

EXAMINATION MALPRACTICE AT PUBLIC EXAMINATIONS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study was carried out to determining the strongest links to examination malpractice in Nigerian Schools. It also attempted to proffer solutions to the problems. The samples of examination malpractice we have used in the study consisted of 100 undergraduates of the Federal Polytechnic, Offa. They were randomly selected and made to complete a 10 item questionnaire on the agents of examination malpractice. The data were analyzed using simple percentage for ranking parties to the menace from 1 to 10. The Findings pointed out that the activities of the students and their peer groups constituted the strongest link. It was also discovered that the students are victims of their poor educational environment. In our recommendations, it was suggested that a conducive and enabling environment should be provided for the students to face all examinations with confidence that they can pass without cheating and that less emphasis be placed on paper qualification by employers of labour.

Key words: Examination, malpractices, Nigerian Schools, agents and menace

Introduction

Examination is an important aspect of the education process. This is the stage at which the learners knowledge, skills, ability and competence are assessed; and judgments are made about such performance. The outcome of such judgments is used for diagnosing as well as placement of the learner. An attempt to beat the due process of examinations leads to malpractices. One can claim that examination malpractice is as old as examination itself. However, the rate at which it occurs differs from one place to another. The rate at which examination malpractices occur in the Nigerian educational system is highly disturbing and therefore, needs prompt attention by all stakeholders because of its moral and legal implications.

Examination Malpractices

Examination malpractice is a cankerworm, Yakubu (1998) and Edokpa (1998). The high rate of this menace in Nigeria prompted the Federal Military Government to promulgate "Examination Malpractices Decree 20" in 1984. Decree 20 of 1984 was amended as Decree 33 in 1999 and lists twelve various offences as examination malpractices. The decree prescribes heavy punishments for the offenders. In spite of stiff penalties, which the decree prescribes, examination malpractice is growing in leaps and bounds at all levels of the Nigerian educational system. This study discovers Pupils/students, teachers, school administrators, parents, examination invigilators and supervisors, custodians of examination materials, officials of examination bodies and law enforcement as the agents involved in examination malpractice.

Examination malpractice as described by Nwahunanya (2004) is an act of omission or commission intended to make a student pass examination without relying absolutely on his/her independent ability or resources. Nwana (2000), while discussing the aberrations on the Nigerian educational system stated that examination malpractice includes a massive abuse of rules and regulations guiding the conduct of both internal and public examinations. The rules were made to regulate all the activities beginning from the setting of questions for such examinations through the taking of the

examinations, marking and grading, to the release of the results and the issuance of certificates. Odongbo (2002) says that examination malpractice refers to an act of wrong doing carried out by a candidate or groups of candidates or any other person with the intention to cheat and gain unfair advantage in an examination. Awanbor (2004) opines that examination malpractice is the application of unusual means to obtain a score or set of scores that is normally beyond the mental capability or the state of preparedness of a candidate for that examination.

Sooze (2004) defines examination malpractice as all illegal means which the students used to pass examinations. The University of Port Harcourt's Academic Policy refers to examination malpractice as all forms of cheating which directly or indirectly falsify the ability of the students which include cheating within an examination hall, cheating outside an examination hall, and any involvement in all illegal examination related activities. The document listed ten types of cheating within an examination hall. They include copying from one another, exchanging question/answer sheets, collaboration with an invigilator/lecturer through which an invigilator or a lecturer provides written/oral answers to a student in the examination hall, colluding with members of staff to obtain set questions or answers beforehand and soliciting for help after an examination. Onyechere (2004) extends the list further to include Government's policy of automatic promotion and lecturers examination of students based on topics they did not teach due to prolonged strikes. Olasheinde (2004) identifies ten while Onyechere identifies thirty-three types of examination malpractice. In whatever form it rears its ugly head, examination malpractice is unacceptable in any sane society.

For examinations conducted in public schools in Nigeria, records showed that in most cases, candidates who cheat do not act alone. Sooze (2004) and Onyechere (2004) identify the subject teachers, invigilators, supervisors, principals and parents as agents of examination malpractice. There are also examinations "mercenaries" that help some students who are sitting for public examinations with which they gained admission into higher institutions. There is also community participation through contribution of money to bribe supervisors and invigilators to look the other way when the act is perpetrated. Our investigation revealed that, where the community could not supply the money, they dug trenches on the road leading to their community so that the supervisor would not reach the school while the examination was in progress.

Rani (2004) submits that if a medical doctor makes a mistake, the patient dies, if an engineer makes a mistake, the bridge collapses, but if a teacher makes a mistake, it affects the unborn generation. This shows that while the mistake of the medical doctor and the engineer have immediate repercussions, that of the teacher is long lasting or of lifetime impact. It is therefore a serious matter that must be stopped at all cost. It is for these reasons that this study sets out to find out who is most culpable in the crime. It is also the objective of this study to find out what factors conditioned the agents of examination malpractice into the act and how they can be assisted out of it. The seriousness of examination malpractice and its widespread manifestations have received attentions in research and have generated both public and private discussions, (Olasheinde, 1993) and (Sooze, 2004).

According to Ojikutu (1987) and Olumero (1992) examination malpractice, as an antisocial behaviour, has in recent times attracted the attention of stakeholders in the education industry. The Federal Polytechnic, Offa Students Handbook (2004), identifies several forms of examination malpractice and the penalties for the offences. They include:

- i. Taking prepared scripts to the examination hall - Expulsion
- ii. Taking written material not relevant to examination hall - Expulsion
- iii. Gaining access to or having foreknowledge of any set of examination questions before examination - Expulsion
- iv. Using a desk or any other materials, i.e. wall, palm, lap, ruler, etc with written answer, aids to answers or any inscription that are relevant to the examination questions - Expulsion
- v. Offering or accepting assistance in answering any set of examination question during an examination - Expulsion

- vi. Resisting being searched for clearance for examination misconduct and refusing to sign examination misconduct form or refusal to make statements - Rustication for one session
- vii. Refusal to take instruction from invigilators or being rude to invigilator during an examination - Rustication for one session
- viii. Mutilation of answer scripts - Rustication for one session
- ix. Leaving the examination hall without permission - Score zero in the paper
- x. Writing anything other than name and matriculation number of the candidate on the question paper - Score zero in the paper
- xi. Failure to fill in name and matriculation number of the candidate on the question paper - Warning
- xii. Communication in whatever forms with others during an examination without the permission of the invigilator - Rustication for one session
- xiii. Any act which disrupts or stands to prevent the orderly conduct of an examination - Expulsion
- xiv. Cases of inducement by student to lecturers such as monetary and material rewards, appeals, etc during and after examination - Expulsion
- xv. Exchange of question papers with inscription that are relevant to the examination - expulsion
- xvi. Impersonation - Expulsion and refers to police for prosecution
- xvii. If a student is caught cheating in an examination but he or she destroys the exhibits so as cover up - Expulsion
- xviii. Cases of students harassing, threatening or intimidating invigilator, any staff or student of the institution after being caught for examination misconduct - Expulsion and to be handed over to the police for further necessary action
- xix. A student caught for any examination misconduct but defies invitation to face the committee three times - Expulsion

In summary, Makoju, Adewale, Nwangwu and Shuaibu (2004) opine that whenever rules and regulations governing the conduct of any examination are not adhered to by parties involved (i.e. candidates and any other person involved in the conduct of examinations from setting the question to the release of result), then we can conclude that examination malpractice has occurred.

Causes of Examination Malpractice

Makoju, et al (2004) report the responses of parents of secondary school students when they were asked the factors that encourage examination malpractices in Nigeria? Parents response to questionnaires which according to their study represents 41.8 percent indicated that when questions are not related to the syllabus, examination malpractice is encouraged. There are two types of syllabi, one developed by an examination body referred to as examination syllabus and the one developed by Nigeria Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) known as teaching syllabus. Although these two syllabi should be common in scope, the report has always been that JAMB syllabus is overloaded and difficult for candidates, so candidates oftentimes find it difficult to cope with. Their inability to cope is discovered to be promoting examination malpractice. 28 percent of the parents according to Makoju, et al^s (2004) study were of the opinion that insufficient time for writing papers also encourages examination malpractice. However, it is observed that insufficient time is not likely to pose a serious threat to candidates to warrant examination malpractice because if the candidates know what to write, they are not likely to have time for cheating, as they will be pre-occupied with trying to beat the time. Some parents were of the opinion that objective questions also encourage examination malpractices. This is because many students have developed different skills in using their fingers to pass information to their colleagues on the "correct options" in objective tests.

In the same study Makoju, et al (2004), reported that 52.17% students are not ready to learn. In most public schools, students are seen roaming the streets, some with video cassettes and some playing football. Consequently, these categories of students more often, engage in examination malpractices. Other factors responsible for examination malpractice such as emphasis on paper qualification, parents desire for their children to pass at all cost, corrupt supervisors and custodians

of examination papers are reflections of the wider society. Until less emphasis is laid on paper qualification and the nation places emphasis on skills acquisition in order to function well in the society, the issue of examination malpractice will continue to persist. The craze for paper qualification is the offshoot of the poor implementation of the 2004 national policy on education. If emphasis is removed from paper qualification and the nation shifts her focus to acquisition of demonstrable skills and academic excellence, perhaps, the rate of examination malpractice will drastically reduced.

Poor environment in which the students have to learn, poor infrastructure in the schools, inadequate number of qualified teachers as well as poor attitudes of teachers to work; lack of; or poor teaching materials/aids, inadequate number schools, overcrowding of students in a class, extortion by the private schools, parental carelessness and governments inadequate budget for education make the school environment appears hostile for serious students while the unserious ones use the problems as excuses for their non-performance and excuses for engaging in examination malpractice.

Ranking the Agents of Examination Malpractice

This section of the study is an attempt to rank the level at which each identified agent of examination malpractice participate and determine which of them ranks highest. The population under study consists of the students of the Federal Polytechnic, Offa, Kwara State who had sat for SSCE, JAMB and UME. The sample consisted of 100 undergraduate in the School who were randomly selected. The instrument used for data collection was a 10 item questionnaire developed by the researcher and face-validated with a reliability coefficient of 0.89. It listed 10 agents of examination malpractice which the respondents were required to rank in order of their influence in aiding and abetting examination malpractices. The guide indicated 1st for the agent that has the greatest influence and '10th' for the one with the least influence. The data were analysed using frequency count and percentages. The result is presented in the findings below

S/N	Agents	Freq	%	Rank
1	Examination Candidates	30	30	1 st
2	Peer group influence	16	16	2 nd
3	The principal (As individuals and with teachers)	15	15	3 ^d
4	Parents (Fathers, Mothers and guardian)	12	12	4 th
5	Teachers (Individuals and group)	10	10	5 th
6	External Examination Officials (WAEC, JAMB)	7	7	6 th
7	Special Centres influence	4	4	7 th
8	Community in which school is situated	3	3	8 th
9	Influence of mercenaries	2	2	9 th
10	Other relations (brothers, sister, uncles etc.)	1	1	10 th

Table 1: A rank scale of the agents of Examination Malpractice

Discussion

Table 1 above ranked the examination candidates as the strongest link (1st) in examination malpractice while the peer group influence and the Principals along with their teachers were ranked second and third (2nd and 3rd) respectively. The influence of other relations, Mercenaries and the Community in which the school was located were the weakest agents ranked 10th, 9th and 8th

respectfully while the Parents were ranked 4th

Although this is a small scale study, it nonetheless gives some insight into the linkage in examination malpractices. It confirms that, since the students are the candidates who write the examination by themselves but try some unethical means to pass the examination, then, they are the strongest link. In other words, if students decide not to commit examination malpractice, there will be none. On the other hand, if it is possible to prevent the student from carrying out examination malpractice, it will not happen.

The result also shows that peer group influence is strong and so are the parents. What is interesting and possibly worth exploring is why external examination officials were ranked 6th having a stronger link than the Community in which the School is situated. Even the mercenaries thrive only because there are customers (students) who patronize them. Looking at the school as a link, the result also reveals that it has stronger link than that of the mercenaries and relations. The Principal (as an individual and with teachers) and the teacher(s) (as an individual and a group) were ranked 3rd and 5th showing that when they aid and abet examination malpractice, they do so mostly on individual basis. This study reveals that the whole staff acts together as shown by item three ranked 3rd by the respondents. The school principal and the teachers together reveal that the teachers aid examination malpractice with the knowledge of their Principal when they act as individual or in group.

Findings

The findings of this study have therefore isolated three strong links to examination malpractice; namely the examination candidates, peer group and the Principals (as individuals and with teachers). Examination candidates succumb to temptation either from themselves or from other sources. On the part of the peer groups, they can supply information to each other on leaked question papers, source for mercenaries to assist them, and supply the amount to pay in cash or sometimes in kind. The group members can also allay each others' fears of being caught and/or assist each other inside the examination hall. The Principals either (as individuals or with teachers) willingly or unwillingly through teacher-student's relationship offers to render such assistance during examination.

Onyechere (2004) is of the opinion that too much emphasis on certificates in Nigeria is one of the factors responsible for examination malpractice. Lack of confidence to pass examinations due to ill preparedness has also been advanced as a student factor. The examination candidates do not care about the acquisition of knowledge if they can get the certificate that qualifies them to gain admission into the higher institutions. Some do not attend lectures/lessons regularly: They roam about on the campus/streets, travel at will and engage in clandestine activities. These are to be the habits they have cultivated from primary school levels.

The influence of the peer group has not been given the needed attention in the literature, probably because it is a hidden affair among students. However, it is well known to teachers that some students share information that can lead to examination malpractice and also assist each other to cheat. Some other candidates possess written solution and transferred them to other students during the examination. Sometimes, some of them jointly contribute money to buy the question papers which may turn out to be fake and thereby wasting their time in studying such fake questions.

As for the Principals (Individuals and with teachers), it was found that other possible factors which make them a strong agent apart from the teacher-student relationships is that they may want to use the opportunity to speak well of themselves and their schools by the success rate or as an attestation that they are passionate about the students' success.

Conclusion

One of the major conclusions of this study is that, the examination candidates are most tempted by peer group influence. This paper also concluded that counselling is a powerful tool for behaviour

change. Government is admonished to employ more education guardians and counsellors in school and create enabling environment for them to function properly. It is also our conclusion that if an examination candidate lacks confidence to face an examination, he/she might throw decency overboard. Proper counselling will prepare candidates for the examination and instil confidence in them.

Recommendations

Based on the findings this paper strongly recommends that the students should be given the confidence to face examination and thus break their dependence on examination malpractice. This can be achieved if prompt and adequate attention is given to educational system especially at the lower levels. The paper also recommends the following:

- i. Parents should try and send their children/wards to good schools where they will be able to have good learning
- ii. Government must intensify the monitoring and supervision of schools as part of their social responsibility to the people.
- iii. Government schools must be adequately funded and supervised to stem the tide of decay.
- iv. An apparently simple but significant problem that must be solved is the problem associating with seats' arrangement in the examination halls. 'One chair and one desk' policy is the ideal with a maximum of 35 students in a class/examination hall.
- v. More and qualified teachers have to be employed. The shortage is artificial because there are many trained and qualified teachers in the country who are unemployed.
- vi. More Classrooms have to be built for the schools so as to have enough space.
- vii. Communities and religious bodies should be encouraged to establish more schools and allowed to manage the schools.
- viii. Teaching materials must take governments' priority and more teachers should be trained and re-trained.
- ix. Moral/religious counselling should be used as a strategy to reduce involvement of students and staff in examination malpractice. Such counselling could be given during orientation programmes for new students and staff during registration, during teachers and workshops and seminars.
- x. Apart from making provision for adequate halls and seats for examinations, adequate number of invigilators should be assigned to examination rooms (the policy of a supervising invigilator and at least one invigilator to every 40 students should be adhered to).
- xi. All activities relating to examinations such as question paper production, invigilation, marking and result collation as well as computation should be handled with a high sense of responsibility by those concerned
- xii. Concerted efforts should be made to properly acquaint staff and students with regulations governing examination conduct. Towards this end, workshops and orientation programmes should be carried out periodically to acquaint staff with their duties as examiners and invigilators and students of their expected preparation for, and conduct at examinations.
- xiii. Less emphasis should be placed on paper qualification by employers of labour.
- xiv. The Examination Malpractices Act of 1999 should be implemented to the letter to serve as a deterrent to others.

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