ISSUES AND INSIGHTS INTO NIGERIAN EDUCATION IN THE 21ST CENTURY: EXAMINATION MALPRACTICES - CAUSES, CONSEQUENCES AND REMEDIES

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Abstract

The "Nigerian educational system has been completely bedeviled by the virus of examination malpractice. This virus cuts across the three tiers of the nation's education system - primary, secondary and tertiary levels with devastating consequences. In pre-independence era, the incidence of examination malpractice was rare, and its rate - minimal, irregular and limited in scope. Today, examination malpractice assumes such a dangerous dimension that it has not only occupied the centre stage of our public discourse but has also become a national malady. It has done an incalculable damage to the nation's economy, and in no small measure, hampered capacity utilization process. Efforts have been made by both the Federal and State Governments to eliminate the hydra-headed monster from the nation's educational system. But it continues to rear its ugly head with greater intensity, Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to define its true meaning, trace its origin, causes and consequences on the society and suggest concrete remedies to eradicate it.

Introduction

One of the cardinal objectives of formal education is to prepare individuals for challenges in the society by developing them to fit into manpower requirements in the diverse sectors (Igbe, 2004:1). It is expected that the level of education one has acquired should give the individual the right to occupy certain positions in the society. This is because, by the level of education one has attained, it is assumed that he has acquired the necessary skills and competence needed to occupy such a position. Thus, all things being equal, on the presentation of an appropriate educational certificate; one should be given the required job or position without struggle. The major established means through which a student is adjudged qualified to be awarded an educational certificate is through the avenue of examination assessment.

Regrettably however, this simple but acceptable standard no longer obtains in the nation's education system. One of the social vices, examination malpractice, has crept in and eroded standard norm by which an individual is certified competent to perform a given task. During the colonial era, as observed by Onyechere (1996), the rate of examination malpractice was minute, irregular and limited to spying/giraffing, secret passing of papers between candidates or merely whispering answers to neighbouring candidates. Cases of connivance, aiding and abetting by invigilators, supervisors or staff of examination bodies were completely absent. However, Ahmed (1996) noted that cheating in an examination became more pervasive and assumed more serious dimensions from the 1970s and 1980s. Today in Nigeria, examination malpractice has not only become a national malady, it has also occupied the centre stage in our public discourse in recent years. Onyechere (2004) has regretfully observed that examination malpractice:

- Goes beyond fraud in admissions, training and test evaluations in educational system. It also includes fraud in the assessment and evaluation for employment and promotions, in tenders, licenses and permits in commerce and industry, and in elections and politics. Examination malpractices extend to the registration, supervision and regulation of professionals in the healthcare, engineering, judiciary, finance and other sectors (p. 8).

- It is perpetrated at all levels of the nation's education system including primary, post-primary and tertiary institutions. At the primary level, forms of malpractice manifest in teaching, continuous assessment exercises, aiding and abetting in entrance examinations halls, leakages of question papers before the date of examinations, assault and intimidation of supervisors, collusion and mass cheating: malpractice involving practical as well as teaching continuous assessment and mass promotion malpractices. For tertiary institutions, malpractice include sale of admission to unqualified candidates, teaching malpractice; sale of handouts, grade and honourary degrees, satellite campuses and accreditation malpractice, assaults and intimidation of lecturers and irregular activities in examination hails.
Meaning of Examination Malpractice

The term 'examination malpractice' is derived from three Latin words - 'examintio' 'practicir and 'mains'. The New International Webster's Comprehensive Dictionary of the English Language defines 'examinath' (p. 442) as the act or process of carefully testing, investing, inspecting and scrutinizing knowledge, skill, progress, qualifications, etc. The same source (p. 990) explains 'practices' as an established custom or usage; doing, performance, accomplishing or an act or process of executing. The prefix 'mal' (p. 769) as in mal! - practice denotes bad; ill, evil, wrong, imperfect, uneven and negation. Therefore, the term 'examination malpractice' means all the evils, ills, imperfections perpetrated before, during and after the examination.

There are many definitions proffered by different scholars explaining the concept of examination malpractice. Some look at it as copying directly from books and chalkboards. Others view it as copying from their fellow mates. Still some perceive it from the perspective of discussing examination questions in the examination hall, while examination is in progress. The University of Port Harcourt has, in their academic policy, defined examination malpractice as all forms of cheating which directly or indirectly falsify the ability of the student. These include cheating within an examination hall and any involvement in all illegal examination related offences: (www.Uniport.Edu.ififi) Onotume (1996) and Onyechere (1996), look at examination malpractice as an irregularity or any negative thing that transpires before, during and after the examination. In a similar way, Onyechere (1996) sees examination whether private or public, as anything that has rules and regulations guiding it. Any act of omission or commission outside these rules, undermines the validity and reliability of test and the integrity of certificates issued. This is more so when these irregularities are premeditated and perpetrated by candidates/students and/or their agents with the intention of gaining undue advantage, constitutes examination malpractice. Igwe (1990) agrees with his viewpoint when he opines thus, "Examination malpractice is any act intended to benefit or give undue advantage to one's self or another by deceit or fraud, before or during an examination". In as much as there is no single accepted definition of the term 'examination malpractice' or that the term cannot lend itself to any single definition, suffice it to say that examination malpractice, in summary, can be said to be, according to Ashiko (2004) "any measure engaged in which seeks to sabotage the ideal of correctly gauging the competence of a candidate in any given branch of knowledge" (p. 1). Imperfect as the examination system may be said to be, it is still generally considered as one of the best ways of assessing what people know in any given discipline. Where a device is produced that seeks to distort in any way this process of assessment, a malpractice is said to have been committed in the examination procedure. The end result of an examination malpractice generally is that the candidate shows a performance level, which is much higher that what should truly obtain thereby grossly falsifying the actual standing of the candidate. The consequences of such distorted assessments are obviously grave for society.

A Brief Historical Background of Examination Malpractice in Nigeria

The first recorded history of examination malpractice in the world was done by our first parents - Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden when the duo refused to follow the rules and regulations set by God Himself (Gen. 3:1-7), it was the first attempt by mankind to set standards for himself and to disregard the laid - down procedure - a failed test. The prevalence of examination malpractice is not limited to the Nigerian society alone but extends to other societies. Brick Man (1983), observed that in Ancient China death penalty was imposed on both examiners and others caught cheating as a final deterrent (Ker, B. O., p. 1).

In Nigeria, examination malpractice as observed by Ahmed in Onyechere (1996), dates back to pre-independence era but points out that the rate was minute, irregular and limited to spying/giraffing, secret passing of papers between candidates or merely whispering answers to neighbouring candidates and in some cases prepared answer notes to popular questions were smuggled in by bold candidates. There were no recorded cases of connivance, aiding and abetting by invigilators, supervisors or staff of examination bodies. However, Ahmed (1996) noted that cheating in an examination became more pervasive and assumed more serious dimensions from the 1970s and 1980s. It has been suggested that this practice can be traced to the period immediately after the end of the civil war in this country, ostensibly by soldiers disengaged from military services and who were in dire need of paper qualifications to enable them gain employment opportunities in the civil service. The first official recorded case of examination malpractice was the leakage of Cambridge School Certificate Examination in 1914, (Onyechere, 1996). This observation was confirmed by the country's serious outcry of the recurrent problems of examination malpractice from the West African Examinations Council.
(W.A.E.C.) over the leakage of its question papers for West African Examination Certificate in 1977. This public lamentation spurred the setting up of a tribunal by the Federal Government to investigate the massive leakage and suggest possible measures to curtail further occurrence. The Federal Government in addition to this, promulgated degree 20 to impose punishment on those caught in this act. Since then, this virus has completely invaded the educational system, causing irreparable and untold damage to the system. Cheating in examination especially the WAEC, NECO and JAMB examinations, have become internalized and legitimized by most secondary schools administration, such that students are even compelled to pay certain amounts of money as examination aid. Tertiary institutions are not left out in this menace. In higher institutions, examination malpractice takes various forms such as awarding underserved scores to female candidates to pass entrance examination into JSS1, awarding fictitious marks in the continuous assessment exercise, etc. Students now look at these arrangements as a normal way of passing examinations.

Forms and Methods of Examination Malpractice

Examination malpractice has many forms as the perpetrators adopt various methods to succeed in their nefarious activities. Onyechere (1996), outline thirty-three types of examination malpractice but these can be categorized (Kalgo, 2001:43) as thus: (i) Malpractice before the examination. (ii) Malpractice during the examination. (iii) Malpractice after the examination.

(i) Malpractice Before the Examination

These are acts of malpractice, which occur prior to the examination proper, and may consist of the candidate procuring the question paper before the examination, or in any other obtaining knowledge of its content. This is the practice known generally within student circles as "EXPO". A very common form of malpractice in the 70s and early 80s. It is currently on the decrease especially in nationally organized examinations in favour of more advanced forms.

(ii) Malpractice During the Examination

This is malpractice carried out during the examination. This form of malpractice is very much in vogue today, both in public examinations such as those conducted by WAEC, JAMB and NECO and in internal examination of secondary schools and tertiary institutions. These malpractice manifest themselves in the following forms:

a) Impersonation, otherwise known as "Mercenary", This can take any of the three forms (a) writing examination for a candidate; (b) exchange of examination numbers or names on answer scripts/sheet; (c) international use of someone one's examination number.

b) Taking into the examination hall of unauthorized relevant materials. This practice is referred to as "Bullet".

c) Coping or writing relevant things on parts of the body, or hiding the materials in 'private' parts, handkerchief, underwear, shoes, lap, foot, sole, slippers, etc.

d) Consulting materials outside the hall.

e) Obtaining external assistance, in form of what is referred to as "Missiles".

f) Communicating through exchange of answer booklets, or question papers on which answers have been written.

g) Collaborated coping where two or more persons work together and aid one another, often referred to as "ECOWAS". h) Uncollaborated coping otherwise known as "giraffing" or "spying".

i) Teachers giving clues to questions in the chalkboard or dictating answers to objective questions constitute malpractice during examination.

(iii) Malpractice After the Examination

This type of malpractice takes place after the examinations. It is generally claimed by those who engage in it to be the safest and the surest as it is enacted with the co-operation of either the supervisors, examiners, course lecturers, examination officers, computer officers, custodian of answer sheets typists, etc. This type of malpractice may manifest itself in the form of rewriting the paper after the examination, changing scores or through arbitrary award of scores. The malpractice is hatched and abetted with many individuals and institutions involved. Those are parents, principals, teachers,
Remote and Immediate Causes of Examination Malpractice in Nigeria

1) One of the remote causes of examination malpractice in Nigeria is over dependence on academic Certificates as a measure of one's ability, competence, skill and knowledge. This has led to a mad rush for Certificates by most people (Sofola, 2004).

2) General decadence in the society with low moral values and no fear of God is another remote cause of examination malpractice. The Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB), agreed with this view-point when it noted that "the tempestuous manner in which some of our youths ferociously commit examination irregular/malpractice" (JAMB, 2004). Thus, people perpetrate examination malpractice without feeling any prick on society consciences that they are doing anything wrong. The decadence in the society has given rise to high level of corruption that has cut across social strata in Nigeria.

3) Laziness on the part of students: In recent times, students no longer deem it necessary to read, therefore, they are it-prepared to face the rigours of examinations. The reason for this laziness on the part of the students, according to Thomas Demy of the West African Examination Council (WAEC) is that "the youths have prioritized entertainment and pleasure at the expense of their books" (Myspece fin.com., 2004).

Immediate causes, according to Anyin (1998) include the following:

1. Lack of necessary facilities for teaching/learning process.
2. Non-coverage of the prescribed syllabuses due to their extensiveness.
3. Frequent strike or industrial action by the teachers.
4. Mass promotion of students, in internal examinations.
5. Misconception of good performance by some principals and the society as a means of enhancing the status or social rating of the principals and their schools.
6. Faculty or lack of proper administration of examinations.
7. Imposition of school subjects on candidates by parents, and etc.
8. Poverty on the part of teachers who constitute the bulk of invigilators and examiners.
9. Constant increases in examination fees.

Consequences of Examination Malpractice

The hydra headed monster, examination malpractice has so many damaging effects on the students and the entire society in one-way or the other (Fiber Sima, 2001:71). According to him, some of the consequences are as follows:

1) **Cracks the Wall of the Society:** The fundamental base upon which the society is built is education. Therefore, any weak foundation leads first to a crack on the wall of the society and then eventually collapse of the society.

2) **Half-Baked Graduates:** Examination malpractice produces half-baked graduates from institutions of learning. Such graduates cannot defend their result in institutions of higher learning and practical work environment.

3) **Discourages Hard Work:** Examination malpractice discourages the hard work and honest students, especially when they discover that those who they are academically better than are performing better than them in all examination through cheating.

4) **Makes Non-Sense of Educational Qualification:** The validity, reliability and credibility of educational certificates gotten through examination malpractice are put to question. It is no secret that certificates acquired in Nigeria from the mid eighties are not recognized in some international institutions.
5) Increase in the cost of conducting examination as a result of the over increasing incidence of examination malpractice: The cost of conducting public examinations like WAEC, NECO and JAMB, etc. have increased tremendously because of the devices employed by these examination bodies in a bid to curb malpractice.

6) **Encourages Other social Vices:** Examination malpractice encourages other social vices like armed robbery and cultism in our society. Those caught and expelled through examination malpractice have turned out to become a problem.

7) **Hampers the Educational Growth of the Child:** Examination malpractice hampers the educational growth of the child. This is observed in situations where the results of a whole examination centre have to be cancelled due to examination malpractice. The effect of this on the candidate, especially the innocent ones, is that it hampers their chances of proceeding to the higher institutions or writing other professional examinations. Some students, when caught can be rusticated for many years or expelled our rightly. All these forms of punishment inhibit the educational growth of the child.

8) There is a positive correlation between examination malpractice and the falling standard of education. According to Onyechere "Until we are able to stop examination malpractice, the standard of education will continue to fall" (Vanguard, 2004).

9) Inability to get a competitive and challenging job. Some jobs require a test of practical proficiency and skills. A student who got his qualification by cheating his way through cannot stand such jobs.

10) There is a positive correlation between examination malpractice and corruption in high places. According to Onyechere (2004; 10), "(he massive breakdown of ethical standards and tire pervasive culture of fraud and corruption have their roots in examination malpractice".

11) The culture of examination malpractice embedded in a school gives it a very bad image (Orhuiigur, 2003). The institution also suffers sanction by the Government and well meaning members of (he society. The candidate/student is stigmatized by members of the society.

12) There is no pride of achievement after one has made his papers through examination malpractice. Instead, there is the nagging feeling of guilt that he/she is holding something he does not merit.

**Remedies**

The priority of every nation state is to have a stable and verifiable society founded on democratic principles and a sound educational system for efficient and effective human resources development.

A malfunctioning of educational system affects the entire development of the society, especially in the training and retraining of human resources for the society's productive institution. According to Tyav. T. T. and Tyav. M. N. (2004), to forestall occurrence of examination malpractice in the nation's educational institutions, the following approaches may be considered:

1. **The Role of the Government**

   In order to stem the tide of examination malpractice in schools, government is expected to play the under-listed roles:

   (i) To empower all educational institutions at the Federal, State and Local Government levels, with logistics needed for effective monitoring and supervision of school.

   (ii) Government should consider it as a priority issue to grant operational approval only to schools with basic facilities like classrooms, examination halls, qualified teachers, etc.

   (iii) Examination centres should be granted to only schools that have requisite for teaching facilities such as well-equipped science laboratories, libraries and examination halls.

   (iv) Government should improve on the working conditions of staff (both academic and non-academic) in schools as motivation measures.

   (v) Open up operational units of guidance and counseling in all schools to counsel students in the area of difficulty.

   (vi) Stricter laws and measures to be taken against offenders of examination malpractice.

   (vii) Examination bodies and custodians should sensitive its entire staff and associates involved in examination administration and its leakages.

   (viii) Government should formulate an educational policy, stopping the arbitrary migration of
student from either side of rural and urban schools.

(ix) A curricula review of subjects/courses in schools be done to suit moral conduct and disciplinary orientation of the psyche of the student against those social ills (examination ills and oilier similar vices).

2. **The Hole of the Community**

All communities within which schools are sited have varying responsibilities and roles to play in lighting examination malpractice.

(i) Through self-help efforts, community organizations should educate their members on eliminating examination malpractice and why they must not encourage it.

(ii) Community effort should be geared towards the provision of infrastructural facilities such as examination halls, libraries, laboratory, classrooms, etc in their schools,

(iii) Through self-help effort community members can embark on the construction of access roads to make their schools accessible to supervisors of the examination bodies.

(iv) Community in conjunction with school authorities within their domains can fight examination mercenaries and other related syndicates hired by students/candidates to write examination for them,

(v) Some communities fund examination malpractice through individual contributions. Such communities are hereby advised to desist from this act considering its effect on the society.

3. **The Role of the Parent Teachers Association (PTA)**

The role of the PTA in curbing examination malpractice in school include:

(i) The PTA in collaboration with the government can improve on the quality of teaching by recruiting staff/teachers in their school lo enhance educational standards.

(ii) PTA should enforce stricter measures against academic indiscipline of any kind from both student and staff in (he schools in other to instill fear and discipline in them.

(iii) A standing action committee against examination malpractice can be constituted by the PTA to tight this menace in schools,

(iv) In order to check the arbitrary movement of students including their admission from one school to another, especially in the graduating classes PTA in the light of the above should ensure that student population does not exceed the stipulated number as stated by the school rules and regulation or by the ministry of education.

(v) Students study habit can be improved upon through proper supervision and constant check of student by the PTA.

(vi) Funding examination malpractice especially through parent-teacher relationship should be stopped and discouraged.

(vii) PTA should assist in restricting candidates with tapes and handsets telephones into the examination hall.

Above all, there is a general need for orientation in the value system of the general. Nigerian public towards applauding the truth, hard work, honest achievements and competence. Emphasis should be on competence and hard work efficiency far and above paper qualification and certification and certificates. In addition, improving the welfare of teacher should be the priority of the government. This will facilitate commitment to work and eliminate fraud on the part of the teachers.

**Conclusion**

A careful study of the nature of examination malpractice as done above shows that is antisocial phenomenon, which works directly against the very fabric of society. Paradoxically however, this anti-social phenomenon has been generated in response to faulty society expectations. Our society has placed such high premium on academic certificates, wealth and social position that how these attainment are arrived at is hardly questioned, thereby making it possible for people to disregard the means as they pursue the ends. A proper social orientation will enable us to weight the attainments against the means employed (Ashiko, J.B., 2003). We need orientation on: wealth, education and social position. There is no way a society with such a distorted outlook on education, where certificate is seen as an end in itself no matter how acquired, can make any meaningful progress.

**References**


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