

EXAMINATION MALPRACTICE: A COG IN THE WHEEL OF THE NIGERIAN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

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Abstract

One of the major problems facing all levels of our educational institutions in Nigeria is examination malpractice. It is a source of worry to all the stakeholders in educational sector as it undermines the very purpose of education. This enigma has serious consequences on the nation. This paper takes a critical look at the conceptual framework, causes, effects, forms and perpetrators of examination malpractice. Finally some recommendations, including leaching of examination ethics in our schools, training teachers to teach well, de-emphasizing paper qualification, stringent punitive measures on the perpetrators, among others, are made. If these recommendations are implemented, it is hoped that the menace will be curbed and the Nigerian educational system will be enhanced, as it will then be to a desirable end.

Introduction

Although examination is opined by many not to be true test of knowledge, there is yet to be a better means of assessing knowledge and competence. According to Liman in Onyechere (1996:22). Examination is an instrument for testing, assessment, evaluation and accreditation. It is used for the purpose of selection, placement, certification and promotion. Thus, in schools, factories and industries and in every human endeavour, examination is a potent instrument for judgment of knowledge or competence. For any examination to be credible, it must possess key elements, which are validity and reliability. These key elements can only be present if the examination is free and fair, devoid of partiality, cheating and all sorts of malpractice.

Examination, therefore, must be rid of (his hydra-headed monster called examination malpractice in order to achieve the aim of education which is, of course, a desirable end.

Examination malpractice on the other hand is, in the view of Afigbo (1977:12), any action done or omitted—which makes it impossible to use an examination in determining the level of competency of a candidate in absorbing, reproducing and where appropriate applying knowledge.

Similarly, Akpan (200:63), considered examination malpractice as any act omission or commission which contravenes stipulated rules and regulations to the extent of undermining the validity and reliability of tests and ultimately the integrity of the certificates issued.

From the foregoing, examination malpractice is quite inimical to the aim of education. Examination malpractice has been with us for a very long time. Despite all efforts to curb or eradicate it, it has continuously raised its ugly head and has persistently put a question mark on certificates acquired from Nigerian educational institutions.

Examination malpractice is contagious as those who are not involved in it think themselves misfits. Moreover, it has left no level of educational system as it cuts across primary, secondary, tertiary levels, including our universities. It is a global educational problem, which unfortunately is growing in variety and sophistication at an alarming rate in Nigeria far above any preventive measures that has so far been adopted by any examination body, at any point in time. On this Yaroson (2004:2) observes:

It is sad to note that, although examination malpractice in Nigeria has for a long time engaged the attention and evoked wide condemnation by well meaning Nigerians and concerned educators who felt highly disturbed about the colossal and unsavoury effects of the phenomenon on the continuing deplorable state and falling standard of education in the country, this hydro-headed problem instead of abating has like a malignant tumour, continued to fester.

It is true that enough concerns and efforts have been given to it by the various governments in

prescribing solutions, but because all stakeholders in the educational sector have contributed in one way or the other in promoting one form of malpractice or the other at different times and at different levels. the monster heightens in the society.

It is a common experience that the manner in which examinations are handled and submitted in our schools is a very sad situation for a nation that is estimated to have more than half of her population as illiterates. The issue of examination malpractice by implication appears to be: a syndicate affair.

In a situation where parents, teachers and students connive by way of ensuring examination success through dubious means, the much needed or desired educational goals is undermined, Some parents do everything possible to ensure that their children pass examination at all cost without the candidate having eh corresponding knowledge. Like Litman in Onyechere (1996:14), state parents also contribute largely to the malaise. -Some pay for live papers, hire people to sit for exams on behalf of their wards and pay for falsification of credentials...

No wonder then that most certificates acquired from some higher institutions of learning in Nigeria are questioned when taken out of the boundaries of this country. It is a known fact that qualitative education is a sine-qua-non for nation building. The reverse will be the case if most of the so-called educated elites cannot defend successfully the certificates they have dubiously acquired.

Dimensions of Examination Malpractice

Prior to the 1970s Nigerian students were regarded as novices in examination malpractice nationwide, but the prevalence of the malpractice in recent years seems to have spread like wildfire that has engulfed the entire educational system at all levels. To this end, Ivowi (1996: 47), remarked that, "the major examination malpractice in Nigeria was in 1977, when it attracted the wrath of the Federal Government into setting up a tribunal to unravel the circumstances that caused the leakage.

Maduemezia (1998:2), equally observed, that: examination malpractice previously existed at a low ebb at rudimentary levels, but it became more pervasive from 1970 with the involvement of persons other than the candidates. The above two immediate citations show a brief history of the emergence of examination malpractice in our institutions of learning which was hitherto unpronounced.

Causes of Examination Malpractice

It is axiomatic that nothing goes for nothing. And that means if examination malpractice has come to stay with us in the Nigerian education, sector, there must be causes. We shall therefore, take a cursory look at some causes of examination malpractice in our institutions of learning in Nigeria.

Briefly outlined, some causes of examination malpractice are shown below:

- i. Emphasis on paper qualification rather than ability and capability of the graduates.
- ii. Changing societal values in terms of aiding and abetting corruption.
- iii. Inadequate infrastructure such as classroom, laboratory, workshops, equipment and instruction materials.
- iv. Students' population explosion in our schools,
- v. Inefficiency of some teachers,
- vi. Non-studios attitude of modern students,
- vii. Financial gain accruing to examination malpractioners.
- viii. Inadequate teachers in the various subject areas.
- ix. Parental/guardian influence on their wards to pursue courses they have no mental capabilities for.
- x. Admission policies based on quota system,
- xi. Lack of confidence on the part of the students in relation to examinations.

The above factor, to mention a few, are some of the major causes of examination malpractice in Nigeria.

Forms of Examination Malpractice

Examination malpractice as a cankerworm has eaten deep into the fabric of the Nigerian educational system for the primary to the tertiary levels. The dimension this has assumed now is alarming. Salami (2004:20), aptly viewed:

The situation in the higher institution is worst, as there are some students who are deviants and perpetually truant and hardly prepare for exams yet they pass through due to one form of malpractice or the other. Female as well as male students compete in the dastardly act using "using they have to get what they want". In as much as the female students have been identified as wooing seductive tactics on the lecturers to gain access to questions before the examination day, the male students have used their cult affiliations to intimidate lecturers.

As evil as the act of examination malpractice has proved to be different ways are devised by examination syndicates with a view to passing examinations by all means. Some forms of examination malpractice in our institutions of learning are mentioned below;

- i. Bringing in foreign materials such as text books, cheat notes, handkerchiefs, calculators, waste ships, currency notes, weapons, mathematics sets, handsets, rubber rings, etc.
- ii. Collusion among students such as exchange of answer scripts, dictating answers to students and supervisors pretending to be sleeping to room for cheat,
- iii. Supervisors shading objectives answers for students.
- iv. Some principal diverting the attention of supervisors via lavishing entertainment to facilitate cover up of massive cheating by the students.
- v. Tattooing: here, information is written in different parts of the body, chair, desk or any object in the examination hall.
- vi. Impersonation: brilliant students writing exams for other students on agreed price,
- vii. Questions-paper-leakages, this may sometimes involve the course lecturers, staff members, examination authority, printers, proofreaders or messengers or moderators.
- viii. Intimidation: examination officials including supervisors and markers of examination papers are physically threatened where they fail to assist the students.
- ix. irregular activities inside and outside the examination hall such as score inflation by members of staff, copying or giraffing, snatching of question papers, "handling chargers" by principals, smuggling in of readymade answers, students dialoguing with staff, comfort funds, etc.

The forms of examination malpractice are too numerous and so remain inexhaustible.

Effects of Examination Malpractice

Examination malpractice has grace effects on individuals, schools, society and the country as a whole. The fraud attracts penalties ranging from cancellation of results, suspension, termination of appointment to stringent jail terms.

The malpractice also has specific effects on the parents, government and society. On the part of parents, materials resources, time, energy and money are wasted on the students who are caught and expelled. On the part of government, where the government awards scholarship to students, becomes a waste. Also viewed as affects of examination malpractice include the following:

- i. Students' loss of integrity.
- ii. Certificates issued lacking credibility.
- iii. Aims of education are defeated as education is to no desirable end.
- iv. It stagnates national development, given the importance of education to national development.

With the already fallen standard of education, the Nigerian society is the ultimate loser no society can really development without quality manpower via qualitative education.

Perpetrators of Examination Malpractice

It is pertinent to state that examination malpractice exists in the primary, secondary and tertiary institutions and universities.

The key perpetrators in this game of examination malpractice, according to Akpan (1995:12), include students, parents, guardians, teachers, supervisors, bank custodians, officials of examination bodies, students of tertiary institution who serve as surrogate students, principals, tertiary institutions students, lecturers, non-academic staff who duplicate examination questions, invigilators, printers, touts, contracts, security agents, etc. the perpetrators are multifarious in nature.

Towards Eradicating Examination Malpractice

Having examined the conceptual framework, causes, effects, perpetrators and forms of examination malpractice, the natural question to ask is. what is the way out? Based on this question, some recommendations that could help in eradicating or curbing of this act are made below:

- i. Examination ethics should be mounted and taught as a course or subject from primary to tertiary levels.
- ii. The teachers should be trained to teach well. The teaching profession has been denigrated that many good teachers have left the profession. Teachers should be given enough incentives.
- iii. Staff members found guilty of this offence should be made to serve the prescribed punishment without minding who is involved.
- iv. Students involved in examination malpractice should be well investigated and subsequently expelled or punished appropriately,
- v. Employers of labour should de-emphasize paper qualification and emphasize ability and competence.
- vi. Parents found collaborating with the students or teachers to cheat should be punished appropriately as they are not worthy citizens of their father land.

If these recommendations are implemented, the students turned out from our institutions will be able to defend their certificates wherever they find themselves will be good ambassadors of their schools in particular and the country at large.

Conclusion

To achieve the national aims and objectives in the Nigerian educational system, concerted efforts are required on the part of all stakeholders in education; and this will deal a deadly blow to this hydra-headed monster called examination malpractice.

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