

REVISITING CAUSES OF EXAMINATION MALPRACTICE AND DEVISING INNOVATIVE STRATEGIES TO CURB CHEATING

Alutu A.N.G. (Ph.D) and Ochuba , V.O.(Ph.D)

Abstract

The major causes of examination malpractice among undergraduates are re-visited with a view to devising innovative methods of examining to curb examination malpractice. The participants are undergraduate students from four, out of eleven Faculties in the University of Benin. Data collection was based on Focus Group Discussions (FGD) and interviews held with twenty five (25) students each from the Faculties of Engineering, Education, Social Sciences, and College of Medicine. The qualitative data gathered are presented in three major sub-themes. The result reveals that the undergraduates see examination malpractice as an illegal way of writing examination in order to obtain good results. They also note that this can be put in check if the examination halls are roomy such that students sit at least two meters apart while writing examinations. In addition, some students indicated that on-line examinations as well as placement of closed circuit cameras in examination rooms should be explored.

Background

One of the national education goals is "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 the society," (FRN, 2004 Pg.8) The effectiveness of any educational programme is thus determined by appropriate methods of assessment which is an indicator of quality of performance of the school system and the level of attainment of its products. Denga (1983), asserted that a successful performance in an examination is so critical to a student's placement in higher institutions or in the world of work, The use of performance in examination as a yardstick for school/job placement amidst the non-availability of spaces has led to the struggle by students to obtain high grades by all means, hence the increased incidences of examination malpractices. Ekennia (199!), noted that so much prominence is given to examination results in educational institutions and they cause anxieties for many students. Such excessive anxieties could lead students to resorting to fraudulent practices as a means of achieving 'good' grades. Most candidates are desperate; even some cases of suicides have been reported. Achebe (1982), reported the case of a female student who committed suicide because she failed the West African School —Certificate Examination in Benin City—a candidate was—also reported to have committed suicide because he could not meet up with parents' high expectation. It is now a serious moral issue and all hands should be on deck to change the mind-set of individual candidates and their major stakeholders towards examinations.

Examination malpractice has been defined as a deliberate act of wrong doing, contrary to official examination rules and is designed to place a candidate at an unfair advantage or disadvantage (Standler, 2000). The history of examination malpractice in Nigeria dates back to the early 19th century. The first recorded public incident of examination malpractice took place in 1914 when it was reported that the Cambridge School Certificate Examination leaked. Since then, the occurrence of examination malpractice has continued without much public attention drawn to it until around 1963 when there was another leakage in two major public examinations; First School Leaving Certificate and West African School Certificate of that year. The rate and dimensions of examination malpractice has gradually increased over the years and at present, various new and sophisticated devices have emerged. No wonder, Awanbor (2003) asserted that examination malpractice has become a monster that is beyond ordinary human perception and to define it poses an awful and perhaps equally daunting task, as the perpetrators ingeniously craft different means to make the monster more unrecognizable.

Various kinds of cheating exist globally and seem to have defied all known strategies put in place so far to curb them. Lehohla (2006), noted that in Lesotho, common irregularities and malpractices include breaking into strong rooms, selling question papers, one person writing on behalf

of another candidate and so on. Alutu and Alutu (2003), noted some common forms of examination malpractice carried out by students as the use of microchips, bullets, programmable calculators, transparent chips and recently, mobile phones. They also noted that examination malpractices are reinforced and sustained by external forces, academic and non-academic staff, staff of examination bodies and impersonation among others. Onyechere (2003), reported that examination malpractice has metamorphosed into organized crime

controlled by syndicates with links in education ministries, examination boards, and educational institutions. Supervisors, invigilators, and examiners are now part of the syndicate rings extorting money from students.

Many contemporary researchers, educators and various stakeholders of education have adduced diverse reasons for the sustained examination malpractices in our school system (Aina 1996; Iheanacho 1997; Alutu and Alutu 2003). The reasons vary from social, economic, political and personal values. Among these factors, personal values and ethics seem to be a very strong factor that they need to be vigorously revisited. Society is made up of groups of individuals and these individuals are linked to families. Some studies have associated a major cause of examination malpractice to the child's upbringing and family background. This has to do with inculcating the right values and ethics in the child during the early years (Balogun 2001; Alutu and Aluede, 2005). Awanbor (2003), Alutu and Aluede (2005), and Bolarin (2006), also noted that low self confidence leads students to get involved in examination malpractice. Ochuba (2001), also noted that the expansion of higher education has created a public oversight at efforts to evaluate and promote academic quality.

It should be noted that examination malpractice is a cankerworm that has eaten deep into the fabric of our education industry; therefore, we should patiently strive hard to redeem the fallen standard in our education. The destructive 'worm'¹ (examination Malpractice) needs to be exterminated with constant effort as it took years to burrow deep holes.

Statement of the Problem

Examination malpractice over the years has been persistent and complex methods of sustaining it keep evolving. While educators and examining bodies discover ways of curbing examination malpractice, candidates keep devising more sophisticated ways of cheating. It is against this background that this study revisited causes of examination malpractice with a view to devising innovative ways to curb cheating. The problem is: Why are examination malpractices becoming so complex that they seem to have defied known methods of curbing them? What other innovative strategies could be adopted for examining to eradicate corrupt practices associated with examination malpractice?

Research Questions

Three research questions were raised to guide this qualitative study:

- 1) What factors do you consider responsible for examination malpractice; before, during and after the examination?
- 2) What other ways should examinations be conducted to stop examination malpractice?
- 3) What other innovative devices have been practiced within and outside Nigeria to stop examination malpractice?

Method of Study

A qualitative method was adopted in carrying out this study. Three suitable themes were chosen in line with research questions. The participants were undergraduate students from four, out of eleven Faculties in the University of Benin. Data collection was based on interviews and Focus Group Discussion held with twenty-five (25) students, each from the faculties of Engineering, Education, Social Science and College of Medicine. Their responses were collated according to various sub-themes in the questionnaire. Subsequently, the collated data were analyzed.

Data Analysis

In order to reduce the problem of data overload characteristic of qualitative analysis, the significant features of focus in this study were summarized and discussed. The qualitative data collected from the respondents were presented in three themes: factors responsible for examination malpractice among students, ways to conduct-examinations to stop malpractice and innovative devices practiced within and outside Nigeria.

The result from the qualitative data analysis will be discussed based on the three major themes.

Theme 1

Factors Responsible for Examination Malpractice Among Students

- ❖ Inadequate preparation for exams due to lousiness
- ❖ Lack of self-confidence
- ❖ Inadequate teaching and preparation of students for examinations
- ❖ Low self-esteem and fear of failure
- ❖ Invigilators' inability to effectively monitor exams
- ❖ Leakage of question papers by corrupt lecturers

- ❖ Leakage of question papers by secretarial staff who type and produce them
- ❖ Non-coverage of course content by lecturers
- ❖ Non-inculcation of examination ethics among students
- ❖ Short period to prepare for examinations
- ❖ Abridged academic calendar due to strikes
- ❖ Compromise by non-academic staff involved in invigilation
- ❖ Offers of bribe or sex to lecturers by students in the bid to obtain high scores
- ❖ Desperate desire to make good grades by students and their accomplices
- ❖ Poor handling of answer scripts by lecturers, thus encouraging smuggling of scripts and change of scores.

Theme 2

Ways to Conduct Examination to Stop Malpractice

- Counselling of lecturers/students on the ills of examination malpractice
- Stiff penalties for students and lecturers involved in examination malpractice
- Inter-mixing of students from departments (offering different courses) during examination
- Well spaced sitting arrangement

Screening of invigilators to reduce incidents of collaborative cheating

Adoption of oral examination in addition to written examination

- Open book examinations should be adopted where applicable
- Introduction of on-line examinations.

Theme3

Devices Practiced within and Outside Nigeria

- Availability of lecture materials and other learning gadgets
- Electronic/on-line examinations
- Placement of close-circuit cameras in examination halls
- Oral examinations
- Open book examinations
- Emphasis on practical examinations
- " Effective continuous assessment strategies
- Emphasis on continuous assessments, term papers and mini projects
- Organizing tutorial classes for students
- Giving students enough time to prepare after the end of lectures
- Reduction of class size to encourage good interpersonal relationship between students and their lecturers
- Conference marking of students' scripts

Discussion of Results

Some innovative ways of curbing examination malpractice resulting from the content analysis of the qualitative data are discussed as follows:

Theme 1

- Inculcating examination ethics among students
- Low self esteem and fear of failure
- Absence of stiff penalties for students and lecturers caught in examination malpractice.
- Inadequate teaching and preparation of students for examinations

Theme 2

- Counselling of lecturers and students on the ills of examination malpractice.
- Proper teaching and preparation of students for examination.
- Inter-mixing of students from different departments (offering different courses) during examination
- Well spaced sitting arrangement with effective invigilation/supervision of exams.

Theme 3

- Effective continuous assessment strategies.

- Adoption of electronic on line examinations
- Placement of closed circuit cameras in examination hall.
- Conference marking of students scripts

Theme 1

Inculcating Examination Ethics Among Students

This finding agrees with (Balogun 2001; Alutu and Aluede, 2005), who asserted that inculcating the right values and ethics in the child during the early years could help deter anti-social vices like examination malpractice. Counsellors should organize examination ethics clubs in schools and universities and have representatives from each department based on the student population. During orientation of new students, a speaker can talk to on issues concerning examination. Counsellors should be in constant touch with the students to find out their views about examination malpractice and how it can be completely curbed.

Counsellors should encourage students to expose any secret, unauthorized group meetings of students as this could lay foundation to secret cult formation, which is the deadly monster plaguing our institutions of learning today from primary to tertiary institutions.

Low Self-esteem and Fear of Failure

Counsellors should assist students to build up their self esteem so that they will shun any type of examination malpractice. This can be achieved by training students to acquire appropriate study skills. Counsellors should use facilities available to them to screen students' academic problems like the Study Habit Inventory, Attitude to Academic Subject Scale and Self Concept Scales. Counsellors should encourage students to dissociate themselves from any form of examination malpractice and to report such immediately to the Counsellor who will not divulge the name of such good candidates but use the information for necessary investigation. This will encourage students not to suppress information due to fear of failure or victimization.

Stiff Penalties for Students and Lecturers Caught in Examination Malpractice

The absence of severe punishment for those aiding and abetting examination malpractices has encouraged the vices associated with it. The usual punishment meted out to those found cheating includes disqualification of the candidate from that particular examination or temporary suspension from school. Theme 1, revealed that some corrupt lecturers engage in question leakages and collection of gratification from students. When indicted, these culpable lecturers are either warned or suspended for a short period thus encouraging others to get involved.

There is therefore, the need to impose and execute strict sanctions against all manner of cheating/exam malpractice which will act as deterrence to those intending to get involved. These sanctions should range from one or two years probation, sack, withdrawal of certificate and imprisonment. If these are effectively implemented it will ensure the realization of the national education goals (FRN, 2004).

Inadequate Teaching and Preparation of Students before Examination

Proper teaching and preparation of students is an effective way of reducing the incident of examination malpractice. The goals of tertiary education as stated in the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2004) include the contribution to national development through high level relevant manpower training and the acquisition of both physical and intellectual skills which will enable individuals to be self reliant and useful members of the society among others. These goals can only be achieved if the students are well exposed and effectively guided in their course of study.

The first step should involve proper preparation of a detailed course outline to guide both lecturers and students on the course requirements in terms of coverage and expectations. The plan should be explained and kept in mind so that at completion, it can be reviewed and summed up. In addition, emphasis should be made on practical-application of learning rather than recognition of facts and ideas. When teaching is made effective and practically oriented, learning becomes enjoyable, making students to be well grounded thereby creating self confidence; lack of which was discovered as one of the major causes of examination malpractice.

Theme 2

Counselling of Lecturers and Students on the ills of Examination Malpractice

Guidance Counsellors" should "develop effective communication links and networking to guide students towards achieving optimal behaviour during the conduct of examinations (internal and external). These can be achieved through:

- Delivering individual and group counselling to students, on the expected behaviour before

and during examinations. This helps to desensitize the students by reducing phobia, anxiety and tension usually associated with examinations.

- Presenting seminars on how to study effectively and prepare for examinations.
- Organizing talks at least twice every session for all students at the beginning of the session and a week to the examination. Handbooks given to new students should include expected examination behaviour.
- Orientation of Lecturers/invigilators on the expected behaviour during the conduct of examinations.
- Encouraging course advisers to refer students who need academic counselling to Counsellors well ahead of examination period.

Apart from referred cases, Counsellors should on their own identify weak students and hold counselling sessions with them regularly. Counsellors should also tap information from brilliant, disciplined students on how they study and write examinations and use them as models for others.

Inter-mixing of students from different departments offering different courses during examination

Experience shows that admissions into the nation's higher institutions keep increasing, while the volumes of resource inputs have not expanded to meet the admission demand. The result is acute shortage of physical facilities among other inputs. Ochuba (2001) noted that the expansion of higher education has created a public oversight at efforts to evaluate and promote academic quality. Effective teaching and conduct of examination are reliable ways of producing quality output. Unfortunately, there are limited spaces for examination as against the number of students who utilize them. The need therefore arises as to how to effectively manage the available spaces while reducing the incidence of cheating. It is therefore suggested that examination schedules be prepared in such a way that students from different departments of same faculty be made to write their examinations in the same hall. These students should be well mixed that no two students offering same courses are allowed to sit close to one another.

Well Spaced Sitting Arrangement with Effective Invigilation of Examinations

In theme 1, it was noted that one of the causes of cheating during examination is invigilators inability to effectively monitor examinations. How can invigilation be effective in an over "crowded hall? This finding collaborates with Ochuba(2001), who noted that the non expansion of Infrastructural facilities in our institutions of higher learning against the increase in admission over the years has led to overcrowding of (he available spaces.

In theme 2, it was suggested that well spaced sitting arrangement will help to curb cheating. The issue of effective supervision of examinations can be solved by having students sit at least two meters apart creating less room for **communication** among students. In addition, students can be properly screened before examination to control the incidence of importing illegal materials into the hall. An examination schedule can be made to involve fewer departments on a weekly basis where spaces available for proper conduct of examination are limited.

Theme 3

Effective Continuous Assessment Strategies

Continuous assessment, if well conducted, has more advantages over the one shot sessional examinations conducted in our institutions of learning. This can be administered in form of field work, case studies or impromptu tests to assess affective, psychomotor and cognitive domains of students' knowledge. Only objective measures will be effective in motivating students to work consistently in order to achieve good results. This will also reduce examination anxiety which leads to examination malpractice.

Adoption of Electronic/on Line Examinations

Due to the development of **information**, communication and technology worldwide, examinations are administered and scored on-line. This process will only be effectively adopted in countries where there are hardly electricity outages. It will also go a long way to reduce cheating of various forms.

Placement of Closed Circuit Camera in Examination Halls

With the increasing technological development, the use of closed circuit camera in shopping centers to identify shop lifters gained prominence even in developing countries. Its use has been diversified to include surveillance in areas which need monitoring. The cameras transmit signals to a specific limited set of monitors.

The use of closed circuit cameras for monitoring examinations and identifying those involved in cheating is expensive but it is invaluable if the menace of exam malpractice will be checked.

Conference Marking of Students Scripts

One of the factors identified in theme I, as responsible for examination malpractice is poor handling of scripts by lecturers thus encouraging smuggling of scripts and changing of scores. It is alleged that such lazy lecturers engage students in marking and collating of scores. This gives room for manipulation of scores by those involved who sometimes collect gratification from desperate students to perpetrate the evil of malpractice after the conduct of examination. Furthermore, it has been alleged that some lecturers do haphazard marking because they are not guided by well structured marking schemes. This can be an indicator of malpractice since it places a candidate at an unfair advantage or disadvantage (Standler 2000).

Responses from theme 3, reveal that a viable way of minimizing the involvement of lecturers and support staff in examination malpractice is conference marking of scripts by lecturers. In order to ensure the effectiveness of conference marking, coordinators should be appointed. The duties of the coordinators should be to ensure that lecturers use prepared marking schemes for fair grading. Secondly, they should ensure that marks recorded by lecturers at the end of marking are not altered by the secretarial staff or other intruders.

Conclusion

This paper has reviewed the causes of examination malpractice and proffered innovative strategies to be adopted in curbing them. The fact remains that to be able to discriminate among students of diverse capabilities we must examine. Therefore, the onus is on the relevant stakeholders to adopt holistically these innovative ways suggested to carry out this important evaluative procedure without allowing fraudulent practices to render the exercise worthless.

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