

EXAMINATION MALPRACTICE: IMPLICATIONS FOR QUALITY SECONDARY EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper examined the menace of examination malpractices in Nigerian secondary schools and its implications for quality assurance. This hydra-headed monster has grown so much out of proportion today; especially in our secondary schools that concerned members of the society have become so perturbed on the credibility of certificates gotten from our secondary schools and even the future of Nigerian educational system as a whole which appears to be in serious danger due to the menace of examination malpractices. Among the numerous causes of examination malpractices as identified by this paper are undue emphasis place on certificates in Nigerian society, lack of adequate infrastructural and instructional facilities in schools coupled with poor teaching/learning habit. The paper therefore advocates among others as remedies to examination malpractices the imposition of tougher sanction against candidates or any perpetrators of examination frauds. Also, emphasis should be placed on skill accusation rather than paper qualification as it were in Nigerian society.

Introduction

One of the objective of secondary education in Nigeria as stated in NPE (2004) is to prepare the young ones for higher education and develop them to meet the nation's manpower needs. The teaching-learning process will not be complete and will be meaningless unless the students are examined and one of the greatest problems militating against the Nigerian education system today is this faulty process of examining students; which can be referred to as examination malpractice. It is a cankerworm that has eaten so deeply into the fabric of the nation's educational system over time; and already, its a monster in the nation's educational system (Ajayi and Ekundayo, 2012).

Oyinloye (2002) lamented that examination malpractice had become a very serious menace that is threatening the Nigerian educational system. It is threatening the system because it destroys quality and replaces it with mediocrity. It inflicts damage on hardwork and excellence. Looking at the dangerous dimensions this "hydraheaded" problem has assumed in our educational sector, then, there is a need for serious concern among the stakeholders in education industry.

Still in line with the above view, Ajayi and Ayodele (2002), buttress the fact that examination malpractice has assumed such an alarming position of relevance in all levels of education in Nigeria; from primary, through to secondary and tertiary institutions that, it is incredible to think that we can do without it. This position was further affirmed by Ogbaji and Aliawuya (2004) that the situation seems worst in the secondary level of our education such that hardly a year passes without bodies like the West African Examination Council (WASC) and National Examination Council (NECO) being faced with the dilemma of coping with various aspect of examination fraud.

As explained by Otu (2002), the situation has taken a dangerous dimension such that it has become a national embarrassment and disgrace for which severe laws have been promulgated as punishment to deter members of the society. However, all efforts so far made to curb this ill seem to have been proved abortive.

According to NPE (2004), secondary level of education occupies an essential position in Nigeria educational system. It aims at preparing students for useful living within the society and preparation for higher education, it equally determines and dictates to a great extent the standard of education at the tertiary level. NPE further affirmed that secondary education is the education children receive after the primary education and before the tertiary stage, it then implies that secondary education is a bridge between primary and tertiary education. Ekundayo (2009) further corroborates the above position that secondary education is the bedrock upon which other levels of education are built.

Having considered the importance of secondary education to an individual and the society at large, it could then be said that of all the problems facing Nigerian educational system especially at the secondary school level, none appears to be more agonizing and

persistent as the issue of examination malpractice which has made nonsense of our educational system, and concerted efforts according to Adebayo (2004) is urgently required to curb or eradicate this menace totally.

Concept of Examination

Examination can simply be defined as the act of examining or state of being examined; a careful search, investigation or inquiry. It can also be described as a process prescribed or assigned for testing qualification. In the words of Otu (2002), examination is the activity by which the performance of an individual is measured. It provides an index of evaluating and assessing the achievement of the objectives of education. The compliance to the rules and regulations of examination, be it external or internal examination is very germane to its integrity and credibility of its certificates.

Oxford advanced learners dictionary of current English (2006) equally defined examination as "testing of ability". Onyechefe (1996) similarly defined examination as an assessment of students to ascertain to what extent they have benefited from the teachings of their teachers in a given subject. For any examination to be therefore credible, Liman (1996) opined that it must possess the key elements, which are validity and reliability. According to him, these key elements can only be present if the examination is free and fair, devoid of partiality, cheating and all sorts of malpractices. Balogun (1999) defines it as a process through which students are evaluated or tested to find out the quality of knowledge they have acquired within a specified period.

Examination could be internal or external; it could be oral, written or both. Examples of internal examinations are continuous assessment test and promotion examinations. Examinations common in Nigerian schools are, common entrance examination for admission into secondary school. School certificate examinations are conducted by West African Examination council (WAEC) and National Examination Council (NECO). The Joint Admission Examination Board (JAMB) and National Teacher Institute (NTI) conduct admission tests into tertiary institutions. Odebola (2013) summed it all by describing examination as a potent instrument for judging knowledge as well as competence.

Concept of Examination Malpractice

Examination malpractice may not be a new trend in our educational system but the dangerous dimension it has taken currently calls for concern, so that the school system can be rid of its consequences. In the past, students tend to hide this act, but now they do it openly with impunity despite the examination malpractice act 33 of 1999 that stipulates punishment ranging from a fine of 50,000 to 100,000 naria and imprisonment for a term of 3-4 years with or without option of fine. This development may be due to an act of complacency on the part of government in enforcing this law on erring students. Examination malpractice as defined by Ajayi and Ekundayo (2012) is an attempt to use fraudulent means to achieve success in an examination. It is any wrong doing during or after any examination.

Mgbekem (2004) defined examination malpractice as an organized cheating practice adopted by candidates of an examination, who have no confidence in themselves to pass the examination, but have confidence in Fraud. Equally, Olumero (1992) and Ongom (1994) see examination malpractice as any examination not conducted in accordance with specified norms set up by the examining institutions. Olayinka (1993) further posited that examination malpractice is any misconduct or improper practice in any examination with a view to obtaining good results through fraudulent action. Ajayi (2002) equally defined examination malpractice as attempts by examinees or their agents or collaborators to influence the outcome of examinations unfairly. Owuamanam (2008) in his own words sees examination malpractices as an act of wrong doing that especially contravenes laid down rules of examination practice.

From the foregoing definitions, it can therefore be deduced that examination malpractice are all forms of misconduct associated with the conduct of an examination which could take place before, during and after such examination.

Causes of Examination Malpractices

There are various causes of examination malpractices; prominent among them are as follows:

- **Undue emphasis on certificate:** Ajayi (2002) and Oyinloye (2002) posited that the high premium placed on certificates in the country has facilitated mass cheating and the desire to pass

examination at all cost. The quest for acquisition of certificates by incompetent persons in order to improve their standard of living has led to mad rush by most people to acquire certificate by all means. Many holders of certificate cannot practically defend them through their performance.

- **Lack of adequate infrastructural and insructional facilities in school:** Asuru (2002) blamed poor and unconduvisive learning environment as one of the causes of examination malpractices in Nigerian schools, especially our secondary schools. He observed that rowdiness in classrooms and examination halls has done more harm than good to the process of conducting credible examination in our schools in Nigeria.
- **Poor teaching/learning habit:** it is worthy to note that teachers are central to the delivery of quality education. The old saying “like teachers, like students” still holds for all seasons. Many of our secondary school teachers are not committed to their jobs, as they ought to. It seems as if many of them lack self development in the words of Adebayo (2004), and total absence of professional ethnics appear to be a common sight among our teachers. Some of them are even willing tools for aiding and abetting examination malpractices in our secondary schools. All these combined do hamper the creation of conducive atmosphere for effective teaching and learning and the resultant effect is therefore students becoming desperate for examination leakage. This poor teaching and learning situation in our secondary schools have grossly eroded confidence in both teachers and their students.
- **Poverty and lust for money:** Ajibola (2006) argued that the poverty level in the country had injected almost everybody with virus called bribery. Bribery in the education system has therefore given birth to the monster called examination malpractice. Teachers in the school system tend to believe that the quickest way of having their on share of the national cake is through aiding and abetting examination malpractices for monetary reward.
- **Poor preparation for examination by students:** this is one of the root causes of examination malpractices especially in our secondary schools. Many students are naturally lazy, many of

them have little time for a serious study. Moreover, truancy and absenteeism in class make many students to be ill-prepared for examination and they opt or settle for malpractices in their examinations as a way of passing by all means.

- The list of causes of examination malpractices is inexhaustible; there are factors of lack of proper guidance and counseling from parents and teachers, fear of unknown, low moral standard in society, parental factor and so on and so forth.

Strategies of Examination Malpractices

Various strategies are being employed by the students who get involve in examination malpractice. Ajayi (2002), Oyinloye (2002), Adebayo (2004) and Mgbekem (2004) identified various strategies employed by students to cheat in an examination to include bringing of foreign materials into the examination hall (such as textbooks, prepared notes and so on); smuggling in of already prepared answer scripts, impersonation in the examination hall; leakage of examination questions and intimidation of supervisors to relax the rules and regulations governing the conduct of examination.

Ajayi and Ekundayo (2012) further identified pairing method which involves students copying each other in the examination hall, rewriting examination privately after the official examination hours, collusion with examination officials to cheat and the use of cell phones to text answers to candidates as parts of strategies employed by students to cheat in examination. Irregular activities inside and outside of the examination halls, such as stealing, substituting or misappropriating the scripts of other candidates, tearing part of question paper or answer booklet during examination to enhance cheating. Inscribing materials or information on any parts of the body such as palms, thighs, arms and so on, are all parts of strategies employ by students to cheat in examination.

Implications of Examination Malpractice for Quality Education

Ajayi, and Ayodele (2002) and Ajayi and Ekundayo (2012) highlighted the consequences of examination malpractice in the country to include:

- Decline in educational standard. Examination malpractice is injurious to the sustenance and perpetuation of education as a

life-long agent. It lowers the standard of the educational system of a nation. It makes nonsense of the educational system and it hampers the achievement of the country's goal of technological advancement.

- Lower the integrity of a nation and its people. When a country is infested with mediocre due to examination malpractice, the educational certificates of such country are under-rated. The country faces disgrace particularly when the graduates are found to be grossly incompetent in performing or discharging duties that are commensurate to their qualifications.
- The quality and standard of the certificates issued to candidates by the various institutions are equally put into jeopardy through the act of examination malpractice and many at times, this has led to non-recognition of our certificates by foreign universities; as a matter of fact, no foreign institution will recognize certificates awarded in a country where examination malpractice is the order of the day.
- It has made the integrity of the examination bodies to be called to question many at times. Examination officials need to endeavour to strive for excellence in their codes of examination conduct or punishment for examination malpractice offenders for the sake of our future generations.

Another devastating effect or implication of examination malpractices is that it has eroded the culture of learning in our educational institutions, the desire to study hard seems to have completely lost among our students especially our secondary students since certificates can easily be got through fraudulent or dubious means.

Remedies to Examination Malpractice

Various methods can be employed to curb the act of examination malpractices in the words of Obioha (2006) and Ajayi and Ekundayo (2012): prominent among them is the imposition of tougher sanction against candidates or any perpetrators of examination fraud, be it the students or the invigilators. Possession of certificates should also be de-emphasized, emphasis should rather be placed on skill accusation rather than paper qualification.

Also, effective teaching and learning must be promoted on the parts of both the teachers and students alike. This could be achieved by providing enabling environment through the provision of adequate equipment, learning facilities and materials and motivation of teachers through enhanced remuneration package.

Parents should also inculcate dignity of labour in their children by teaching them never to be desperate for certificate acquisition. Emphasis must be placed on moral values articulated in the National Policy on Education (2004). There is a need to uphold those tenets and implement those values to the letter. There should be no paying of lip service in implementing those cherished values which promote the nation's image. If the moral and ethical behaviour of our youths is strengthened, examination malpractice in our educational system, especially our secondary schools will be reduced to a barest minimum.

Positive study skills and habits should be inculcated into students; especially at the secondary school level of education. In the words of Adebayo (2004) emphasis must be placed on continuous assessment and aptitude tests. The school curriculum also needs to be reviewed from time to time so as to meet the yearnings, aspirations and technological development and advancement of the present generation.

Principals and teachers equally occupy a unique position to curtail examination malpractices in our secondary schools. It actually takes two to tangle, if students plan to cheat in an examination and principals and teachers strongly resist such an attempt, definitely, actualization of such cheating objectives will be in futility.

Aggressive campaign against examination malpractice in both electronic and print media must also be promoted. That is not all, seminars and workshops on proper conduct of examination should be organized for all stakeholders in administration of examination and more involvement of security agents in enforcement of rules and regulations governing the conduct of examinations must be encouraged. Examination body in conjunction with the school principals should plant secret cameras in examination halls to monitor examinees. Governments should also be alive to it responsibility of enforcing the examination act 33 of 1999 when situation demands for it.

Conclusion

The place of education in the survival of any nation cannot be overstressed. The socio-political, moral and economic development of a nation depends on its educational system. A nation whose educational system is laced with various acts of examination malpractices as identified in this study will be stagnant both economically and technologically. The scourge has grievous and destructive consequences on the nation's values, there is therefore a need for all stakeholders in education to put heads together by waging serious war, against all forms of examination malpractices in our educational system; especially our secondary education because it put the attainment of quality education into jeopardy.

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