite denials; and that to reduce examination malpractice to a zero tolerance is possible and achievable. Thus, the writer recommends self-discipline, and changing of our orientation and value system among others as instruments to achieve this feat.

The efficiency and quality of an educational system is greatly determined by the performance of its product in an examination. This means that examination is one of the various means of assessment. It also means that assessment of learners is a natural phenomenon in every teaching and learning process. Assessment can be carried out through various measuring devices, but written examination is one of the most established yardsticks for assessment. Hence, examination for Anzene (2014) is a formal test of one's knowledge or ability in a particular subject especially by means of answering questions or practical exercises. This implies that examination involves the use

of tests. It also suggests that students are evaluated or tested to find out the quality of knowledge they have acquired within a specific period of time. Despite the importance of examination in our educational system, instances of malpractices are on the increase. The former Minister of Education, Ruqayyatu (2010) presented a disturbing trend in cases of examination malpractice in the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) and Senior Secondary Certificate Examinations (SSCE) between 2005 to 2009. According to her, in 2005, a whooping number of 73,050 students representing 6.86% were involved in examination malpractice. In 2006, the

number increased to 82,941 candidates representing 7.19%; while in 2007, there were 74,734 candidates representing 5.97% involved in examination malpractice. The figures rose astronomically in 2008 and 2009. Where in 2008, it was 100,428 candidates representing 7.88% that were in the WAEC/SSCE malpractice, while in 2009 it was 118,608 candidates representing 8.74% of the total number of candidates that sat for the examination that were involved in malpractice. Enejeta (2017) also observed that some 214,952 candidates cheated in the 2017 May-June West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) and their results seized by the authorities of WAEC. The story is not different in the NECO and JAMB examinations. Hence, Ajobe (2016) maintained that out of the 1,022,474 candidates who sat for the 2016 National Examinations Council (NECO) Senior School Certificate Examination (SSCE), 43,905 were involved in malpractices; and that NECO's Registrar and Chief Executive Prof. Charles B. U. Uwakwe described the number of schools involved which was put at 194 as 'worrisome'. More worrisome is that the number increased in 2017 where the Registrar and still the Chief Executive of NECO Prof. Uwakwe explained that 50,586 candidates representing 4.81 percent of the 1,055,988 candidates who registered for the 2017 June/July examination were involved in malpractice and that 276 schools were involved in the mass cheating in 34 states (Kaduna, 2018). In a similar vein, The Registrar of the Joint Admission and

Matriculation Board (JAMB) Prof. Is-haq Oloyede said that the Board withheld about 80,889 results of the Computer Based Test (CBT) Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) as a result of alleged examination malpractices; and sad enough, some owners of the Computer Based Test centres connived with some parents and candidates to cheat (Agbakwuru, 2017).

The above statistics revealed that examination malpractice is the thief of quality education in the country and it is on the increase with those involved. What then is quality education and examination malpractice? These two questions form the next thrust of this paper.

Quality Education: An Explication

Quality education is one of the best legacies a nation or an individual can leave behind for generations to come. This is true because education is not only an integral part of human society but can be used as a veritable instrument for development. Omemu (2015) citing Anikweze (1989) defined quality education as a body of highly valued knowledge also reflected as observable behaviour and performance of the product of educational system. For Oseni (2014), it is the extent to which education accomplishes the various roles ascribed to it such as usefulness of education for employment relevant to the developmental needs of the recipients and the society in which the individuals live and operate as citizens, and achievement of students. In other words and as observed by Issa (2005), it is aimed at producing individuals

who are honest, respectable, hard-working, skilled, co-operative and conform to the social order of the day. Mu'azu (2011) also observed that quality education connotes not only the production of college or university graduates who can perform efficiently and effectively, but those who can function with the right types of values and attitudes for the survival of individuals and society in general.

From the foregoing, it simply means that the output of quality education should be intellectually sound, socially adaptable, technologically skilled, vocationally competent and morally sound. Again, it simply suggests that quality education transcends mere schooling to really educating the students. The policy document on education is very clear on this. It states that quality education include the inculcation of national consciousness and unity; the inculcation of the right type of values and attitudes for the survival of the individual and the Nigerian society; the training of the mind in the understanding of the world around; and the acquisition of appropriate skills and the development of mental, physical and social abilities and competencies as equipment for the individual to live in and contribute to the development of his society (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004). This means that the objectives of quality education are geared towards self-realization, better human relationship, individual and national efficiency, and scientific and technological progress among others.

An Exposé on Examination Malpractice

Examination malpractice is any irregular behaviour exhibited by candidates or anybody charged with the conduct of examination in or outside examination hall. It is dishonesty in examination perpetrated by a person or group of persons. It is all forms of cheating within and outside an examination hall which directly or indirectly falsify the ability of the candidate. Hence, Awanbor (2004) explained examination malpractice as an illegal act committed by a single student or in collaboration with other 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. For Oseni (2014), examination malpractice is anything done by the examination candidate that is likely to render the assessment useless or anything made by the stakeholders such as examination administrators, teachers, parents or students that is likely to render the assessment or examination ineffective. The foregoing definitions suggest that examination malpractice is any dishonest effort on the part of the candidates and other collaborating parties aimed at ensuring success in an examination.

There are various forms of examination malpractice. According to Gross (2003), Olu-Aderounmu (2004), and Owuamanam (2005), these include misrepresentation of identity or impersonation, theft of other students' works, bringing prepared answers to examination halls, unethical use of

academic resources, bringing in foreign materials, mass cheating, and insult or assault on supervisors and invigilators. That is not all. In recent times, examination malpractice has gone from simple giraffing where students occasionally stretch their necks to catch a glimpse of what they want to copy from other students' scripts to a variety of sophisticated forms. Anzene (2014) included in the aforesaid lists, the use of micro-chip (i.e. writing very tiny answer summaries on pieces of paper); sorting in which students negotiate with corrupt teachers or lecturers for scores by rewarding them in cashor kind; ECOMOG or ECOWAS or OAU which is an alliance among classmates to communicate via coded language; and hand-held smart devices such as modern cell phones. The simple fact here is that the various forms of examination malpractice have kept evolving by becoming more complex and sophisticated and as such, are not limited to time and place of the examination.

Many scholars and commentators have suggested reasons or causes of examination malpractice in Nigeria. Mu'azu (2011) adduced such reasons to include students' population explosion; non-enforcement of examination malpractice decree 20 of 1984; parents misplaced priority for their children; the public preference for abstraction rather than competence and capability; and teachers ineptitude. There are yet other causes of examination malpractice in the country. Adeyemi (2010), Anzene (2014), and Omemu (2015) listed the causes as inadequate teaching and learning facilities;

poor moral upbringing of some of the youth by parents; lack of confidence among students as a result of inadequate preparations; low moral standard in schools; societal or peer influence; lack of effective supervision of students during examination. Omemu (2015) in citing Denga (1993) reduced these causes into three viz psychological, environmental, and intelligence factors. Again and more importantly is that the list of causes of examination malpractice cannot be exhausted and as such, we turn to the effects which is the hub or centrality of this paper.

Examination Malpractice as the Bane of Commercializing Education in Our Dwindling Economy

Examination malpractice is one persistent force that poses an intractable threat to the worth and merit of education and of teacher education. The methods kept metamorphosing and the effect is vast and devastating. The consequences Oseni (2014) observed, is more evil than any social vices in the country. Abbas (2006) noted that examination malpractice is posing a great threat to the survival and sustainability of good quality education and the integrity and credibility of the certificates awarded. The effects on education is too alarming that Oseni (2014) argued that instead of education to be an agent for purifying the minds of children to become useful members of the society, it is rather diverting their minds away from what education is intended for and thereby, promoting breakdown of moral and ethical standard in our society,

and in rendering the quality of our education less important.

Another serious effect is that several examination centres are derecognized as a result of examination malpractice. Adenipekun (2004) maintained that each year, about 360 schools are derecognized as examination centres. Anzene (2014) reported that the Federal Ministry of Education blacklisted and derecognized 324 secondary schools across the nation as centres for conducting public examinations from 2007 to 2010. The derecognized schools cut across the six geo-political zones where the North-central have 54 schools representing 16.6% of the total number of schools in the zone that were involved; North-west have 12 schools representing 3.6% of the total number of schools in the zone involved; South-east have 48 schools representing 14.8% of the total number of schools in the zone involved; South-west have 86 schools representing 26.5% of the total number of schools in the zone involved; while South-south have 116 as the highest number of schools and this represents 36.0% of the total number of schools in the zone.

One clear deduction from the aforementioned figures is that examination malpractice brings about waste of resources in curbing. Buttressing on this wastefulness of resources, Dimka (2013) observed that the Exam Ethics Project (EEP) chairman estimated ₦100 billion as being wasted to examination malpractice where over five million results were cancelled between 1997 and 2004. Apart from the waste of resources and still on the effects of examination malpractice,

Anzene(2014),Oseni(2014) and Omemu (2015) postulated that the effects include distortion of psychometric properties in the institutions' test; reduction of students self-confidence (here, students have this impression that they cannot do well unless assisted); discouragement of good study habit (here, students' intellectual capacity and skills acquisition are stunted); making the validity and reliability of the examination and the integrity of the certificate issued by the institution questionable; giving the best students' awards to the wrong students by the institution.

Conclusion

Examination malpractice is a social problem that is learnt. It is a menace to quality education. The forms and causes are continually metamorphosing while irreversible loss of credibility, cancellation of results, termination of appointment, 21 years of imprisonment among others are the very few grievous effects of examination malpractice. This makes the effect too alarming for any person to feign ignorance. Yet, despite the causes and effects, meaningful efforts to reduce examination malpractice to a zero tolerance is possible and can be achieved through the instrumentality of self-discipline and changing our orientation and value system.

Recommendations

As already noted, a zero tolerance to examination malpractice is possible and

achievable through purposeful efforts. To this end, the paper recommends thus:

1. There is need to sincerely change our orientation and value system (to life) in achieving excellence over mere approval by the society.
2. There is dare need to reinvigorate the full implementation of examination malpractice decree 20 of 1984 which stipulates 21 years jail term for culprits.
3. The appointment of officials of examination boards and teachers involved in perpetrating examination malpractices be terminated. This should serve as deterrent to others.
4. Very sophisticated or highly technical electronic devices should be used to check students before allowing them into examination halls.
5. Concerted efforts should be made in instilling discipline in students through counselling services in schools. This will prevent acts of indiscipline during examination.
6. Creating a conducive and friendly learning environment in schools should be encouraged.
7. Parents should allow their children to pursue courses that are suitable to their choice and abilities.
8. Marking of lesson notes in schools should be seriously done by the supervisory bodies to ensure that teachers follow the scheme or syllabus.
9. Students should be encouraged and allowed to work independently with learning materials or equipment. Such learning materials or equipment should be provided.

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