
Information and Communication Technology and Examination Malpractice in Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper highlights a major threat to quality education in Nigeria; examination malpractice that has bedeviled all levels of education for decades. It examined the concept, causes forms of examination malpractice and the various applications of Information and communication Technology (ICT) in facilitating examination malpractices. The paper calls for among others, that the use of electronic signaling devices in the examination halls should be banned, while electronic signal detectors are installed in examination halls in various schools and institutions of higher learning.

Formal school system in Nigeria is plagued with many problems of which examination malpractice is one. The problem of examination malpractice has been a continual dilemma and cuts across the whole educational system from primary to tertiary level (Oluyeba and Daramola, 1993). Fuandai (2006), Kelley and Bonner (2005),

Oluyeba and Daramola (1993) viewed examination malpractice as a “Chronic problem” that affects all levels of education and involves significant number of students.

Although examination malpractice is a global phenomenon, it appears to have assumed a dangerous proportion in Nigeria. The problem of examination malpractice in Nigeria is as old as the introduction of western education into the nation (Agbatogun, 2007). Ike (2006) observed that examination malpractice has the tendency of ruining the educational system as well as impairing the efficacy of the labour force. According to Ivowi (1996), the first major occurrence of examination malpractice in Nigeria in 1977 led to the setting up of a tribunal by the Federal Government to unravel the

circumstances that caused the mass leakages of question papers in the school certificate examination (WASCE). The Federal Government promulgated Decree 27 of 1973, and the miscellaneous offences decree 20 of 1984. The latter prescribed 21 years jail term for convicted offenders of the crime. Despite these measures aimed at curbing the “monster”, the cheating is still prevalent in most schools and institutions. The number of students reported to have been involved in examination malpractice by the Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB). West African Examination Council (WAEC), National Examination Council (NECO), primary and tertiary institutions such as Universities, Polytechnics and Colleges of Education is quite high. This has resulted in increased withholding and cancellation of results. Adesemowo (2005) reported that prospective university students who attempted (JAMB) examination between 1978 and 2005 were caught in various forms of examination malpractices which led to cancellation of results. Akpoo and Akpoo (2006) and Awanbor (2003) opined that examination malpractice should be viewed by all stakeholders in the educational business as a monster that is beyond ordinary human perception and a devastating evil which places stigma on the education system. The advent of information and communication technology (ICT in Nigeria has added new forms of examination malpractice. The focus of the aer therefore is to highlight the various ways ICT devices have been utilized by students to perpetrate examination malpractice, and identify ways of employing ICT devices to minimize or eradicate examination malpractice in Nigeria.

The Concept of Examination Malpractice

Examination malpractice involves a deliberate act of wrong doing, contrary to official examination rules, and is designed to place a candidate at an unfair advantage or disadvantage (The World Bank Group. 2001). The WAEC (2004) defines examination malpractice as “any irregular behaviour exhibited by a candidate or anybody charged with the conduct of examination in and outside the examination hall, before, during or after such examination. Obasanjo (2006) and Oftuwon (2007) defined it as corrupt practice. Onyilo (2004) pointed out that some parents who spend huge amount of money to give their wards some advantage over their peers through dishonest practices are sowing the seed of corruption in the minds of these youths.

Alliyu, N. and Oyafunke, C. (2003) further expressed examination malpractices as wrong doings carried out deliberately contrary to official examination rules, and is designed to place a candidate at an unfair advantage or disadvantage.

Generally speaking, examination malpractice is a demonstration of irregular behavior by candidates or agents charged with the conduct of examination within or outside the examination hail prior to the commencement, or during or after the test or examination with the intention of gaining undue advantage in such test or examination.

Forms of Examination Malpractice

A wide range of behaviours are considered as acts of examination malpractice. These include:

Examination paper leakage: The content or any part of examination is disclosed prior to the examination due to improper handling of examination questions during production processes by the examiner, staff, printers, proof readers, messengers, personnel employed to develop the papers, heads of departments and school administration.

Impersonation: A brilliant student who is not registered for the examination, writing for the registered candidate on an agreed price basis.

Mass cheating: Resulting from poor invigilation and supervision facilitated by gratification such as presentation of gifts to supervisors.

Copying: This involves reproduction of another candidates work with or without permission as a result of inadequate sitting arrangement.

Bringing in foreign materials such as cheat-notes, textbooks, programmed calculators, wrist slips, micro-chips, dangerous weapons such as loaded guns, knives and others.

Collusion among candidates such as exchange of answer scripts, dictating answer to candidates and supervisors pretending to be sleeping to give candidates room to cheat; supervisors or invigilators shading objective answer sheets for candidates; some principals distracting or diverting the attention of supervisors through lavishing entertainments to facilitate cover up of massive cheating by the candidates.

Other forms of examination malpractice include abuses, insults and physical assault on invigilators, supervisors and inspectors; forging of continuous assessment scores for external candidates; passing of coded information from one student to another; use of assistants to drop question papers at designated points for a mercenary, who in turn picks the question papers, solves them and returns them to the beneficiaries in the examination hall. This list is by no means exhaustive of the acts of examination malpractice in Nigeria.

Many factors have been identified as possible causes of examination malpractice. These include: high stakes for examinations, inadequacies in the teacher and the school system, inadequate school facilities, inadequacies in the public examinations, quota system, location of examination centres and low salary level of examination officials (Chukwuemeka, 1982; World Bank Education, 2001; Adesemowo, 2005). Underwood (2006), and Aiyu and Aluede (2006) identified other related factors

to examination malpractice as size of the institution, educational environment, relevance of subject, examination official, lax attitude, social milieu, student ability, diminishing sense of academic integrity, lack of self-control and tutor & lack of commitment. Olujuwon (2005) observed that examination malpractice is a product of existing social ills emanating from inadequate teaching and learning facilities, inadequate qualified teachers and parental contributions.

Application of ICT in Examination Malpractice

Massive application of ICT in Nigeria has added new dimensions to the forms of examination malpractice. Baker (2006) and Nnachi (2006) reported that the rapid growth of digital technologies and their integration in education have given many students new tools to facilitate cheating at all levels. The following are some of the ICT devices used in perpetrating examination malpractice: Mobile phones, Electronic organizers, MP3 player, microscopic earphones, optical character recognition software, programmable calculator, palmtops and digital camera phones.

Mobile Phones

Increased use of mobile phones by students has enhanced examination malpractice in schools (Oksman, 2006) Students use electronic devices like mobile phones to send information silently through text messages or faxing to friends. Cases of this form of examination malpractice abound in our tertiary institutions. For instance, Akpoo and Akpoo (2006) reported that in 2004/2005 academic session, many students of university of Agriculture, Markudi were caught sending text messages of answers to friends during examination. Again, Yaqoob (2006) reported that students used mobile phones to solicit foreign in examination halls. Mobile phones enhance student & exchange of notes with colleagues in the hall and collection of information from colleagues outside the examination hall. Mobile phones used under this condition are put in silent and vibration modes.

Agbatogun (2007) reported that 15 students of Moshood Abiola polytechnic Abeokuta between 2004 and 2006 were arraigned before the students' disciplinary committee for committing this offence. Underwood (2006) reported that mobile phones have been found to be the preserved tool when students chose to engage in act of examination malpractice.

Electronic Organizers

The use of digital technology such as the electronic organizer for cheating in examination is common among secondary and tertiary institutions. Here, the students put their revision notes on the handheld organizers, smuggle them into examination halls, scroll through a wealth of the information sneaked in via this electronic device so as to gain undue advantage over their colleagues Agbatogun, (2007).

Olugblle (2007) observed that the Nigerian Examinations Committee, a unit of WAEC lamented that candidates have changed tactics from impersonation and seeking for question before examination to using technology devices like organizers to cheat.

MP₃ Player

This is another ICT device that students use in cheating in examination halls. They put a whole course lecture note on MP3 player, and smuggle it into the examination hall.

Microscopic Ear Phones

This is a microscopic wireless earphone network device that students insert into their ears. Since it is wireless, the student cheating may perpetrate the illegal act without being noticed.

Optical Character Recognition Software

The device is inexpensive and an easy to use software that works with a scanner. With this device, printed text can be quickly imputed into a processor for “doctoring”. Students copy detailed assignment easily with the help of the Optical Character Recognition Software. This digital device makes perfect copies of the assignment in such a manner that there exist no remarkable difference between the original copy and the duplicates.

Programmable Calculators

It is a data storage media that has infrared beaming capability. Students use this media in storing formulae, and text. It has been recorded that high volume of calculations can be recorded on it for illegal use during examination. Underwood (2006) reported that Algorithm programmes, graphs and drawings are stored and executed through this device. Agbatogun (2007) reported that Students’ Affairs Records of Olabasi Onabanjo University, Agolwoye, and Tai Solarin University of Education, Ijagun indicated that between 2005 and 2007, 12 students have been caught during examinations with calculators which contained stored information that would have given them undue advantage on their mates.

Palmtops/Digital Camera Phones

This is a handheld computer that can be carried by individuals without being noticed. Students use palmtops to perpetrate examination malpractice because with this device, they can receive and make calls, take digital photos and record sound. Again, students use palmtops and digital camera phones to photograph test in order to share with their colleagues who face the same test at later time of the day.

Utilization of ICT in Combating Examination Malpractice

Different approaches have been adopted to check examination malpractice in institutions of learning in Nigeria. At the national level, legislation has been put in place to curb the malady. Penalties range from cancellation of result to outright dismissal of culprits.

Onabanjo (2006) argued that all measures aimed at curbing examination malpractices in schools seem to have failed. However, technologically, it would be relatively possible to minimize examination malpractices in schools and institutions of higher learning if various hi-tech equipment are employed: These include the following:

Electronic Detectors

These are technological equipment that has the ability of detecting mobile technology devices as they are switched on or off and when in use. These detectors could be utilized to identity signals outside the hall. It can also indicate whether the mobile device is being operated within an examination hail.

Phones Signal Jammers

Phone-Jammers are devices which are designed to prevent radio equipment from receiving and transmitting the signal relevant to their functions. Meikie (2006) pointed out that it is technologically easy to disrupt mobile phones by making all attempts to block the electrical fields.

Faraday Cage

Underwood (2006) reported that faraday cage is a less expensive alternative to signal jamming. It is also called blanket cloaking of an examination hall. This device disrupts the mobile phones connections. The cage involves creating a metal to shield the examination hall/room, which blocks electromagnetic waves by mobile phones from traveling. By so doing, the unwanted signals are flittered out while allowing certain transmission proceeds as normal. The main function of the device is to prevent signal from getting through by causing “shadows” or radio wave blind spots.

Airport Style Security Scanner

This is a signal detector useful in preventing the use of mobile communication in examination hall. It allows for quick search, screening, and examination of students and what are on them before entering the examination halls.

Once suspicious items are shown on the monitor screen of the scanner, the student will be instructed to remove the items before entering the examination or test hail (centre for Medicare and Medicaid service, 2005).

Electronic Monitoring-Service (EMD)

Here, tele-electric monitoring device otherwise known as closed- circuit Television are installed in examination halls. This device can be very effective in curbing examination malpractice in institutions where there are large numbers of students and few invigilators or supervisors in the hall. Through the closed-circuit television, examination monitoring officers from the control room watch and monitor the examination halls effectively.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Examination malpractice has serious implication for student, the educational system, parents and the society. It is the duty of all stakeholders within and outside the educational sector to evolve means of curbing and totally eliminating it in our institutions. The government should provide adequate fund for schools and institutions to enable them successfully fight against examination malpractice. Electronic signaling devices should not be allowed within the school premises. Posters should be pasted at strategic places around the school compound campaigning against the use of electronic signal devices in the classroom and in examination halls. Students should be thoroughly screened and inspected before they are allowed into examination halls in order to checkmate the preplanned tricks that could give them undue advantage in the examination. Schools and institutions should endeavour to install within the examination halls electronic signal detectors and tele-electric monitoring system which allows supervisors to watch examination halls with ease. Electronic signaling device or dangerous weapons found on any student should be confiscated and should not be returned to the student until the student's parents or guardians provide written document of undertaking. If a student commits the same offence at another time, he should be subjected to suspension or expulsion.

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