CRACKING DOWN ON EXAMINATION MALPRACTICE: INOYOTORO FOUNDATION APPROACH

Akpakpan O. Udoh

Department of Science,
St. Mary’s Science College Abak,
Akwa Ibom State.

Abstract

This paper takes a compelling look at the hydra-headed phenomenon of examination malpractice in our schools. It observes that it is an endemic monster, cutting across all strata of the Nigerian society and having the potential to devastate the Nigerian education sector if decisive steps are not taken to reverse the trend. It observes further that to deter would-be examination malpractitioners, various measures/sanctions such as public campaign and enlightenment, cancellation of results of defaulters, derecognition of erring schools, including jail sentences, have been suggested and tested to no avail. Accordingly, the paper is a passionate advocate of Inoyotoro Foundation approach in which experienced teachers mentor their less-experienced colleagues, to produce and multiply excellence in the teaching profession, systematically replacing the culture of examination malpractice with the virtues of examination ethics.

The phenomenon of malpractice in public examinations has taken a heavy toll on Nigerian education system, taking centre stage of national discourse for more than a decade. It has become a monster that undermines the reliability and validity of examinations and ultimately the integrity of the certificates issued by examination bodies such as West African Examination Council (WAEC) and National Examination Council (NECO). It almost makes a complete nonsense of the Joint Matriculation Examination (JME) results, as implied in the popular concept of post JME aptitude test conducted by the respective Nigerian universities for the purpose of determining the actual level of competence, defining the suitability, or otherwise, of candidates for university admissions. It can be extrapolated from the current trend that urgent and decisive steps must be taken to avert a nightmare scenario.

Concept and Role of Examination

Adekake (1993) defined examination an instrument for assessing individuals’ skill and knowledge in general, and specific areas of studies and overall academic achievements. To Hornby (1995), examination is a formal test of somebody’s knowledge, skill or ability in a particular subject, especially by means of written
questions or practical exercises (p.58). Liman (cited in Onyechere 1996) emphasized credible examination. Hear him:

Examination in broad perspective is an instrument for testing, assessing, evaluation, and accreditation. It is used for the purpose of selection, placement, certification and promotion. Thus, in schools, factories and industries and in every human endeavor, examination is a potent instrument for judgment of knowledge or competence. For any examination to be credible, it must possess key elements which are validity and reliability. These key elements can only be present if devoid of partiality, cheating and all sorts of malpractices (p.22).

Examination can be internal or external. Examples of internal examinations are: terminal and promotion examinations. Examples of external (public) examinations are: Senior School Certificate Examinations conducted by WAEC and NECO; Junior Secondary Certificate Examinations conducted by State Ministry of Education; Unified Matriculation Examinations for Universities, Polytechnics and Colleges of Education conducted by Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB). Examination Malpractice occurs in both internal and external examinations, almost routinely.

Examination Malpractice Versus Examination Ethics

Ahmed (cited in Onyechere 1996) defined examination malpractice as any art of wrong doing or neglect that contravene the rules of acceptable practice, before during and after an examination by anybody, in anyway. To Ezekwesili (2007), it is any act of omission or commission which compromises the reliability and integrity of any assessment or evaluation system, “” making it impossible to use an examination in determining the level of competence of a candidate in absorbing, reproducing and where appropriate, applying knowledge “” (Afigbo, cited in Onychere 1996, p.27). Examination ethics on the other hand, is said be

the correct conduct and behavior which should underpin any examination system such that it gives validity and authenticity to the certification resulting therefrom... The rules, regulations and expectations, and code of conduct prescribed to guide and determine all segment of the examinations constitute the ethics (Afigbo, cited in Onyechere 1996, pp.26-27)

In events of boycotting examination ethics, irregularities set in. “This pollutes the results of the students in examinations and poses a great threat to the validity and reliability of examination results and certificates”’ (Alutu and Aluede 2006, p.296). The goals of national educational system and in deed national development become like the mirage if examinations ethics is not encouraged and instituted (Nwadihani 2005).
Phases, and Forms, of Examination Malpractice

Examination malpractices occur in three (3) phases, namely: Pre-examination Phase, During-examination phase and post-examination phase.

Pre-Examination Phase: Before-examination fraud takes the form of:
- Migration from urban to rural schools to register to sit WAEC/NECO Senior School Certificate Examination (SSCE)
- Inflating continuous assessment scores of candidates
- Collecting money from candidates to pay invigilator/supervisors to facilitate malpractices
- Imposing impersonator’s photographs on the original registration forms.
- Buying ‘live’ question papers from examination bodies or corrupt bank officials entrusted with the safe-keeping of question papers.

During-Examination Phase: Common malpractices at this stage include
- Copying neighbours’ work through neck-elongation (Giraffing)
- Whispering answer in examination hall
- Bringing note/text books into examination hall, nick named “hide-and seek”
- Swooping of scripts in examination hall, known as “shuttling”
- Writing on hidden part(s) of wares, known as “Super print”
- Writing on desks, known as ‘desktop publishing’
- Writing on laps, referred to as ‘laptop publishing’

Post-Examination Phase: Examination malpractices often occur after the examination. Common forms of these malpractices include:
- Repackaging of scripts to include new scripts written outside examination hall
- Payment of money to examiners/makers for some favours, including re-writing the examination
- Corrupt practices of computer operators during production of results
- General sorting, particularly, with officials of examination bodies and examiners to post grades not earned or merited by those concerned.

Indicators of Examination Malpractice

Twelve common indicators of examination malpractice are discernible in a given examination center. These are: similarity of answers across scripts, same mistakes, exceptionally neat/rough scripts, out-of-range answer scripts, multiple handwriting on the same answer script, forgotten microchips of note in answer booklets, answers beyond the intelligent quotient of candidates, submitting two or more answer scripts on the same candidates with different handwritings.
Examination Malpractitioners

Examination Malpractice is said (Abbas 2006; Onyechere 1996) to be perpetrated by every stakeholder in the education sub-sector. The list is pretty long. At the top of the list are: the candidates, teachers, parents/guardians, school authorities/supervisors/invigilators, custodians of examination papers and government functionaries.

Factor Responsible for Examination Malpractice

The fundamental factors responsible for examination malpractice, according to Abbas (2006) and Onyechere (1996) include: inadequate preparation for examination, general laziness and absence of hardwork, teachers inability to cover the stipulated syllabus, ineffective teaching methods, lack/inadequate instructional materials. Others are: congestion in examination hall, inadequate invigilators during examination, lack of proper supervision/invigilation, wrong choice of subjects, lack of proper guidance and counseling programmes, economic depression, excessive emphasis on certificate by the society, and poor remuneration for teachers.

The basic factors of examination dishonesty can be organized into psychological, environmental and sociological perspectives, in order to give a more comprehensive insight into the social malaise.

Psychological Perspective

Psychologically, examination malpractice is primarily induced by high-level anxiety arising from poor and inadequate preparation for examination. From various research studies emerge the finding that high-level-anxiety-students exhibit worry before and during examinations, heart-palpitation, uneasiness and sweating (De cecco & Crawford 1988), which are inimical to success in examination.

Although the term ‘anxiety’ takes in different shades of meaning as it appears in the writing and research of psychologists in various fields of specialization, there is general agreement that it refers to the complex and sometimes chronic emotional state and generally characterized by fear, apprehension, or tension. As such, it is associated with failure to meet our needs, anticipation of such failure, or even merely an awareness of possibility of failure (Lindgren 1976). The psychological tremor of failure or scoring low grades disposes students to indulge in examination irregularities and misconducts. From psychological standpoint, examination malpractice is highly contagious, capable of affecting the psyche and integrity of students who are hardworking and would ordinarily resolve not to involve in any from of cheating.

Environmental Perspective

Environment conditions that sustain examination malpractices encompass non-availability, or inadequacy of instructional materials, poorly equipped school libraries and laboratories, noisy school environment; shortage of qualified teachers, poor remuneration for teachers. Under these conditions, the teaching methods would be
ineffective, the syllabus would neither be thoroughly treated nor completed; The teacher, in general would subscribe to helping students cut corners in examination. Similarly, teachers and other personnel who are poorly remunerated are susceptible to aiding and abetting examination malpractice (in the face of financial and material inducement from students and parents) in order to make ends meet.

**Sociological Perspective**

Sociologically, examination malpractices are a product of a society that nurtures cheats and mediocres and turn them to celebrities (Ekpu, 1991). The desperations to pass examination result from the excessive emphasis placed on certificate as a measure of suitability and preparedness for socio-economic and political positions. Candidates are quite conscious of the fact that good grades in examination are gateways to further education and entry into the labour market. Most candidates, therefore, opt to excel in public examinations by hook or crook, in order to gain admission into tertiary institutions rather than fail examination or obtain poor grades and be ushered in to, and stagnated on menial jobs, which portrays a hopeless and a bleak future.

It is a regrettable fact that all forms of examination malpractice are provoked by misplacement of priorities. According to Omoluabi (1993) and Uzoka (1993), as cited in Alulu and Aluede (2006)

> our value system has broken down completely and so adults and youth alike act without moral scruples. The general emphasis in our society today is on materialism, bribery, corruption, cultism, sexual promiscuity, fraud, violence, certificate racketeering and the host of other social vices (p.296).

**Dangers/Consequences of Examination Malpractice**

Examination malpractice is a social evil capable of damaging Nigeria to the extent of leading to a failed nation. This iniquitous practice has very serious educational, economic, political and social consequences. Of all educational problems in Nigeria, none poses a greater threat than the phenomenon of examination malpractice. Because it undermines the reliability and validity of cognitive measures, it is rather impossible to use results of examination to: determine the levels of skills and competences of candidates, evaluate the effectiveness of teaching strategies; diagnose students difficulties, weaknesses and deficiencies in learnings; and predict candidates future academic behaviours and careers.

The culture of examination malpractice has very serious consequences for the society, viz:

> Dangerous orientation for leaders of tomorrow; planting seed of fraud and corruption in the fertile minds of students; education without character and learning; certificate not backed by skills and knowledge; poor quality and fraudulent labour force; fatal professional errors; rejection of certificates awarded by Nigerian institutions by international education market; and direct monetary and economic waste associated with canceling 700,000 results each year (Ezekwesili 2007: 2.)
From the foregoing, the actualization of the goals of education will continue to be a mirage if the scourge of examination malpractice is not eradicated from the system. What is the way out of this quagmire?

Eradicating Examination Malpractice

Several measures have been suggested for taming examination malpractice. The commonest ones include:

- Actualizing active learning through participatory, interactive, collaborative and reflective teaching which are the hallmarks of student-centred approach
- Starting the fight against examination malpractice at the level of the family by inculcating in our children/wards the values of hardwork, honesty and diligence in school work.
- Placing less emphasis on the possession academic certificates and refocusing on skill acquisition, inorder to reduce the cravings for ‘alphas’ and “credits” in public examinations at all cost
- Deploying severe sanctions. In this case, Abbas (2006) advocated: cancellation of the entire or part of the result of candidates caught in the nefarious act; barring of candidates from taking any examination conducted by the examination body for a period of time; de-recognition and prevention of erring schools from presenting candidates for a period of time; dismissal/termination of appointment and/or prosecution of defaulting officers of examination bodies. “In addition to suspensions, expulsions, cancellations of examination results, withdrawal of certificates, de-recognition of schools, etcetera, names of examination malpractitioners should be regularly published in the national dailies” (Onyechere 1996, p.86)

Meanwhile, all efforts being made to stop it, including enacting examination malpractice law (Examination Act 33 of 1999) to make it a criminal offence, punishable with imprisonment for a term of 3-4 years with or without option of fine, have remained largely ineffective. Amidst the continued search for therapeutic measures, emerges the proactive / pragmatic approach of Inoyo Toro Foundation.

Inoyo Toro Foundation: Teachers Mentoring Teachers

Examination malpractice is just a reflection of societal value system. The Nigerian society is that which celebrates mediocres, viewing cheating as smartness, which is most unfortunate. Accordingly, to have a crackdown on examination malpractice and enthrone academic excellence, Inoyo Toro Foundation (www.inoyotorofoundation.org) operationalises a systematic reproduction of a chain of excellent
teachers through mentoring to populate the teaching profession in Akwa Ibom State, by instituting a 2-phase, compelling teachers award for teaching excellence.

**Phase I: Annual Teachers Award for Teaching Excellence**

The Foundation inline with it’s vision to improve the standard of education in Akwa Ibom State, using teachers as a focal point, institutes a special Annual Award for the “celebration of excellence in the teaching” of physics, chemistry, biology, mathematics and English Language in Akwa Ibom State public secondary schools. Accordingly, the first prize winner receives ₦250,000.00; the second ₦150,000.00, the third ₦100,000.00.

Mhipom (2009) explained that, to choose winners for the award, the award committee has put in place competitive, rigorous and transparent selection criteria, viz:

- Review and ranking of West African School Certificate (WASC) results for all public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State for initial short-listing
- Review of SSI, SS2 and SS3 students’ registration rate for the short-listed schools.
- Visit to the schools to assess and ascertain availability of laboratory and environment to support WASC results.
- Input from the school principals, fellow teachers, and students of the selected teachers via questionnaires
- Attitudinal test administered by an independent body on the selected teachers for final selection.

**Phase 2: Grand Mentor Teachers Award of ₦500,000.00.**

In this phase, every prize winner of phase I is turned a mentor, via an intensive mentoring programme (of a consulting firm), watched by the Executive Secretary of Science Teachers Association of Nigeria, and monitored by the State Commissioner for Education. By definition

> Mentoring is the partnering of an experienced person with a less experienced colleague to facilitate personal and professional growth and development for the benefit of the mentor, the mentee and the organization. The mentor is the experienced person or role model, and the mentee is the less-experiences colleague (Udoh & Olumide, 2000, p.5)

In this mentorship stage (phase 2), every mentor is to reproduce 4 to 7 excellent teachers in his mentees, thereby initiating a 4 to 7-man crusade to shorten the lifespan of examination malpractice. Each of these crusaders (new population of excellent teachers), trained by Inoyo Foundation, will in turn reproduce 4 to 7 excellent teachers. The process is continuous, and is expected to result in a geometric increase in population of excellent teachers, stamping out examination malpractice in students lifetimes.
The most committed mentor adjudged in terms of successful reproduction of excellence in mentees, will cart away N500,000.00 prize money, courtesy of Inoyotoro Foundation, in a colourful ceremony.

Summary/Conclusion

Examination malpractice is a terrible monster in our midst. It undermines the reliability of the senior school certificate examinations offered by WAEC and NECO and threatens the validity of the certificates issued by these institutions (WAEC and NECO). The alarming rate of increase in examination malpractice in Nigerian Secondary Schools, and it’s attendant grave consequences on the social, political and economic structures of the nation, calls for concern from all stakeholders in the education sub-sector.

To deter would-be exam malpractitioners, various measures/sanctions such as: public campaigns and enlightenment programmes against the menace, suspensions; cancellation of results, and de-reorganization of defaulting schools, including jail sentence, have been suggested and tested to no avail. Nonetheless, Inoyotoro Foundation Approach, in which experienced teachers mentor their less experiences colleagues, to produce and multiply excellence in the teaching profession, is systematically replacing the culture of examination malpractice with the virtues of examination ethics. Government, both state and federal, should lend support to this noble project.

References


