

Pragmatic Techniques of Curbing Examination Malpractices in Secondary Schools in Nigeria

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Abstract - *This paper is concerned with pragmatic techniques of curbing examination malpractices in Nigerian secondary schools. Annually, the West African Examination Council (WAEC) withholds and cancels thousands of students' results as a result of examination malpractices. The concept and forms of examination malpractices are discussed in this paper. Causes of examination malpractices are traced to students, teachers, parents and examination officers. Low intellectual ability, poor attitude to learning, peer pressure, crave for dishonest gains, parental pressure and laxity on external supervisor's part are some specific causes. The resultant effects include loss of credibility of certificates and blacklisting of schools. Recommendations are made on pragmatic ways of curbing the menace. These include Personal determination, Values education training, orientation for parents, use of computer-based tests and biometric verification.*

Keywords: Examination, Malpractice, School, Pragmatic, Curbing, Techniques

INTRODUCTION

Examination is a formal test designed to assess students' knowledge in a subject or skill in order to make necessary adjustments in the teaching - learning process. The test can take the form of practical exercises or answering questions [1]. Examination therefore, plays vital roles in evaluating learners' comprehension, assimilation, retention and recall of information. It is the bedrock upon which an individual's future academic achievements are based [2]. Examination remains the best tool for objectively assessing and evaluating students' knowledge [3]. However, students tend to approach examination with fear and anxiety. These include fear of not being

promoted to the next class; fear of retrogression in the pursuit of one's career and fear of failing to qualify for University education. These fears and the quest for success at all cost prompt a number of students to engage in examination malpractices.

Examination malpractice remains a major problem plaguing the Nigerian Educational System. According to Ibadin [4], examination malpractice has permeated all levels of education in Nigeria. There is an alarming rate of increase in incidents of examination malpractice at the secondary school level, in Nigeria [3]. In spite of efforts made by Governments, examination committees, schools, individuals and other stakeholders, examination malpractice incidents seem to be on the increase. For instance, NGScholars [5] reported that the Nigerian Examinations council (NEC) of the West African Examination Council (WAEC) [18] withheld the results of 118,101 candidates involved in examination malpractices in the May/June 2015 WAEC examination and later cancelled the results (as against 30,654 results cancelled in 2013 as reported by Oduwole [6].

Students appear to be the main culprits perpetrating examination malpractices in schools. However, the shameful involvement of greedy teachers, school-heads and parents seem to aggravate the occurrences of examination malpractice in secondary schools [9]. This development should be of paramount concern to all stakeholders in education. Consequently, this paper focuses on the Forms of examination malpractice; Concept, Causes and Consequences of examination malpractice, as well as Pragmatic ways of curbing the menace of examination malpractice in Secondary Schools.

Conceptual Clarification:
Examination Malpractice

Examination malpractice entails all unpermitted and dishonest activities that some examination stakeholders engage in before, during and after an examination [10]; [17]. Every year, about fifty thousand candidates (students) are caught in acts that constitute examination malpractices. According to Abdulkareem and Alabi [11], others involved in this corrupt act include examination invigilators, supervisors, custodians of examination materials, officials of examination bodies and law enforcement agents. New and sophisticated techniques of examination misconducts are being fabricated every examination season and these affect the quality of education in Nigeria [1]. This development completely defeats one of the purposes for which examinations are conducted which is measuring student's knowledge. Examination malpractice hinders the assessment of students' actual knowledge. It is therefore pertinent to examine the sources and consequences of examination malpractices and propose pragmatic techniques of curbing the menace in order to upgrade the credibility of certificates awarded in schools and generally enhance qualitative education in Nigeria.

Forms of Examination Malpractices

Examination malpractices take different forms. WAEC and other researchers [12]; [13]; [14]; [2] have highlighted the forms of examination malpractices to include copying from another candidate's work (popularly known as "giraffing"), asking another candidate for correct answers during examination and bringing already-prepared notes into the examination hall. Others are leakage of live question papers to candidates, colluding with others to jointly answer questions in examination hall, impersonation and mass cheating whereby a whole examination centre gets involved in examination malpractices. Such centres are sometimes referred to as "miracle centres" where candidates are taxed or forced to pay in exchange for good results.

Causes of Examination Malpractice

Examination malpractice could be due to several factors. Abdulkareem and Alabi [12] posited that examination malpractices have immediate and remote causes which are linked to the family, school and the society. Specifically, examination misconduct originates from students, teachers school-heads, parents, examination officials and security operatives:

A) Students:

Low Intellectual Ability: An average intelligence level is required for successful learning. Low achievers are cheap victims of examination malpractice. Students with history of poor academic performances in internal examinations erroneously engage in examination malpractices during external examinations to make up. Students' desire to pass the core-courses by all means is also a cause of examination misconduct [12].

Lack of Adequate Preparation for Examination: Some students fail to prepare adequately for examination because they get distracted by other social activities like Facebook, Twitter, English Premier League, Home- videos (endless watching of African Magic Shows), Talent shows and Sport-Betting.

Misconception about How to Pass Examination: Some students feel they cannot rely on their brain (or hard work) to be successful in an examination. They erroneously embrace examination malpractice as additional "help" needed. Students' poor attitude to learning prepares the ground for examination malpractices [14].

Peer Pressure: Some students are pressurized by fellow students to get involved in examination malpractice. A group of students may contribute money to purchase 'leaked' examination papers at exorbitant prices.

B) Teachers/School Heads:

Improper Teaching: Students easily lose confidence in teachers that do not show competence in the subjects taught. At times, teachers fail to teach properly or cover the syllabus before the examination. Such teachers, sometimes resort to examination malpractice (e.g. passing notes to students in the examination hall) in order to buy students' favour [2].

Desire to Steal Recognition: Competent teachers are often recognized and rewarded by the School Management. However, some teachers seek to steal recognition (instead of earning it). Such teachers fail to teach students effectively and yet they want to be praised or rewarded for high achievements in their subjects.

Teacher's Favouritism: Some teachers feel obliged to "help" their relations writing examination by smuggling prepared answer scripts into the examination hall and exchanging such with those of candidates of interest.

Crave for Dishonest Gains: With the present economic hardship and unfavourable working conditions in some schools, some teachers easily succumb to collection of money from students to aid them in the examination.

Admission Drive: Some School- Heads or Principals want their schools to be rated as performing schools by all means. High performance in WAEC [18] papers (even if through fraudulent means) is used by some school authorities as bait to attract more students into the school. According to TVC [19] WAEC blamed Principals of Secondary Schools for high examination malpractice in 2011/2012 SSS examination.

C) Parents:

Parental pressure on students is a factor. Some parents mount pressure on their children/wards to pursue careers that they do not have aptitude for or not interested in. Also, some parents are directly involved in perpetrating examination malpractice by sending leaked examination question papers to their children/wards in school.

D) Examination And Security Officials:

There is growing laxity on the part of external examiners or supervisors posted to secondary schools for Senior Secondary School (SSS) examination in that some external examiners collude with school principals and teachers to aid examination malpractice after receiving bribe [16]. Also, some corrupt WAEC/NECO officials leak the questions for monetary gains.

Furthermore, some security officials attached to schools to maintain law and order are sometimes bought over. They are given money, food and drinks to aid examination malpractices [11], [12].

Consequences of Examination Malpractice

The consequences of engaging in examination malpractice include the following:

Loss of credibility of certificates

Certificates issued by schools noted for examination malpractice often lack national and international recognition. Candidates are often subjected to rigorous tests and interviews to test the credibility of certificates presented [12] while pursuing higher degrees or employment.

Failure in job performance

Graduates lack necessary knowledge, skills and competence to perform creditably in commensurate terms with certificate presented. They are unable to defend their certificates and woefully fail in their job performance [10].

Imprisonment

Examination malpractice is a criminal offence that can lead to imprisonment. In 1984, the Federal Military government promulgated a decree 20th on examination malpractice. This was later amended to act 33 of 1999 in the Nigeria constitution [13]. This act stipulates that any candidate caught in examination malpractice would pay a fine of 100,000 naira or be jailed for three years [15].

Blacklisting of schools and centres known for examination malpractices

Many schools and centres involved in examination malpractices have been blacklisted by WAEC [18]. In 2013, WAEC blacklisted 113 secondary schools for malpractice [6]. In line with this, Fapohunda (2015) reported that WAEC gave approval to de-recognize some schools as examination centres for some years and that indicted supervisors have been blacklisted.

Cancellation of results

Annually, WAEC cancels results of students involved in examination malpractice. For instance, the results of 30,654 candidates who sat for May/June 2012 West African Senior School Certificate Exam (WASSCE) were cancelled [6].

Generally, examination malpractices have grave consequences on national development. Consequently, the NEC of WAEC [18], urged stakeholders to join hands in curbing the menace of examination malpractice.

The foregoing suggests that if the goals of education must be achieved, more pragmatic approaches are needed in curbing examination malpractice.

Pragmatic Techniques Of Curbing Examination Malpractice

The following practical approaches are suggested:

Determination to achieve excellence through hard work:

Personal determination arising from religious, educational and cultural convictions to desist from

examination fraud is one of the pragmatic strides towards curbing the menace. A principled candidate is able to snub examination malpractice while writing an examination, even if he has the chance to do so or in the absence of an invigilator. Individuals need to determine to achieve excellence through hard work as a matter of principle. Also, schools, examination centres and examiners need to take this positive step.

Adequate funding of the education sector:

Funding of the educator sector should be improved upon so that adequate infrastructural facilities can be provided in schools. This will help to avoid overcrowding which can promote examination malpractice. Also, adequate provision of funds by Government and private owners will help to improve teachers' salaries and welfare packages.

Reduction of undue emphasis on certificates:

Too much emphasis on certificate acquisition does not allow higher education to thrive [7]. Emphasis should be placed on acquisition of knowledge, skills and competence more than certificates.

Reduction of focus on University education:

The trend whereby many secondary school graduates focus mainly on acquiring University education without considering their aptitude should be checked. The Registrar of the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB), Dr. Dibu Ojerinde submitted recently, that a University degree certificate is not the only way to make it to the top. People should develop interest in Technical Education and Entrepreneurship Education too [8]. This knowledge should help to check the rush for University education by all means.

Training in Values Education:

Vigorous campaigns and seminars should be made to restore values of honesty, dedication to duty and study, hard work and perseverance among others, in the lives of citizens and students writing examinations. Also, there is need to enlighten staff and students on benefits of avoiding examination malpractices.

Orientation of Parents:

Organized meetings like the Parents Teachers Association (P.T.A) meetings and other special meetings can be used to enlighten parents on the

consequences of examination malpractice and the children's career choices.

Examination-Counselling Programs:

The school Counsellor has vital roles to play in curbing examination malpractice. Individual and group counselling sessions for students should be conducted. For *Individual counselling*, students with records of examination malpractices should be counselled. Delinquent children and low-achievers should be motivated to seek counselling. Also, for *Group counselling*, the school counsellor can counsel students on topics like- How to prepare for examination; Good study habits; Dangers of Examination Malpractice; How to improve academic performance; and Career choice. These sessions may help to broaden students' understanding, reshape their value systems and change their attitudes towards examination and discourage examination fraud.

Use of Customized Answer Booklets:

Examination bodies including WAEC should consider printing customized answer scripts for candidates' use. Such booklets should display candidates' personal details like examination number, Passport photograph, Sex, School or centre location to guide against examination malpractices.

Establishment of Examination Malpractice Commission (EMC):

The EMC should be solely for examination matters and should function like the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC). The body should have its team of investigators and prosecutors [3]. The body should be backed by law, independent of government interference and adequately funded. The body should be charged with the responsibility of arresting, trying and prosecuting perpetrators of examination malpractices. Having such a commission will help the fight against malpractices.

Use of Computer-based Tests and Biometric Verification in Schools:

Recently, JAMB [8] took a giant stride in introducing computer-based test. This has helped to drastically reduce the spate of examination malpractices in JAMB examination. Use of computer-based tests in writing some examinations (including WAEC) in secondary schools (though capital-intensive) is recommended as helpful in curbing examination fraud. Also, in this computer age, the use

of biometrics verification to identify examination candidates is also a plausible technique of reducing examination malpractices. These options should be considered in the nearest future.

CONCLUSION

Examination misconduct is a cancer in the society. Forms, Causes and Consequences of examination malpractice have been examined in this paper. The student, teacher, parents, examination officials have been identified as key facilitators. Pragmatic techniques of curbing the menace of examination malpractices have been proposed. It is hoped that if these pragmatic strides are taken towards curbing examination malpractices, the nation's educational system would soon be transformed into more credible and highly-valued world-class education system.

Research Delimitations

The present research was confined to the pragmatic techniques of curbing examination malpractices. The focus was on Secondary school system of education in Nigeria. Other researchers may wish to focus on other countries and other levels of education like Primary schools and Tertiary institutions of learning.

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