

STRATEGIES FOR COMBATING EXAMINATION IRREGULARITIES IN SOUTH-SOUTH REGION OF COLLEGES OF EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Examination malpractice is no doubt an embarrassing practice that has eaten deep into our education sector. This menace has placed Nigerian educational system into threat and created doubt on the quality of Nigerian graduates from Nigerian institutions. This paper critically examined the concepts of examination irregularities/malpractice, forms of examination malpractice, possible causes of examination malpractices and suggested strategies of curbing this unwholesome scenario with particular reference to Colleges of Education in South-South region of Nigeria. Examination malpractice or irregularities is described as unfair, illegal, and unethical act against examination rules and regulations. Some of the identified forms of examination irregularities include impersonation, introduction of extraneous materials, copying from fellow students, sneaking out with question papers among other factors. The causes

highlighted here include – laziness of students, corrupt invigilators and supervisors, high stakes examination, over-emphasis on certificates, inadequate teaching and learning facilities and so on. It is hoped that the content of this paper if implemented by government and examination bodies, will help to reduce the incidence of exams malpractice and restore the credibility of our educational system.

Keywords: Forms, Causes, Examination, Irregularity, Colleges, Combating

Examination irregularities is also referred to as examination malpractices simply which means any irregular behaviour exhibited by a candidate or anybody charged with the conduct of examination before, during or after the examination that contravenes the rules and regulations governing the conduct of such examination. Examination malpractice can also be regarded as unfair, illegal, and unethical act against examination regulations. As aspect of it, is referred to as “Expo” which is used to describe a situation of exposing the examination questions to the students before the time of the examination. Chukwuemeka in (Onah, 2013) described examination malpractice as a violation of examination rules and regulation by candidate. Bunza in (Onah,2013) is of the view that what constitutes malpractice is any action that contravenes the rules and regulation of examination ethics. This is line with Adamu in (Onah 2013) who described it as irregularities premeditated and perpetrated by the candidates or their agents with the intention of gaining undue advantage in the examination.

Nwana (2000) affirmed that examination malpractice is a massive and unprecedented abuse of rules and regulations pertaining to internal and external examinations, beginning, from the setting of such examinations through the taking of the examinations, their marking (scoring) and grading, to the release of the results, and the issuance of certificates. In a similar and more concise form, Nnawuchi in (Ekoja & Mgboro 2006) defined examination malpractice as seeking, obtaining or giving undue aid to any candidate before, during and after the examination. Tukur and Musa (2001) considered examination malpractice as any act acknowledged as illegal or ethical that a student commits with the aim of obtaining grades or marks underserved.

Denga (2001), described examination malpractice as a complex deviant behaviour whose change-ability in type and form ranged from leakage of questions, entering examination hall with prepared materials, foul marking, purchase of grades, re-writing of the examination paper after the actual examination, and impersonation. Odongo (2002) described examination malpractice as an act(s) of wrong doing carried out by a candidate or group of candidates or any person with the intention to cheat or

gain an unfair advantage in an examination, while Onyehere in (Onah, 2013) defined examination malpractice as “any action done or omitted which makes it impossible to use an examination in determining the level of competence of candidates in absorbing, reproducing and where possible applying knowledge.

Examination irregularities or malpractice is viewed as any irregular behaviour exhibited by candidates or anybody charged with the conduct of examination in or outside the examination hall, before or after examination. Omoegun (2003) supported this view-by affirming that it is a misconduct or improper practice in any examination with a view to obtaining good result through wrong practice.

Summarily, examination irregularities or malpractice is an unconventional or unlawful ways which testees or learners use in passing their test or examinations. It include all ways and manners that distort or confound the desire or goal of examination agencies to provide a uniform procedure or localized uniform setting of standard for the conduct of examination.

Forms of Examination Malpractices/Irregularities

Examination irregularities take place at various levels of education. In Colleges of Education in Nigeria with particular reference to the South-South Region of Colleges of Education in Nigeria, the writers observed and noticed that these irregularities commenced during examination development, examination preparation, and administration of examination and during scoring or marking exercises.

- a. **Examination Development:** The common forms of examination malpractice at this level are leakages. Here, the content of the examination is disclosed to the examination candidates prior to taking the examination. In most case, it usually involves one or more of the members of the examination bodies or agents. Example printers, typists, messengers, securities and even co-lecturers.
- b. **Examination Preparation:** Irregularities at this level can occur if the students have access to the items or questions before writing the paper. Such malpractice involves some staff member of examination authorities, proof-readers and messengers employed to arrange the papers and school administrators.
- c. **Examination Administration:** During the administration of examinations, Happiness and Jean (2006), noted the following forms of malpractices
 - i) **Impersonation:** Here, an individual who is not registered as a candidate takes the place of one that is registered. This is a common phenomenon found amongst students in Colleges of Education where this study is carried. This often is made possible through the collusion between the examination co-ordinators, supervisors and the students. In such cases, the supervisors of the examination take monetary

rewards from students in order to allow the non-registered for such examination to write for the student who registered for the examination.

- ii) **Smuggling of Foreign Materials:** This is one of the common forms of examination malpractice noticed among the students in the Colleges of Education. This relate to them introducing unauthorised materials such as textbooks, notebooks, monographs, handsets, answer booklets, etc. into the examination hall. Such materials are usually smuggled into the examination halls by students' pants, shoes, written on part of their bodies, writing on desks, writing on handkerchiefs, writing on tissue papers, on their hair-ties among other available means of smuggling in materials.
- iii) **Copying:** Here, students spy and reproduce another students' work with or without permission of the student being copied from.
- iv) **Collusion:** In collusion-malpractice, students are enhanced by inadequate spacing. By this, they engage in passing of information between themselves.
- v) **Intimidation:** This is a situation where examination officials, supervisors, invigilators, course lecturers are physically assaulted or threatened by some students who claimed to be powerful and cultists. By these their actions, most lecturers begin to unduly award pass marks to such category of students. In many occasions, the students visit the lecturer's offices or their home to make these intimidating demands.

Onah (2013), identify the following as forms of examination malpractice or irregularities. They include; impersonation, introduction of relevant extraneous materials, copying from fellow students, asking other students questions inside the examination hall, sneaking out with question papers and answer scripts, use of minicomputers, organizers and calculators, textbooks, lecture notes, body writing or tattoo, conniving with supervisors and others.

Fagbemi (2001) identified various forms of examination malpractice. They include – bringing in unauthorized materials, writing on currency notes and identifies cards, spying of other students' in examination halls, substitution of answer sheets, change of examination scores or grades. Jacob and Lar (2001) stated that examination irregularities include impersonation, leakage of examination questions to students before examination, conniving with supervisors to cheat, body writing or tattoo in which students specially females writes on hidden parts of their bodies. Maduka in (Onah 2013) stated that some students buy question papers with money while some others buy questions with their bodies in the case of females. Fagbemi (2001) further identified other forms of irregularities in examination to include the use of radio

transmitters in hidden clothes, personal stereos loaded with pre-recorded tapes and programmable calculators packed with data.

In another development, Olatunbosun (2009) stated that the introduction of the Global System of Mobile Telephones (GSM) in the country has revolutionized examination malpractices in the school system. He advanced that a lot of relevant academic information is stored in handsets and easily downloaded and used inside examination halls. It is also common for students to transfer answers to other students through sms (text messages).

Causes of Examination Irregularities/Malpractice

Examination malpractice is a cankerworm that portends grave dangers for the nation, especially in Teacher Training Institutions. The major causes of examination malpractices are;

- **Laziness of the Students:** Seriousness is thrown to the wind by many students. Most of them have little time for their studies. They spend their time attending parties and forming gangs who engage in unwanted behaviour.
- **Many Students are Desperate:** Some of them think that passing examination is a do or die affair. They want to excel by all means. Thus, they engage in cheating to pass examination.
- **Corrupt Invigilators and Supervisors:** Some students' bribe the invigilators and supervisors to allow them cheat in the examination hall.

Oluwu (2006), advance the following causes of examination practices generally.

- a. **The High Stakes of the Examination:** Success in an examination can have profound, immediate and long-term impacts on a candidate life. In many developing countries like Nigeria, examination success and secondary school graduation represents the sole avenue for poor students to secure a non-menial job. Many parents are keen to resort to various corrupt tactics to ensure that their children "pass" the public examination.
- b. **Teacher and School Status:** In many instances teachers and school reputations depend on the success of students in public examination. This is particularly true where official, or unofficial, league tables are published.
- c. **Personality Disposition:** Some students are more prone to cheating than others.
- d. **Quota System:** Quota systems are often applied to determine pass rates, where a student perceives that success is dependent on the number of available places rather than on attaining a given level of performance, they may conclude that

success is due to factors beyond their control. They may feel that success cannot be guaranteed by hard work, and become poorly motivated.

- e. **Inadequate School Facilities and Teachers:** Textbooks shortages, inadequate teachers training, teacher absence from work, teacher lacking subject matter competency, strikes and frequent school closures are common features of Education in many developing countries like Nigeria. Parents and students may perceive conditions of learning to be inadequate that they have little option than to resort to unfair means to increase the likelihood that the student will pass the examination.
- f. **Inadequacies of the Examination:** Where the standard aimed at is too high or obscure, teachers and students may lose confidence in their abilities to master the material. In such instances, students may resort to smuggling materials such as textbooks and notebooks into the examination room.

The writers observed within the Colleges where this position paper is focused that, some of the causes of Examination malpractices or irregularities include:

- a. Lack of coverage of the course work.
- b. Lack of monitoring the lecturers in terms of performing their jobs.
- c. Lack of space for examination.
- d. Poor lecturers' attitude towards examination supervision and invigilation.
- e. Over-loaded curriculum for the students.
- f. Not adhering to the examination time and time-table.
- g. Non-publication of students results among other causes or factors.

Edukugho (2007) stated that non-execution of educational policies is one of the things that encourage examination malpractices. He stated that government usually come out with laudable policies but fail to execute them. He advanced that facilities, personnel and other things needed for execution of government educational policies are not put in place. When teachers, educational administrators, and others involved in education sector embark on endless strikes, it becomes impossible for any laudable policy to be executed. He stated that schools through the proprietors, principals, teachers, as well as parents, supervisors, invigilators and community leaders work in concert to facilitate cheating by students. Uwadiae (2007) found out that school factors contribute to about 66% of the variance in examination malpractice in the senior secondary school examinations. Such factors include ownership, school type, syllabus coverage, examination facilities and school performance. Fuller (2008) stated that quality of teaching and learning is a factor in examination malpractice. He was of the view that if syllabus are adequately covered before examinations, teachers teach with instructional materials, students who fail are not promoted, relevant book are provided in the libraries and laboratories well equipped, examination malpractice

will be put under check. Ivowi (2005) stated that lack of confidence as a result of inadequate preparation, peer influence, societal influence, parental support, and poor facilities in schools are some of the factors responsible for examination malpractice.

Badmus (2006), Okafor (2006) and Aminu (2006) identified school programmes, teaching-learning environment, the teacher, the student, over value of certificates, decadence in the Nigeria society and parental support as some factors responsible for examination malpractice in the Nigeria educational system.

Some Strategies of Combating Examination Irregularities / Malpractices:

Having identified some forms and causes of examination irregularities in Nigeria educational sector with particular reference to Colleges of Education in the South-South region of Nigeria, it is worthwhile to also highlight some strategies to curb the menace.

World Bank (2004:16) suggested the following strategies of combating examination irregularities in Nigeria and other developing nations. They include;

- * *Examination bodies, in conjunction with the school principals and supervisors, should ensure that only formally registered candidates sit for the examinations. Efforts should be made to detect cases of impersonations.*
- * *Candidates should submit clear photographs at the time of registration, which should be crosschecked during every examination.*
- * *Examination officers should visit examination centres unannounced. By so doing, candidates will be afraid of being caught.*
- * *Centre supervisors should be people of integrity who are independent of such examination centres. They can also be rotated at will to avoid them being bribed by the school administration.*
- * *Use of electronic devices including handsets and papers should be prohibited.*

Other strategies for combating examination irregularities especially in Colleges of Education which is the teacher training institution in Nigeria include;

- From the point of admission, the students should be properly screened to ensure that they have the requirements for admission. These categories of student should exhibit good knowledge and skills in writing and reading. This is very imperative because some students admitted into the Colleges with the required criteria cannot read and write. This prompts them into cheating while undertaking their studies in the College. These are the categories of students that

bribe lecturers and other staff in the institution to get examination questions before the examination day or to earn marks they do not deserved.

- Lecturers should ensure their coverage of course content and principles of continuous assessment be followed. By this act, students will be adequately prepared for the examination without fear of failing or even earning low grades.
- Course lecturers or co-ordinators should be encourage developing several examination items covering the course content; but should not be involved in selecting examination question for the students to respond to during examination.
- Conference marking should be enforced to prevent a single lecturer have full control over a student script(s).
- Examination questions should only be typed at 30 minutes to the commencement of the examination to avoid its leakage.
- Time scheduled for an examination should be strictly adhered to in all examinations.
- Adequate examination halls and space should be made available during examinations.
- Students who registered for the courses only should be allowed into the examination halls; especially with their photo-identification cards to proof their studentship and qualification to sit for the examination.
- Students should be made to sit on the seats assigned to them in the examination halls.
- Examination supervisors and invigilators should be in the examination halls at least 20 minutes before the commencement of the examination. This is to enable them have a good control of the students and checking them into the examination halls.
- Examination halls should only be opened to students' access prior to a few minutes to the commencement of the examination.
- A ratio of 1:15 supervisor/students in the examination halls should be adopted to enhance effective supervision and management of the students and the examination.
- Students should be strictly warn to adhered to examination regulations especially by keeping all electronic devices, textbooks, notebooks and other implicating materials.

- Instructions to the examination questions should be clear and precise.
- Supervisors and invigilators should be briefed and reminded on the ethics on conduct of examination.
- Violation of examination conduct should be promptly tried and penalized to serve as deterrent to others.

Conclusion

Examination malpractice is a very serious challenge and threat to the educational system in Nigeria. It is disheartening to observe that almost all the stakeholders in education (i.e. teachers, parents, students, examination bodies, etc.) are involved in this menace. It is very imperative for all and sundry to wake up to fight this ugly situation that is almost becoming a norm in our society. Failure to put an end to this unwholesome development in the education sector will definitely ruin our educational system. This is the time for action and war against this embarrassing scenario in the education sector. Examination bodies, agents of malpractices, parents, employers of labour, students, government and the public at large should rise up and battle this monster. It is only by such action that our educational system can be sustained and made to attain the laudable goals of education.

Recommendations

Based on this write-up to ensure that the menace of examination irregularities in our educational system does not ruin the objectives and goals of our education, the following recommendations are made;

1. Government and education authorities should provide conducive teaching and learning environment in our school system.
2. The emphasis placed on certificates should be minimized. That is, employers of labour should de-emphasize their selection based on certificate, rather selection should be based on skills and knowledge demonstration.
3. Teachers, parents and those charged with the responsibilities of conducting examination should set good examples for their children and wards. They should not be seen as champions or involved in examination malpractice but as role models.
4. Culprits of examination irregularities should be promptly investigated and punished according to the stipulated law; “Examination Malpractice Act No.33 of 1999”; which stipulates a minimum of fifty thousand naira and a maximum of five years imprisonment penalty, without option of fine.
5. Any lecturer caught involved in any form of examination malpractice should be forced to leave the institution.
6. Education stakeholders should take their responsibilities seriously. Teachers particularly need to pay more than the usual attention to the need for them to

cover their syllabuses so that students will no longer recourse to cheating in examinations as a method of making up for uncovered syllabuses.

If the forgone recommendations are implemented, examination malpractice could be reduced to the barest minimum in Nigeria.

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