

EXAMINATION MALPRACTICE IN THE NIGERIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM: IMPLICATIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

Nigeria's educational system has been battered by the incidence of examination malpractice in recent years. The phenomenon appears to have defied all known solutions. Significantly disturbing is the great threat of examination malpractice to educational standards and national development efforts: the threat to the authenticity and acceptability of certificates issued and the huge cost of preventive measures and litigation. The need of the moment is not to apportion blames, but to locate and remedy weaknesses and failures. This paper examines the issue of examination malpractice in the Nigerian context, highlighting the various forms of examination malpractice, their causes and implications of the social ill on attaining sustainable national development in the country. The paper ends with suggestions to ameliorate the situation.

Introduction

Examination malpractice has been viewed and defined by various authors. For instance, Ongom (1994) in STAN (2001) considers any form of "wrong-doing in examinations as examination malpractice". Salami (1994) also in STAN (2001) defines it as "an improper or dishonest act associated with examination with a view to obtaining an unmerited advantage". Further more, (Aekan (1996) views it as deliberate acts of indiscipline adopted by students or their privileged accomplices to secure facile success and advantage before, during or after the administration of the tests and examinations. Shonekan (1996) defines the vice as any act of omission or commission which contravenes stipulated rules and regulations on the conduct of examinations to the extent of undermining the validity and reliability of the tests and ultimately the integrity of the certificates. It is clear from all these definitions that the perpetrators of examination malpractice plan and use various means to execute their plans aimed at subverting the examination process to their advantage.

It is pertinent to determine at this point if there are any antecedents of examination malpractice and whether the vice is peculiar to Nigeria. Reports show that examination malpractices are neither new nor peculiar to Nigeria. Examination malpractice occurred in 1914 (Adeyegbe and Oke, 1994; Ogbuka, 1995) in STAN 2001 and Maduemezia (1998) in which questions of the Senior Cambridge Local Examination were obtained before the examination was taken. Leake (1995) had reported the result of a study conducted by an American researcher which revealed that students in UK and United States of America are the world's biggest cheats. Denga and Denga (1998) also observe that in spite of the death penalty enacted by people's communist society of China, examination malpractice could not be abated. One would say that this social thorn in global flesh has no perfect cure since even death penalty could not deter or stamp it out.

Although, Nigerian students were regarded as novices in examination malpractice internationally, the prevalence of this dishonest behaviour in recent years in the country appears like a wild fire which seems to have enveloped the educational system. According to Maduemezia (1998), examination malpractice previously existed in low ebb with simplistic methods but it became more pervasive in 1970 with the involvement of persons other than the candidates. It has been discovered that out of the twenty-one categories of people identified as perpetrators of examination malpractice, students constituted only about three categories (Maduemezia, 1998) which is less than fourteen percent. The first major occurrence of examination malpractices in Nigeria in 1977, according to Ivowi (1996) led to the setting up of a tribunal by the Federal Government to unravel the circumstances that caused the mass leakage of question papers and make appropriate recommendations to check

Key players in the game of examination malpractices range from students, parents and guardians who hawk examination papers; students of tertiary institutions who serve as surrogate candidates; school teachers and principals; university lecturers; junior staff and

non-academic staff of departments in universities and allied institutions; examination invigilators and supervisors; touts and

contractors; security agents; WAEC supervisors; printers; custodians to communities and traditional rulers. These categories of people have been mentioned by Shonekan (1996), Adebayo (1996), and Ojo (1995); Osuji et al (1995); Akpan, (1995); Williams (1995); and Ibot, (1995) all cited in STAN (2001).

Despite many steps taken by the JCCE, NCE, examining bodies and Federal Government to abate examination malpractice, and even the promulgation of Decree No. 20 of 1984 with its amendment in 1986 and the suggested improvements on the inadequacies of these decrees in 1994, the problem has remained intractable. Particularly, worrisome is that the Decree which prescribed 21 years imprisonment had made little or no impact on the frequency and magnitude of examination malpractices being committed (Olatunji, 2000). This paper therefore attempts to locate and remedy weaknesses and failures in examination malpractice in Nigeria. To realistically address this problem especially with the great threat to total collapse of educational standards and placement of national development efforts in jeopardy, it desired that the causes and the forms it takes be identified.

Forms of Examination Malpractice in Nigeria

On forms which examination malpractice has taken, it is observed the methods used by culprits are now becoming more sophisticated and that while examination bodies (like the WAEC) are busy improving their operations, those culprits are also busy perfecting how to thwart their efforts. Umo (1996) and Shonekan (1996) have identified the following in WAEC-conducting examinations as forms of examination malpractice.

Bringing in foreign materials e.g. pieces of paper

Notes, textbooks, handkerchiefs, programmable calculators, skirts, waist slips, currency notes, photo copies of prepared answers and dangerous weapons such as guns, knives, dagger etc.

Irregular activities inside and outside the examination hall e.g. use of mathematical set, log tables, rulers and calculators to exchange information, use of “touts” or “contractors” to answer questions outside the examination hall, mystery voices etc.

Collusion among candidates e.g. Exchange of answer scripts, dictating answers to candidates and supervisors pretending to be sleeping, some supervisors shade objective answer sheets for candidates, some principals distract supervisors and inspectors to facilitate cover up of examination malpractice.

Impersonation e.g. a brilliant student writing papers for another student and brother, sisters, teachers, husbands, boyfriends writing papers for candidates.

Leakage - Having of foreknowledge - resulting from improper handling of examination questions during the printing and production process; instruction to supervisors and subject teachers in practical examinations.

Mass cheating - results of poor invigilation and supervision facilitated by presenting gifts to the supervisor etc.

Abuses, insults and assaults on invigilators, supervisors and inspectors.

Forging of continuous assessment scores for external candidates.

Onyechere (1996) in his Examination Ethics Handbook, identified in addition to reasons similar to those outlined above, the ‘computer’ - situation where hi-tech microcomputers like Casio FX calculators with facilities for multiple entries and digital diaries were brought into the examination hall by students. By use of codes such students log lecture points and recall them in examination halls. Lecturers are easily fooled, thinking the device is an ordinary calculator. No matter the course - Mathematics, Sociology or History, the student who adopts this method is armed with his kit.

Possible Causes of Examination Malpractice

Research literature as outlined by Maduabum (2001) reveals that causes of examination malpractice in Nigeria can be grouped into five categories namely: Society-related factors; institutional-related factors; teacher-related factors; learner-related factors; and group related factors.

Society-related Factors

These include undue emphasis on certificates, poor staffing of schools, laxity in prosecuting offenders, and inadequate funding. It is disturbing to note that ours is a country with no education system but certification system” (Onwuka, 1995:11) where every learner is concerned not with mastery but wants to be certified at all costs as having mastered (Maduabum, 1998). What then explains this desire to pass at all costs? It must be appreciated that children and youth are both a product and a reflection of the society. As Ahyu and Adeloje (1991) rightly observed, that high rate of examination cheating in our circumstances is a reflection of unabated corruption in the society. If others get away with corrupt behaviours some of their respondents say, they saw nothing wrong in engaging in examination cheating. It is instructive to note that out of 5000 Nigerians of three professional groups (teachers, businessmen and civil servants) whom Unachukwu and Onunkwo (1999) sampled, 52.6% of the subjects did not see anything bad with cheating, only 9.2% considered cheating bad. To the students, therefore, it would seem that the end justifies the means.

Another society-related factor is poor staffing of schools, resulting in a situation where many teachers are asked to teach subjects they are not qualified to teach (Ekezie 1997). It must be appreciated that the desire to succeed is the wish of every students. Little wonder then that students resort to examination malpractice especially in circumstances where no meaningful learning has taken place. Inadequate funding is another society-related factor which worsen the problem of examination malpractice in Nigeria.

Again, laxity in the implementation of Decree 20 of 1984 on examination malpractice is a societal factor which helps to worsen the existing situation. It does appear that the Decree aimed at curbing examination malpractice exists as a mere threat of punishment without the actual punishment being meted. Many critics hold the view' that there has been laxity in prosecuting offenders.

Institutional Factors

Lack of conclusive examination environment in terms of physical facilities (classrooms, workshops, libraries etc), and poor invigilation have been implicated in perpetuating examination malpractice in Nigeria (Ahyu and Adeloje; 1991, Uwadiae, 1997). The poor conditions of our schools' libraries, workshops, laboratories amongst others no doubt contribute to students' lack of confidence to pass examination without engaging in malpractice. It is well documented (Ukeje 1991; Ekezie, 1997) that our institutions of learning both secondary and tertiary are heavily deprived of facilities. Maduabum (2001: 338) asserts:

While our institutions of learning are annually battling with incidence of examination malpractice, little is it realized that they themselves are acting as agents of reinforcement of this social ill by not providing enough seats and writing desks in classrooms and examination halls.

With the crowded examination halls, close supervision of students becomes virtually impossible; a situation that is worsened by few invigilators being assigned to invigilate a relatively large number of students. It is pertinent to note that inadequate funding of education has stifled efforts at expanding facilities such as classrooms, workshops and laboratories to adequately accommodate the increasing clientele. It could therefore be rightly said that inadequate funding - a societal/institutional factor contributes seriously to the problem of examination malpractice.

Teacher-related Factors

Lack of commitment on the part of many teachers has also been established as a factor contributing to examination malpractice in Nigeria (Ekezie, 1997; Maduabum, 1998). It must be pointed out that moral laxity of some teachers also contribute to examination malpractice. The apparent lack of dedication to duty is traceable to the demoralizing conditions teachers have generally found themselves despite increased salary package which in most cases is rarely received as and when due. In the lace of delayed or irregular salary payments, teacher absenteeism has today become the order of the day m many schools in Nigeria. Consequently, with minimum contact with students, syllabus is usually not sufficiently covered before examination, which makes students to become desperate and anxious, a potent factor in examination malpractice particularly with weak students.

Learner-related Factors

Inadequate preparation on the part of the students coupled with the attendant companion of fear of failure, have also been implicated as factors contributing to examination malpractice (Onyechere, 1996; Ekezie, 1997; Oderinde, 2000). The individualistic element in learning needs to be recognized. With adequate preparation for an examination, confidence is developed with the students being eager to-do the examination. On the other hand, with inadequate preparation, fear sets in and breeding loss of confidence in the students, in addition to creating anxiety and a feeling of insecurity. For such a student, cheating becomes the only feasible alternative to beat the examination.

Group-related Factor

Examination malpractice in Nigeria has assumed disturbing dimensions with groups such as parents, guardians, supervisors, invigilators and law enforcement agents amongst others having been identified as culprits (Onyechere, 1996; Balogun, 1999 and Oderinde, 2000). Poverty has been identified to make many people including the group mentioned above to commit evils and atrocities including malpractice in examinations. Since most people tend to live below the subsistence level, to get quick money, they would not hesitate to aid and abate examination malpractice.

Having considered the forms and causes of examination malpractice in Nigeria, the pertinent question arises; what are the implications of this social ill on national growth and development and what are the possibilities of curbing it?

Implications of Examination Practice for Sustainable National Development

Examination malpractice is a hydra-headed problem which deliberate and concerted efforts must be made to solve. This is because youths are the future leaders of the nation and these youths are mostly involved in examination malpractice. If the youths of today are corrupt, dishonest and criminal minded, what type of leadership can they provide in future?

This question is predicated on the fact that the laws of the land are very much against the odious act of examination malpractice. Examination malpractice is therefore both an educational and social problem. In order to totally uproot the malaise, there is need to re-examine the foundation of the society. A society where honesty is no longer the best policy, such malady as examination malpractice is bound to have a footing. Many parents do not have time for their children in the home. The children are left in the care of surrogates and nannies. As a result of paying inadequate attention to their studies because of lack of appropriate supervision at the early stages, the children lose confidence in themselves to pass examinations. The parents because of societal pressure, go out of their way to ensure that the children “make their papers at all costs”. Some of them do not mind spending a huge sum of money to procure live papers for the children before the examinations are held. This is DISHONESTY and such dishonesty is not laying a good foundation for the youths who are expected to bring about sustainable national development of the country.

Maduka, (1993) opined that by whatever means examination malpractice is perpetuated, the cheats end up knowing less of the subject matter about which they are being examined. The value of the certificates being awarded to such seemingly successful candidates becomes eroded when it is clear that those who possess them had obtained them fraudulently. The purpose of examination; that of producing knowledgeable men and women of good character is defeated and as a spillover, the corrupt tendencies thus induced and engendered through the malpractice in question are carried over to the society and other theatres of life.

Examination malpractice makes nonsense of the educational system. It militates against the country's technological advancement and if it continues, most future claims of expert technological knowledge may be no more than fake. This is because examination malpractice not only makes nonsense of educational qualifications but also discredits national examination bodies and institutions of higher learning and indeed the nation as a whole as the credibility of certificates issued by such institutions and examination bodies are highly questionable now. If it continues, the end result is that the entire nation will suffer series setback when its destiny is placed in the hands of half-baked elements, most of whom are with low mental ability and no conscience. Honest and developed nations will not value the credentials from a nation where examination malpractice is prevalent.

Graduates from such nations are called half-baked and therefore, cannot perform to support their assumed qualifications.

Students who pass examination by cheating will be psychologically tortured for life. Inside them they know they are dishonest and as it is, no great edifice of true greatness can come out of a foundation built on the shifting sand of dishonesty and disobedience. Any time they see the certificates; their mind goes back to how they passed the examination. Instead of the certificates bringing joy, happiness and satisfaction and a sense of achievement, they bring sorrow and a sense of guilt and self-condemnation. With such state of mind the individuals fail to function effectively on the job.

Examination malpractice makes the students to lose the ability to work hard in their studies since it is not those who work hard that get the best results under a system where examination malpractice prevails. Universities and other tertiary institutions will admit people with good examination results who did not work hard for such results. Having admitted the wrong people in the first instance, these institutions will not be able to produce first class professionals and the result is that the nation will be compelled to import experts from foreign countries to man key positions. This will (deplete the lean resources of the nation and under this situation, sustainable national development will elude that nation).

Youths who are initiated in the early stages of their lives into a system of dishonesty and corrupt practices in which they become harder as they grow older will avoid hard work and perseverance. The result is that we may end up with a generation that cannot sustain themselves, economically, politically, socially and otherwise. Such a nation would readily become a prey to other nations.

The Way Forward

Examination malpractice though a global predicament, today constitutes a serious crisis in Nigeria's educational system because of the frightening dimension it has taken. It is based on this perspective that the following recommendations are made:

1. To minimize the undue emphasis on certificates, written examinations should be supplemented with oral/practical examinations as applicable in school examinations and job recruitment exercises. This is a sure way to ascertain a candidate's level of knowledge and competence in a chosen area of pursuit. To this end, however, government will provide adequate facilities in schools for practical to guarantee students' acquisition of practical experience. Furthermore, employers of labour should de-emphasize the possession of certificates and should dwell on actual performance on the job.
2. Science Teachers' Association of Nigeria (STAN 2001) and Onyechere (1999) have stressed the fact that sanctions have failed to achieve the objectives of reducing examination malpractice. They had therefore, suggested the presentation of Exam Ethics Award to "Individuals and organizations who have made outstanding efforts towards the promotion of examination ethics" as a way of drastically reducing or eradicating the problem. Examination Ethics according to Afigbo (1996) is "the correct conduct and behaviour which should underpin an examination system such that it gives validity and authenticity to the certification resulting therefrom". Imbibing examination ethics is, no doubt, worthwhile and it may achieve the desired objective-combating and conquering examination malpractice.
3. The stipulations of the law against examination malpractice should be religiously obeyed. There must be no "sacred cows" in the enforcement of the laws. The government should be serious with Decree 20 of 1984 and enforce it. Put simply, ours should be seen as a society that metes out punishment to offenders without fear or favour.
4. Adequate funds should be made available for provision of conducive learning environment in terms of facilities (classrooms, workshops, libraries, books, chairs, desks etc) and human resources (that is, professionally qualified teachers).
5. Supervision and invigilation of examinations should be more effective. To further check the activities of any group alliance or examination syndicates, examinations should be strictly supervised through provision of enough supervisory personnel.
6. The quality of continuous assessment (CA) scheme should be improved through regular seminars and workshops to update teachers' skills and competence. Suffice it to say that if

CA is rightly applied as a formal live evaluation tool, it has the potential to minimize students' anxiety and tendency to cheat in examination.

7. People with high integrity should be appointed to head educational institutions at all levels. Teachers should motivate their students to learn effectively. There is need to mount regular orientation programmes in our institutions of learning preferably by counselors to inculcate in students the traditional sense of value and good study habits. Such opportunities could also be utilized for vocational enlightenment. In addition, the Ministry of Education should organize regular and well-coordinated enlightenment campaign in schools, aimed at attitudinal transformation against examination malpractice. Such efforts should be augmented by other stake holders in education such as parents, churches, mosques and the community.
8. Examination bodies should beef up the security of live question papers. Any official found guilty of examination malpractice should be summarily disciplined.
9. Above all, in order to motivate teachers to be dedicated to their duty, the need for their salaries to be paid as and when due cannot be over-emphasized.

Conclusion

Examination malpractice, though a global predicament poses a serious threat to standards and national development. In this paper, an attempt has been made to provide a conceptual framework of the term "examination malpractice". Causes and forms of examination malpractice were pinpointed. Attention was drawn to the frightening dimension of this phenomenon in our circumstances and its effects on educational standards and national development with the threat on international recognition of certificates and the attendant cost in terms of preventive measures and litigation. The paper has proffered solutions that will help to reduce if not wipe out examination malpractice.

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