
EXAMINATION MALPRACTICE IN INSTITUTIONS OF LEARNING IN NIGERIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

In this work, the writers discussed the concept of examination malpractice and identified various forms of examination malpractice perpetuated by candidates and their corroborators such as cheating, leakage of examination questions, and impersonation among others. They attributed examination malpractice to emphasise on grades and certificates, low moral standards among Nigerians, poverty among teachers and the tenuous legal process to punish offenders. Finally the paper identified the implication of examination malpractice as lost of credibility in certificates issued to Nigerian graduates and the virtual changing of the Nigerian nation to consumers of technological products and identified the mass production of fake drugs, pharmaceutical products and frauds in commercial banks as some of the consequences of examination malpractice in Nigerian institutions of learning.

Academic Excellence

It is worth mentioning that any society that embraces education embraces worthwhile attitudes, behaviours, skills, and moral values for its citizenry. When this is in place, the society in question can develop economically, scientifically, socially, politically, culturally and in fact, educationally. One of the institutions responsible for the moral, skills, attitude and behavioural development of the citizenry is the school. Through a well developed curriculum, the school seriously impacts on the upbringing of the individual and the society at large. However, in Nigeria just like most developing nations of Africa such as Uganda, Ghana, Malawi and Zambia, there has been a general outcry from government, accrediting bodies and the society at large over the quality of graduates from educational institutions (Anyawu, 2000). According to Denga and Denga (1998), reasons advanced by critics over the quality of graduates from educational institutions ranges from disrupted academic calendar, poor educational infrastructures, examination malpractice and cultism. They (Denga and Denga, 1998) maintained that among many factors, examination malpractice has recently acquired the mean status of a social, moral and educational epidemic in Nigeria that appears to resist all forms of treatment.

Despite several measures (such as the promulgation of decree 20 of 1984 by the Federal Government of Nigeria, formation of disciplinary committees by institutions of learning, examination bodies, ministries and establishments in charge of education) to curb the menace of examination malpractice with a view to ameliorating its scathing effect, examination malpractice has continued unabated.

According to Afibo (1997) and Maduabum (2001), examination malpractice is any doing committed before, during or after an examination which tends to jeopardize the credibility of the certificates issued. This could involve invigilators, examiners, teachers, principals, supervisors, staff of examining bodies or any person who is directly or indirectly involved in the conduct of an examination.

Shishima and Apenda (2004) defined examination malpractice as any irregular behaviour exhibited by those charged with the conduct of examinations in examinations halls or outside these halls; during or after such examinations which contravenes the rules and regulations governing the conduct of such examinations.

Aigbekaen (2006) described examination malpractice as any action done or omitted which makes it impossible to use an examination in determining the level of competence of candidate in absorbing, responding and where appropriate, applying knowledge. He maintained that examination malpractice occurs when an individual

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abandons the rigours of study and depends instead on fraudulent means to pass examinations. Many researchers (Pratt, 1980, Denga and Denga, 1998, Afibo, 1997 and Gbenda, 2008) confirmed that examination malpractice is not peculiar to Nigeria. Pratt (1980) reported that examination malpractice was noticed over 3000 years ago in Chinese Civil Service Examination, despite strict precautions and regulations which include death penalty for both the guilty students and the examiners.

Similarly there has been long history of studies on the frequency of cheating in the United States of America and United Kingdom. In India, More in Gbenda (2008) reported that it is common to see teachers, invigilators and security agencies looking helplessly in the classrooms during examination hours as dozens of brothers, sisters, fathers and cousins stand outside government schools hurling rock propelled answer sheets to students. In Zambia, efforts to curb examination malpractice according to Maduabum (2001) include the administration of oaths of secrecy to students, camping of candidates in hostel rooms for two months without outside contact to reduce examination malpractice.

The first examination malpractice in Nigeria was recorded in 1914 when Cambridge School Certificate Examination was leaked to candidates and similarly in 1948 a Nigerian candidate's result was cancelled because of his possession of notes ready prepared and taken to the examination hall of the Cambridge Examination (Akinseye, 2005).

In 1977 the menace of examination malpractice in Nigeria had reached an alarming stage with the leakage of the West African Examination Council question papers which prompted an investigation and subsequent promulgation of decree 20 of 1984 by the Federal Government of Nigeria (Genda, 2008). Since then, the situation has taken so many dimensions in the country. Examination malpractice in Nigeria has become so internalized and legitimized among students that some of them regard it as a normal process of passing examinations.

In a survey of university students' opinion on cheating in examinations, Denga (1984) reported that some students consider reporting someone for cheating a greater offence than cheating itself. Some students opined that cheating is justified when it is badly needed to keep someone in school. Therefore, many students felt that their fellow students who hate examination malpractice should simply look the other way when they see someone cheating in the examinations.

Forms of Examination Malpractice

Several forms of examination malpractices have been identified by a number of researchers in recent times in Nigeria, notable among them includes;

- 1 Leakage of examination questions
- 2 Cheating
- 3 ECOMOG
- 4 Contractors, Collusion or Impersonation

Leakage of examination questions otherwise called 'EXPO' takes place when candidates in one way or the other have knowledge of the examination questions before the examination day. Such candidates are placed on advantage since they can easily read the relative topics and areas and even hire people to assist them to enhance their performance in that examination. Nwankwo (2012) alleged that in some cases, school principals who are zealous to record a high percentage in certificate examinations may try to leak examination papers to their collaborating teachers to coach or rehearse their students on or before the day of the examination in order to raise the status of the school when results are published.

Another form of examination malpractice in Nigeria as identified by Gbenda (2008) is the ECOMOG system. Here young armed men are used as thugs. They normally force themselves into examination halls, collect question papers, solve them outside the examination hall and return answers to candidates in such examination halls. Any attempt to resist this act by invigilators and custodian of examinations usually results into bodily harm and even death of those standing on their way.

Examination malpractices in Nigeria also take the collusion or contract form. Gbenda (2008) reported that agents such as examination attendants, security personnel etc are used for an arranged fee to help students in one way or the other. In some cases, male students may write examination for their girl friends, undergraduate may write external examination (such as West African School Certificate Examination, University Matriculation Examination etc) for the candidate. Umar (2003) alleged that in some cases, desperate parents offer some money to some invigilators to make sure they allow their candidate to cheat. He added that some principals of institutions arrange after collecting examination malpractice fee, with subject teachers to assist candidates during examinations.

According to Udoh (2011) among the identified forms of examination malpractice, cheating appears to be the most widely employed form of examination malpractice in Nigeria. This occurs in examination halls, at the marking stage and at the

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collation stage. In examination halls, a number of malpractices are exhibited by different candidates. Some students introduce into examination halls tiny pieces of papers containing answers to examination questions usually called “microchips”, “bullets” or “missiles”. Such chips in some cases are wrapped with pebbles to give them weight and are launched from one candidate to another like stones. Some candidates engage in direct copying from text books, peers, exchange answer sheets, copy from note books or relevant materials often hidden under furniture, cloths, bags or pockets. This system of cheating according to Denga and Denga (1998) is called ‘dubbing’.

Nwankwo (2012) identified another form of cheating in examination halls as through the use of mobile phones and high technology microcomputers. He explained that students use mobile phones and send examination answers as text messages to their friends all over the country while those with high technology microcomputers log in points into these computers and use them in examination halls. Even when invigilators see them, they take such computers to be calculators.

At the marking stage, some examiners according to Genda (2008) intentionally make mistakes in adding up the marks earned by some candidates. In higher institutions of learning, Genda maintained that students go round lecturers after examination with gifts either in cash or kind for the purpose of altering scores which is called ‘sorting’. He added that some lecturers even indicate that weak students or students who for one reason or the other, are not sure of success in their examination could see them after examination for some upgrading of their papers.

During collation of results, Kayode (2006) noted that some examiners who have collected bribe from prospective candidates alter their scores to favour them. He added that some of these malpractices are carried out by computer operators who are in charge of typing results. Some because of the geographical location or name tag of candidates make deliberate entries in form of mistakes which if not dictated, are published as authentic scores of candidates.

According to Ada (2006), a new trend in examination malpractice is the emergence of miracle centres and schools in Nigeria where all forms of examination malpractices are perpetuated. In these centres, special fees are being charged for the purpose of aiding and abetting examination malpractices. At the secondary school level for instance, some principals collect un-receipted money tagged malpractice fee which they share with their collaborating agents.

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Agu (2006) reported that in some states in Nigeria, there are examination malpractice agents for all forms of public examinations. Candidates register with the managers of these centres (Miracle Centre) who in turn take these students to schools or centres in the remote areas to sit for examinations where all forms of examination malpractices are exhibited. Ada (2006) observed that in most miracle centres, answers are dictated, answer scripts are smuggled out of examination centres and mercenaries are placed in between students to tell those answers. In extreme cases as speculated by Genda (2008), the proprietors of these miracle centres travel to WAEC, NECO and JAMB offices to bribe staff and obtain excellent scores for their candidates.

Possible Causes of Examination Malpractice

Examination malpractice can be attributed to several factors. Genda (2008) identified under funding, lack of motivation for teachers, wrong values, family factors and personality issues as major factors contributing to examination malpractice in Nigeria. However, Denga and Denga (1998) summarized these factors to include:

1. Pervading emphasis on grades and certificates in the society
2. Inadequate preparations of candidates for examinations
3. Low moral standards in the society
4. Poverty on the part of teachers who constitute the bulk of invigilators and examiners
5. The tenuous legal process to punish offenders.

Denga and Denga (1998) alleged that the pervading emphasis on grades and certificates in Nigeria has introduced a desperate competition and pressure for academic excellence in order to further education or get a job. They maintained that the debilitating pressure from parents and society on candidates to obtain good grades and certificates has triggered off all sorts of desperate behaviours aimed at getting good grades and certificates at all costs.

Another factor responsible for examination malpractice in Nigeria is inadequate preparation of candidates for examinations. Today, learning facilities and poor conditions of service for teachers have perpetually lowered down the standard of education in Nigeria (Ada, 2006). He submitted that a large part of school year is spent on strikes with little or no teaching coupled with poor learning facilities; candidates have few options other than to devise various strategies of cheating to pass the examination which they are not prepared for.

Udoh (2011) observed that the decay in the moral standard of the Nigerian society is replicated by students during examinations. He stressed that while moral

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standard appeared to be corrupt and morally bankrupt, the youths find parallel malpractices in other spheres of the society such as rigging of elections results, dubious recruitment exercises among others. Candidates writing examinations therefore, deduce that cheating is not an offence since it is even encouraged among prominent citizens of the country. They therefore engage in massive cheating without reflecting to the moral norms of society.

Denga and Denga (1998) pointed out that extreme poverty can deprive an individual of the basic necessities of life. They opined that since most teachers experience poverty because of poor conditions of service, they can easily be lured by financial temptations when they are invigilating or marking examinations.

In Nigeria, a lot of people have generally complained that legal processes to bring culprits to books are tenuous and laborious. Udoh (2011) cited instances where tribunals have been set up to try those involved in examination malpractice in the past and even decrees promulgated to deal decisively with offenders without a corresponding action. Such tenuous investigations usually lose the grip with time, and offenders are eventually set free and such precedents can not deter offenders.

Implications for National Development

Examination malpractice is an ugly social virus that is rapidly acquiring the mean status of a social, moral and educational epidemic in Nigeria. The notorious occurrence of examination malpractice is similar to an outbreak of a social malaise that appears to resist all forms of treatment such as AIDS and diabetes. Examination malpractice is perilous not only because it is capable of ruining our educational system but also because it is can impair the efficiency of our labour force by smuggling in those who are mentally and morally defective.

The main objective of education is to equip learners with requisite knowledge, attitudes and skills to enable them relate and adapt successfully to the rapid socio-economic, cultural and political changes in the society and be able to interpret signals of future challenges. Examination robs individuals and the nation of the benefits of education. It makes it impossible to use examination in determining the level of a candidate in absorbing, responding and where appropriate, applying knowledge (Aigbekaen, 2006).

Onyechere (1996) declared that many people within the last 30 years in Nigeria have been made to go to school and pretend to be educated since any system that fails to discipline the learner also fails to train the character. Akinseye (2005) reported a situation in Edo State where aged parents registered First School Leaving Certificate

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Examination and brought their children to write for them. This implies that parents who have the obligation to train their children morally by stopping them from engaging in any form of examination malpractice have failed and the future of our society is at jeopardy. This has the consequence of leading to a gradual indoctrination of the youths into the culture of fraud and other social vices. Such children on graduation from the system may turn out to be fraudulent politicians, engineers, doctors, lawyers accountants, civil servants and in fact, religious leaders. When people get into offices through fraudulent means, they try to maintain themselves in office by fraud thereby, giving rise to mediocrity. The current behaviours of Nigerian leaders in the civil service, economy and governance during and after elections do not send good signals to the society.

Gbenda (2008) opined that the current violent student demonstrations in schools and pervasive cult activities at all levels of education in Nigeria may not be unconnected with the fall out of the lawlessness that has characterized examination malpractice at all levels of education in Nigeria. He alleged that the uncertainty, insecurity, fear, anxiety and anarchy at examination centres in Nigeria have created an emotional torture and trauma on the entire society and in some cases, loss of lives and properties.

In higher institutions of learning in Nigeria, youths have become so resistive, aggressive and violent that instead of articulating their position or views on any local or national issue and seeking audience where they could be heard, resolve to violence. Nwankwo (2012) opined that the situation is such that today in Nigeria, the more violent or destructive you are, the better are your chances of being heard. Umar (2003) predicted that with the present level of violence in Nigeria exhibited by youths, Nigeria is sitting on a time bomb that will sooner than later explode. The activities of Boko Haram and Niger-Delta militants in Nigeria are just the beginning of violence in the country.

Gbariu (2006) observed that examination malpractice seems to be redefining education in Nigeria. He pointed out that some people in Nigeria today hold educational certificates to prove that they are educated. However, Denga (1984) stated that it is a mistake to use certificate as a proof of education. He argued that for a person to be educated, he must meet the prescribed criteria to a large extent and must have enough evidence to show that he has achieved the aims of education as stated in the national policy on education. This is normally exhibited by the learner as he interacts with his co-workers, carryout instructions from subordinates and manipulates his given task. Today, because of undue emphasis attached to paper qualification in Nigeria, students are barely graduates from schools without acquiring the necessary knowledge, skills, norms, values

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and other attributes expected of them. The development has turned out many graduates who cannot boast of any meaningful work place skills.

Many researchers have attributed the unemployment issue in Nigeria to the inability of youths to acquire the necessary saleable workplace skills otherwise called employability skills. They cited many instances where some graduates of engineering programmes could not distinguish between tools and equipment. This they attributed to the inattentiveness of students to class work which they normally feel is unnecessary. Such students who in most cases are members of one cult group or the other feel they can always find their way to have their certificate at the expense of learning. The resultant effect is the surge in crime wave in the country.

Examination malpractice is likely to bring a serious setback to the technological development of Nigeria. While the challenges of technological development and globalization is making nations of the world to maximize their human capital for development, Nigerians are busy wasting human capital by encouraging examination malpractice. In the final analysis where Asian countries and the less endowed countries of the world will have inventions, innovation and technological breakthrough to show for their development, Nigerians would have turned themselves into a consumer nation instead of a producing nation. Today, on every street of the Nigerian nation, students' projects from Asian countries are on sale to Nigerians while Nigerians are still busy thinking of how to use these products without thinking of how they are produced.

Another implication of examination malpractice on the national development of the country is on the credibility of Nigerian certificates in the world of work today. Nigerians intending to pursue higher degrees or seek employment in overseas and here in the country are subjected to one form of examination or the other to authenticate their certificates. Such candidates are not admitted or employed based on their said qualifications alone but also the results of their qualifying examinations.

The validity and reliability of both internal and external examinations in Nigeria has been undermined and this has negatively affected the reputation of examining bodies and even institutions of learning. It is common today to note that admissions into undergraduate programmes of Nigerian Universities is no longer determined by University Matriculation Examination (UME) alone but also by passing an aptitude test set by such universities. This is because Nigerian universities no longer have trust on the reliability and validity of candidates' scores in all public examinations.

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Apparently appalled by the spate of examination malpractice, the Nigerian Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB), in 2001, introduced variations in the numeration of questions for candidates sitting for the same matriculation examination. That year, candidates' performance in JAMB examination was awfully poor. But it did not take long for the syndicates to devise other means to beat JAMB's laudable innovation and that, without gainsay, was with the effective collaboration and connivance of some unscrupulous JAMB officials. Today, JAMB is again proposing internet examination of UME candidates which implies additional cost for candidates.

Similarly, employers of labour have joined the queue of writing qualifying examinations before recruitment. In the Civil Service for instance, promotion of staff to the next level is based on passing a prescribed examination apart from the normal years of service. It is therefore clear that there is no single trust on the authenticity of the Nigerian Certificates. A country that becomes noted for examination malpractices loses international credibility. The implication is that certificates/documents emanating from such country will be treated with suspicion. Consequently, certificates awarded by such country's educational institutions are held in doubt. Such country's educational institutions are as good as dead as far as international cooperation and recognition in education are concerned. Certificate is becoming valueless in this country because of this social malaise that has become inimical to educational development in the country.

It is disheartening to note that this generation of Nigeria graduates will end up producing doctors who will forget scissors and towel in the stomach after surgical operation as long as malpractices are prevailing. This generation will continue to produce students with Alphas (distinctions) in WACE result, first class honours in the universities without a single knowledge in any definite course or subject. This generation will continue to produce teachers, who are unable to spell the names of their schools correctly. This generation will end up producing lawyers who cannot differentiate between an accused person and the complainant.

Furthermore, the producing of fake drugs by pharmacists and massive fraud in commercial banks are the consequences of examination malpractices- malpractices not controlled at the earlier stage which blossomed to high scale malpractices and corruption.

Conclusion

Today, societal values have greatly changed and the attendant consequences are seen in the behaviours of youths and adults. The society is therefore bedevilled by vices such as armed robbery, cultism and examination malpractices among others which seem to be redefining the aims and objectives of education in many countries of the world.

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Since Certificate appeared to be recognized against experience gained during training, many candidates no longer see the need of the rigorous training during school days but rather depend on illegal ways of acquiring certificates during or after training. The result is the production of unqualified graduates who are turned out from many schools yearly. Such graduates who are found in all sectors of the economy to a large extent are unproductive. Nations with such graduates have therefore; become consumers of technological products instead of being producers. The consequence is increased level of poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, armed robbery, violence among others.

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