IMPROVEMENT OF EXAMINATION ETHICS UNDER THE UNIVERSAL BASIC EDUCATION PROGRAMME

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Abstract

One of the most dreadful tasks facing a classroom teacher in today's school system is how to conduct a hitch free examination be it internal or external. However, examination still remains the only method of mental stock-taking which a classroom teacher adopts in assessing the students, the curriculum, the policy and the teacher himself. In the course of examinations today, teachers and examiners are exposed to great danger ranging from verbal abuses to physical and most recently threats to life in and outside the examination halls. Teachers have not done much to improve the situation. It is, therefore, pertinent that in discussing ways of successful implementation of the Universal Basic Education Programme, the ways of improving examination ethics in our school system should be addressed. This paper discusses factors responsible for the do or die approach to internal and external examination irregularities. Some ways of combating the ugly trend were also highlighted.

Teachers have an obligation to provide their students with the best instruction possible. This implies that they must have some procedures whereby they can reliably and validly evaluate how effectively their students have been taught (William, 1975). Today, one of the most popular themes in the educational system is a steady assault on both internal and public examinations. At a point, the attack was on the West African Examinations Council (WAEC). Apart from attacks on leakage of examination papers, there are those on the entire concept of examination which is often considered unfair or restricting upon teachers' freedom to plan. Today, the attack has shifted to so many spheres. The level of examination malpractices within the internally conducted examinations is alarming. Right from the primary school to the tertiary levels, our present education system is bedeviled by a mirage of examination malpractice devices. In the primary school for instance, parents wittingly or unwittingly sponsor examination malpractices. For instance during the so called common entrance examinations and first school leaving certificate examinations, parents pay through their wards some amount of money for the entertainment of the invigilators. It has been observes that the main essence of entertaining the invigilator at the primary school external examinations is to allow the head and class teachers to write for their pupils in order to score hundred percent in these public examinations. What happens at the secondary school level is, therefore, a

carry-over of the primary school experience. Pupils keenly observe the practice at primary level and on entering secondary school, what they do is to perfect the strategies.

The continuous assessment provided by the National Policy on Education (2004) as a way of improving the evaluation process has been relegated to the background by the teachers who have no time for the exercise. For instance, Nzewi (1988) appraised the use of continuous assessment in three local government areas in the then Anambra State eight years after the introduction. She observed that at that period, the teachers were only aware of the programme but lacked the commitment to implement it. She concluded that the programme cannot be said to be functional in the schools where her study was conducted. Today, the situation is worse, the ratio of continuous assessment marks and final examination marks vary from one school to the another ranging from 10:90 through 30:70 to 50:50 respectively. In some schools, there is nothing like continuous assessment rather the teachers have resorted to the one-shot, end-of-course examination which have been criticized for having repressive and restricting effects on both the teachers and the students (Okunrotifa, 1975) and which in recent time, has promoted high degree of examination malpractices.

Teachers and Examination Ethics

Whenever examination malpractices is been discussed it is always important for teachers to undergo self-appraisal for as they are in a very delicate and fragile profession. This is because examination still remains the teachers' major tools for measurement. A teacher in the educational process refers to the person who instructs and evaluates to promote the teaching-learning processes. According to Ukeje (1990) cited in Teacher and Parents Quarterly (2000) what the teacher knows and can do make a great difference and what he cannot do, can be an irreparable loss not only to the child but also to the nation and indeed in the posterity. As Ukeje (1990) further stressed, it is a good teacher that can impact good education. This preposition of Ukeje (1990) presumes the Nigerian teacher to be upright, dedicated, well-informed, knowledgeable, inspiring and positively oriented at all levels of learning.

Examinations have remained the major way by which authorities in the educational industry check how far educational objectives are being achieved. Conducting a hitch free examinations should, therefore, be a major task for every teachers. But conversely, a disturbing aspect of the Nigerian teacher recently discovered is his involvement in examination malpractices. According to Ilodubaeze (1971:59).

> *"Apart from unfortunately leaking the questions they pick and drop copied materials at appropriate points during examinations according to plans. They help students exchange their question papers with*

answers jotted on them. They smuggle question papers out of the hall to mercenaries to answer for the students"

Recently, the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) terminated the services of thirty-two examiners on the issue of examination malpractices.

The subject teachers are not alone in this shameful act. As Ilodubaeze further stated, "some principals of secondary schools have also aided and abetted cheating during the 1990 SSSC Examinations". Most of these principals act as agents between the students and the invigilators. They collect monies from the students which they offer to the invigilators/examiners who in return, allow the students to cheat during examinations. In most extreme case, these principles hire mercenaries for the sons and daughters of the well-to-do members of the Parents-Teachers-Association.

The situation is more worrisome in the private schools. Here, the proprietors believe that the only way to attract students to the schools is by registering hundred percent success especially in public examinations. For this reason, success must be achieved and all sorts of foul-means must be adopted to achieve this. In these private schools, any teacher who is not ready to "cooperate' in this act of aiding and abetting students in this ugly act is shown the way out. In such schools, the target of education from day one is the adoption of methods of outwitting the examiners which is the surest way of survival.

Detection of Examination Malpractices from Candidates Scripts

Scrutinizing students/candidates scripts during the marking and scoring is among the desirable skills which the teachers must acquire. This should form a quality control procedure for detecting irregularities and malpractices. According to West African Examination Council (1999), reports of irregularities and malpractices are received before, during and after the conduct of the examinations. These reports include information from public-spirited individuals, candidates etc before the examination on the game plan for cheating. There are also reports of poor supervision and invigilation and the activities of touts which render supervision ineffective at the examination centres resulting in mass cheating or collusion among candidates.

Some of these irregularities and malpractices found on the scripts of candidates which were also highlighted by WAEC in (1999) are:

(a) Identical answers - Some candidates' scripts contain word for word answers even in wrong answers and cancellations.
(b) A candidates script containing more than one type of hand writing.
(c) Cribs, pages of printed textbooks found in candidates' scripts.
(d) Submission of more than one script by a candidate in a subject/paper.
(e) Mutilated names and/ or Index Numbers on candidate scripts.

(f) Creases or rumpling of evidence of folding of scripts.
(g) Tampering with the stapling pins of the scripts/ answer booklet.
(h) Tampering or replacement of cover page.
(i) Unusually longer or shorter scripts and/or cover pages or inner sheet different.
(j) Scripts consisting of mainly continuation sheets or loose inner sheets not stapled to the cover page.
(k) Scripts without cover page or submission of cover pages only.
(l) Scripts with the serial numbers out of range with the others used at the centre.
(m) Strange scripts found in wrong subjects or examination centre.
(n) Objective answer sheets of a few candidates at a centre found enclosed in script packets or envelopes.

In all of the listed examples, the teacher/examiner should scrutinize the extent of malpractices evident within the range of the examination numbers around the main script in question. All examination bodies and school authorities should take all reports of examination malpractices written on the candidates script serious and all candidates involved must be brought to book serve as a deterrent to others.

Improving Examination Ethics Under the New Programme

The implementation guidelines of the Universal Basic Education Programme number thirty-two, under the subheading "enriched curricular" emphasizes a complete re-conceptualization of examination to press hard the point that education does not mean examination. (Federal Ministry of Education (FME), (2000). This document while emphasizing functional education, calls for a more realistic evaluation procedures which will build in quality assurance into the teaching and learning environment.

In the course of improving examination ethics under the new programme, much is expected of the teachers.

The exercise calls for a total change of both attitudes towards and perception of the teaching profession. According to Ukeje (1995) "without good teachers, we cannot have good education and without good education, we cannot meet successfully the challenges of ever-changing Nigerian world" (And) without good teachers good education, we cannot achieve satisfactorily national development. In addition to being morally upright, teachers should think intelligently about other methods of assessment that will reduce examination irregularities. Two of these methods suggested are: Open Book Examination and Interview Type of Assessment.

1. **Open Book Examination:** Lack of commitment to duties on the part of teachers in the recent time have caused them to set questions that have no content validity (Okpala, 1989, Okafor, 1990). Some promotion examination question are set inside the bus on the teacher's way to school. Of course, these must be questions that will be easy for the teacher to score. Most of these easy-to-score questions are also have easy-to-copy answers in the examination halls. Therefore, the Open book examination calls for more commitment on the side of the teachers. It requires setting more of application questions that are not directly treated in the students text and before the teacher does this, he must be abreast with the current trends and issues on his subject. The use of aids during examinations whenever practicable is an ideal which in recent years is earning the consideration of examination boards. Such aids in geography include maps, atlases and textbooks. The use of sources of references in examination could be supported on the belief that it would provide students with opportunities to discuss and reason intelligently instead of pouring onto paper as much as he could recall from his private reading (Okunrotifa, 1975). The system will also restore the forgotten reading culture in schools.

2. **Interview-Type Assessment:** If questions are asked orally in a face-to-face situation, interview is been carried out. Even though interview has been a perennial favourite as a way of finding out about the affective and cognitive functioning of students, its procedures are basically subjective, variable aid heavily dependent upon the skill of the interviewer. One of the approaches that undertakes to reduce subjectivity and variability of interview procedures while still maintaining flexibility and vividness of direct personal contact is the structured interview (Sada, 1975). The procedure of a structured interview may fall into the following three separate but related parts: the content, the technique and the analysis.

The content is necessary to decide upon the topics or concepts that the interview will cover. The technique deals with the sort of questions which should occur. These are questions that introduce the topic or theme that is to be discussed, those that prompt the students to think, those that direct the students to a topic not spontaneously mentioned by him and those which allow the interviewer to explore potentially complex reasoning about relationships and encourage the student to explore verbally the reasons for the things he has found out. The analysis is the section or part the record of the interview is used to make judgment about whether a subject is developing a conceptual group of the things he has studied or whether he perceives his work as unrelated facts and information. It is also possible to make judgment about the relative success or

failure of the students enquiry method. This is an area of learning that is too often taken for granted by teachers. The major disadvantages of this method of assessment is that it is relatively difficulty to operate for large number of students but it is a method that is very likely to yield successful result especially when combined with other methods such as the one discussed earlier on.

Recommendations/Conclusion

Examination situation in the nation's school system today calls for more commitment on the part of the Nigerian teachers. The teachers must, therefore, demonstrate to his students and the public that he is ready to move Nigeria forward in the new millennium. The 21st century requires Nigerian teachers to be morally upright, intelligent, knowledgeable, mentally balanced and emotionally stable. Teachers are strongly advised to instill in the students right from primary school proper examination ethics.

The present system of evaluation in our school system should be revisited. A close look at the continuous assessment stipulated in the National Policy on Education reveals the what actually goes on where it exists at all is 'continuous testing' not assessment. Many schools have even abandoned the method completely in favour of the one-shot, end-of-course examination which had been criticized for its repressive and restricting effects on teaching and learning. These effects are due, in large part to the fact that the examination is content determined; that it cannot reflect the emphasis and patterns of teaching and that of examination. Therefore, in order to cultivate sound examination ethics, all forms of examinations conducted in schools must encourage independence of thought and judgement in students and as well, increase the freedom of teachers and students. To achieve this, changes are necessary in the style and mode of examining students. Nigerian teachers are, therefore, challenged into exploring greater variety of methods of assessment which will provide wider scope for pursing a wider range of teaching and learning objectives required for nation building.

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