

MEASURES FOR COMBATING EXAMINATION MALPRACTICE IN NIGERIA'S EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

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Abstract

The problem of examination mal-practice is endemic today in Nigeria and this nation will only neglect the seriousness of the problem at its own peril. This paper looks into every nook and corner of examination malpractice i.e. the causes and methods as well as some remedies in order to eliminate it entirely.

Introduction

Gone are the days when individual's abilities i.e. blacksmithing, wood carving, building and roofing of houses, pot molding etc was based on practical demonstrations rather than what he could recall and write on a piece of paper as is the case today and hence the term "examination malpractice" was then unknown. Examination, a system which demands the recalling and writing of facts under a tight/close supervision and within a stipulated time, is now regarded by students as a great monster/threat for the required facts may escape one at the crucial time and hence the "system beating" or examination malpractice. It is so regarded because, he who fails his examination may not further his education, get a good and decent job, marry a girl of his choice and in addition the society looks down on him/her.

Examination malpractice has been defined by various authors. West African Examinations Council (WAEC) in Akparanta (2003:37), Muoghalu in Onyechere (2003:7) all agreed that examination malpractice is unethical which give undue advantage for candidate to pass -the examination he wouldn't have passed. Examination, to date is still necessary as the nation is yet to lay its hands on any alternative to it. Vibrating along (his wavelength, Oriola (2003:15) hints "examination ethics helps students to the habit of hard work, cultivate and sustain high moral standards in all undertakings among other things".

The magnitude of examination malpractice in Nigeria today is so great and alarming that it can best be imagined than described as it begins right from primary to tertiary levels involving pupils, students, teachers as well as parents. This argument is supported by Oriola (2003:15), Aniete, Mathias, Igarumah, Janet, Olu, Utibe, Ukim and Boiaji (1991:10) and Oladimeji (2003:45) where according to Aniete et al (1991:10) an Associate Professor in the Biochemistry Department of the Medical School, University of Lagos was alleged to have answered in his own handwriting part of some questions for a female student.

West African Examinations Council in its Annual Report of 2000 in Alkali (2003:8) identified Nigeria as the highest in reported cases of examination cheating in all the examinations the body conducted in that year. In the whole West African sub-region, 50% of the cases are in Nigeria. Compared to Sierra Leone having almost zero case in the same year.

In 1991, both Obafemi Awolowo University and Ahmadu Bello University were according to Aniete et al (1991:10 & 14) rocked by examination fraud to the extent of virtually brought to a standstill and more than 40 students had prior knowledge of examination questions respectively. Stake holders in education have now equaled the conduct of any examination to a battle field or war as fresh cases are coming up daily. These assertions can be supported by Tunde Olayede in Akparanta (2003:37), Muoghalu in Onyechere (2004:7) and Fabian Osuji in Akparanta (2003:36) Examination malpractice has reached a breaking point in Nigeria for even the law schools are not left out. To this end Ekp (1991:8) laments: - "if examination papers leak or students cheat at the law school, a school populated by adults, adults who are or will be custodians and defenders of the country's laws and morality, than the nation has slipped away from the moral high ground on which it needs to stand and save its soul". Furthermore, to even crown it all, Para Mallum in Aniete et al (1991:9) alarms: "examination malpractice is breaking new ground and fast becoming a culture in Nigerian institutions. Regardless of what the school authorities are doing. Students are becoming more sophisticated in perfecting the art of cheating.

Causes of Examination Malpractice

For this great nation to successfully combat the problem of examination malpractice, the causes must first be identified. In Nuhu Ribadu's words in Izah (2003:25); "unless we understand why and how (his phenomenon happens we can all cry about the negative impacts on us individually and on the society without being able to do anything about it". One wonders, despite the harsh penalty i.e. 21 years jail term for anybody caught in the act by Buhairs Special Tribunal (Miscellaneous Offences) Decree of 1984, examination malpractices is still on the increase. Individuals have various causes of examination malpractice. While some blame the students, teachers, parents etc others blame the schools for not providing adequate training facilities, such as libraries, classrooms etc. Others blame the society itself as the root cause for examination malpractice. Along this line are Munzali Jibril in Aniete et al (1991:16), Onuoha (a student) in Anieteetal (1991:16).

George Ehusani in Oladimeji (2003:45) and Ekpu (1991:8) where Munzali says: "Examination malpractice is the product of a society that nurtures cheats and mediocres and turns them into celebrities ... it is a reflection of the moral decadence of our society. In this country we have pen robbers, arm robbers, smugglers and drug barons who are glorified by the grace of their ill-gotten wealth". Onuoha on the other hand challenges: "Let that Vice Chancellor, let that Commissioner or Minister of Education, let that politician, governor, top military or police officer or even journalist who has not cheated his way through in various ways cast the first stone". While George Ehusani claims: "the issue of examination malpractice in Nigeria comes out of the environment of mediocrity where the right pegs are not put in the right holes, ... it is part of the whole indication of a rotten society" and according to Ekpu, it is not in the school system only that cheating has become a favourite pastime. The prevalence of credit card fraud, bank fraud, counterfeiting, telephone manipulation and contract fraud is a manifestation of a deeper disease with which many Nigerians have been afflicted which are now being referred to as the Nigerian factor i.e. the quick fix, the short circuit, the corner cutting, the system beating. Some individuals ascribe the cause of examination malpractice to teacher, student ratio being too much to enable effective teaching, others are of the opinion that some students are lazy, rich and dull but ambitious thereby paying the greedy teachers or persons who keep the custody of the examination questions. Others are of the opinion that the condition under which the students study and write examination is conducive for exams malpractices. According to Tafa Balogun the I.G. of police who spoke through Willy Ehemetola an assistant I.G. Zone Seven in Akparanta (2003:37), (he phenomenon of examination malpractice thrive because of the perceived reluctance to adopt surgical measures to deal with this near endemic malaise. No wonder he belongs to the force sector. On a different perspective, the head of national office of West African Examinations Council (WAEC) Tundc Olayede in Akparanta (2003:37) traces the causes for examination malpractice to:- Inadequate preparation by both teachers and students, emphasis on paper qualification, education policy, social values, parental and community factors as well as the high stake attached to success in the Board's examination which make malpractice at various stages very attractive. Others apportion the cause to the fact that employers always go for good grade certificates regardless of how the grades were obtained or what one can do practically i.e. in the eyes of the employers, a first class result earned by cheating is far better than a third class result earned honestly. To which Ekpu (1991:8) warns: "when you give honour to whom it is not due, you take away the incentive to work honestly for honour".

Methods of Examination Malpractice

Having identified the causes for examination malpractice, we must also identify the various methods being employed during the act if at all we are really serious about the solution to the problem. No doubt, the various actors of examination malpractice are daily creating new ways to beat the system. They have gone to the extent of manufacturing some terminologies for various methods such as:-

Bullet/Missiles: Where the users go into the examination hall with what generally referred to as arms and ammunition.

Dubbing: Dubbers are those who copy in the examination hall with the collaboration of their helpers.

Body Writing/Tattoo: Mostly used by female students where they copy some expected answers on their inner thighs.

Walker Talkie: Here students outwit the invigilator and smuggle out question papers to an arranged helper who works out the number and feeds the candidate with answers via walker talkie.

Computer: Hi-tech microcomputers like Casio Fx calculators with facilities for multiple entries and digital diaries. By use of codes, students log lecture points and recall them in examination halls and the invigilator thinks it is an ordinary calculator.

Giraffe: Here students strain their necks to catch a glimpse of the material they want to copy.

Super Print: A generic name covering all forms of writing on cloths; undershirts, inner lining of blouses, brassieres, handkerchiefs, jackets etc.

ECOWAS: Here students help themselves in the examination halls by exchanging question papers with some writings on them (question papers) students also borrow points in whispers etc.

Micro-Chips: Here students use pieces of paper not larger than a normal complimentary card on which students, writing in codes condense portion of their notebooks.

Impersonator: Here a mercenary is hired to write an examination for fellow students.

Contractor: Examination attendants who pretend to go for more answer scripts drop question papers at designated points for a mercenary and later collect the already prepared answer scripts in the same way.

Expo: Here Examination questions are leaked to the students before the D-day. Additional strategies are daily being created for examination malpractice.

According to the Chief Registrar, NECO, Professor Dibu Ojerinde in Oji and Francis (2004:17).

Students especially ladies now engage the services of their accomplices, who use their cell phones to text them answers to questions asked in the examination. He also revealed that female candidates who claimed to be nursing mothers, write suspected answers to examination on the back of their babies who they bring to the examination hall.. The professor continues, some students now include money in their answer scripts and the female among them affix their photographs and their addresses to entice the examiners. He affirms: "Indeed even printers also leak the questions because of financial gratification, even conveyors and supervisors equally betray the examination agencies, d'ctchers are not left out". He also confirmed that there were other miracle centres all over the nation where "cooperative fees"¹ are paid by candidates who will pass the examination and such centers when an external supervisor enters the students stop writing until he leaves. According to the Professor, candidates now intimidate supervisors adding: "one of our skiff was bathed with acid for refusing malpractice In her hall. We need £416 million now to do her a plastic surgery ". All these can be said to be from the horse's mouth. According to yet another Prof. Bello Ahmed Salim, the Registrar Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) in Oyckanmi (2003:38). Two years ago a member of staff of the board was on the run, when he was discovered to have attempted changing scores of some candidates in the Board computer strong room. If results can be changed in the computer strong room, then we can now imagine the seriousness of the whole issue.

According to Daily Sun (2003:6). during the last Polytechnic Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (POLY JAMB) examination held in May, when the fraudulent candidates caught were interrogated, they claimed that their parents and guardians funded their fraud.

Effects of Examination Malpractice

Education be it general, technical is accorded great values by all and sundry. However, from all indication, the perennial cases of examination malpractice in this country are slowly but surely diminishing, such values. This is because one can no longer confirm the authenticity of any examination result being presented at anytime. Ehusani in Oladimeji (2003:45), Prof, Bello Salim in Oji and Juliana (2004:17) and Obasanjo represented by Fabian Osuji in Abubakar (2003:4) are in support of this assertion. Where Ehusani laments: "many institutions outside Nigeria who would gladly accept Nigerian graduates before and push them over, are now putting them through remodels

and so on before they can do masters, doctorate degrees and things like that". He continues, even with one's second class upper or first class in such universities as ABU Zaria, Unlbadan, Unlfe one will still be asked to write series of aptitude tests before he is accepted to work in any of the companies in Nigeria. Bello Salim also laments; "People no longer respect merit and educational qualification because they have been bastardized". He regretted that people who indulged in this evil act gave others with God given talent problem because nobody would believe the results. According to Obadanjo, examination malpractice and cultism constitute great dangers to national development, erode quality and standard, diminish integrity and confidence in our educational system as well as creating and entrenching disincentives to academic excellence. He then warns: "we cannot sit back and watch examination cheats and fraudsters destroy the long standing and hard earned international reputation of high quality and standard of the Nigerian education certificates".

According to a publication by Exam Ethics Project in Oriola (2003:15), examination malpractice prevents students from identifying and pursuing their time talent and achieving their destinies. It promotes the habit of laziness and renders certificate useless as basis of assessing skill and capabilities. It also thwarts the concept of academic excellence and negates the idea of educational institutions as places for transmission of moral and ethical values. It also reveals that gratifications and degrees awarded by some Nigerian institutions are rejected in the international education market due to the attendant of examination malpractice.

Any project one can think of e.g. construction of bridges, storey building, motor car, air conditions, bicycles, airplanes, rockets, robots, computers, etc must be preceded by technical/engineering drawing. The engineer draws/designs and the technician constructs/executes according to the drawings given to him even in the absence of the designers. If the engineer got his position of an engineer through examination malpractice i.e. he is not capable of making the accurate and precise drawings expected of him, what would be the fate of such a project at hand?

Examination malpractice is an embarrassment not only to those who are caught in the act and their families, but the nation as a whole. Furthermore, the quality of a nation's manpower is in direct proportion to the quality of its educational system. A country with a shaky or porous examination system will have a very poor manpower as the psychometric values of certificate obtained through malpractice in examination will be useless and the country is the first loser of such a system,

Remedies for Examination Malpractice

Now that we have seen the causes and the methods of examination malpractice, we can now think of the solutions to the problem. There are, as many solutions to the problem of examination malpractice just as there are various causes and methods.

Both Professor Ojerinde in Oji & Francis (2004:17) and Professor Salim in Oji and Francis (2004:17) opined that parents and guardians should teach their children and wards that examination malpractice is evil, Rather than encouraging them by paying huge amount of money for them to hire people who write examination for them because charity begins at home. Others call for cancellation of the so-called special centres for examinations as well as disallowing the use of cell phones during examination. Employers should stop worshipping certificates no matter how good. Instead they should be testing the applicants practically to confirm the authenticity of such certificates. The babies of the nursing mothers should be thoroughly searched before allowed into the examination halls. Teachers should not be overloaded i.e. the teacher-students ratio should be seriously addressed for effective teaching and learning. The Sogbetu Tribunal set up in 1977, as a result of the first major mass leakage of WAEC examination made the following recommendations which can still be revisited:-" Tightening loopholes in the present system of examination; abandoning examination completely and replacing if entirely with a continuous assessment method; and reducing the 100 percent weight placed on final examinations; and conducting examination based only upon the objective types test".

The authors is of the opinion that if the modern electronic gadgets/cameras can be properly positioned in appropriate corners of examination halls so that everybody can be focused during examinations, and the students are also aware that they are being closely watched, the problem of examination malpractice will be greatly reduced or totally eliminated.

Conclusion

This paper has brought into focus the meanings of examination and examination malpractice and-the necessity for conducting examination. It also highlights the magnitude of examination malpractice in this nation Nigeria. The paper identifies the various causes of examination malpractice

as well as the methods being used during the act. It also sheds more lights on the effects of examination malpractice on the country's educational life. It also came up with some good suggestions as the solutions to the problem of examination malpractice. The author is of the view that if the suggested solutions are followed, the problem of examination malpractice in this nation will be a thing of the past.

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