



Examination Malpractice: The Bane of the 21st Century Nigerian Higher Institutions

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Abstract. Examination malpractice has been a serious threat to the survival of the Nigerian higher education. It poses a serious challenge to the 21st century Nigerian higher institutions. Examination Malpractices has been entrenched in our educational system that many higher institutions in Nigeria are ready to spend any amount of money to stamp it out. It however, appears to have defied any solution. This has resulted in many graduates of Nigerian higher institutions rated very low in terms of job performance and academic prowess, since many of them are regarded as product of large-scale examination malpractice with cheap certificates. The problem has placed the country in a precarious situation which is regrettable and needs immediate attention. The paper therefore examined examination malpractice as the bane of 21st century Nigeria higher institutions. The paper discussed the forms of examination malpractice, Causes and Effects of examination malpractice and ways of eliminating it in Nigerian higher institutions. The paper concluded that though examinations in Nigerian higher institutions have been denigrated, there will be no alternative to examinations in Nigerian higher institutions since it is the only route to certification of a student's character and learning. The following recommendations were made. There should be enough invigilators/ lecturers during examinations to avoid the current situation where some students start examination in their own hall much earlier than the other halls for the same course due to lack of enough invigilators. And examination must start on schedule in all the halls to avoid students running away with answer scripts to another hall or into the bush. There is need for the government to properly equip all Nigerian higher institutions to avoid congestion in examination halls as well as avoid situations where students share desks and question paper because they do not have enough. Adequate security should be provided for all examination material and invigilators

to avoid leakage either before or during examinations among others.

Keywords: Examination Malpractice, Forms, Causes, Effects, Ways of eliminating Examination Malpractice

1. Introduction

Education is a systematic process of imparting knowledge through improvement of skills and expertise. It is regarded as a tool for training the citizenry in order to live a better and rewarding life for themselves and for the entire society. Education can also be seen as a life goal achievement for the betterment of the citizenry in order to achieve success in the environment and the society at large (Ossai, 2021). However, to start and progress in any educational institution, assessment must take place and that process of assessment is known as examination. According to Collins in Ossai (2021) examination is a formal test that one can take to show his knowledge or ability in a particular subject or to obtain qualification in a subject or course of study of the person or persons concerned. Education, which is seen as the bedrock of development and one of the foundational factors determining sustainable economic development has been faced with myriads of challenges that includes examination malpractice.

Examination malpractice is a disturbing phenomenon, which has and is still threatening the academic integrity of Nigerian educational system. Examination malpractice makes the aim of education almost unachievable. This poses serious challenges to Nigerian education system, since examination is a test used to ascertain the performance of the learners. The National policy on Education (2014) stated that education is an instrument "Par Excellence for affecting National development. It has witnessed active participation by non-governmental agencies,

communities and individuals as well as government intervention. By this, education in Nigeria is regarded by everyone as a viable entity in transforming the society. But examination malpractice poses a threat to the survival of Nigerian higher education, it is fast becoming an obstacle to the smooth administration of Nigerian higher institution. Examination malpractice has also subjected Nigerian students' academic performance to ridicule that their certificates are often suspicious wherever they are presented.

Examination malpractice in Nigeria could be traced to as far back as 1914 when the first examination malpractice occurred during the senior Cambridge local examination where question papers were leaked before the scheduled date of the examination (Anzene, 2014). This trend however, has gradually increased over the years since the much orchestrated "Expo 70" of the early 1970's without attracting much attention. It was only in the mid 1980's that many Nigerian higher institutions identified it as a cog in the wheel of their development. But while some ignored it, some gave it a fight though mildly. However, it is now becoming increasingly unbearable among Nigeria higher institutions because it threatens the very foundation of education system. The problem posed by examination malpractice in the Nigerian higher institutions is quite enormous and effort by some higher institutions to control it have not yielded the desired result. Although the difficulty in controlling examination malpractices is enormous but there is still hope that it will be controlled through certain measures. This paper therefore will examine the concept of examination malpractice in Nigerian higher institutions, forms, causes and effect of examination malpractice and ways of eliminating it.

2. Concept of Examination Malpractice

Many Nigerians did not experience any difficulty to define examination malpractice due to the fact that both examination and malpractice are household words. For proper understanding of examination malpractice in this context, the word examination and malpractice could be looked at separately. Examination according to Oxford Advance Dictionary is spoken or practical test at Schools or College especially one that is needed to get a qualification. while Wikipedia defined examination as a test-takers knowledge or skill, physical fitness or classification in many other topics. Examination is seen as an assessment of ability, achievement or persons performances in a subject. According to Anzene (2014), examination is a formal test of one's knowledge or ability in a particular subject especially by means of answering questions or practical

exercises. It is through examination that students are evaluated or tested to find out the quality of knowledge they have acquired within a specific period. Examination malpractice is any act of omission or commission which compromises the validity and integrity of any examination (Ministry of Education, 2011).

Fassasi (2016) opined that examination is the tool used to facilitate decision making on performance, educational advancement, and job opportunities for the individual. It is the most common tool around which the whole system of education revolves. Thus, there is hardly any education system which does not have one form of assessment or another as an indicator of the said system. Examination is the instrument used to determine who is permitted to go to the next level of education. In fact, it is the result of examination and teachers' judgment which form the grading system in which all the students are classified annually or more frequently (Akaranga and Ogong 2013). Examination is also seen as an important process of assessing the students' progress, to motivate learners, help to know their strength and weaknesses and provide opportunities for the teachers to try new ways of improving their teaching methods. Examination can be internal or external, oral, written and online. Internal examinations are those set by the teachers in form of class tests and end of term examination. While external examinations are conducted by recognized examining bodies that were not involved in organizing instruction or preparing students for the examinations. According to Anzene (2014), continuous assessment scores, terminal, semester and annual or promotion examination are examples of internal examination while common entrance examination for admission into secondary schools, school certificate examinations which are conducted by West Africa Examination Council (WAEC), National Examination Council (NECO), Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) conducted by Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) are examples of external examinations.

Malpractice refers to counter practice that is against ethics of examination. It is an act of disrespect to all rules and regulations guiding the good conduct of any examination or any evaluation process. The English dictionary defined malpractice as improper or unethical conduct by a professional or official persons. Malpractice is also viewed as any deliberate act of wrong doings contrary to the rule of examination designed to give a candidate an unfair advantage or able to frequently place a candidate at a disadvantage (Malami, 2013).

Fassasi (2016) described examination malpractice as a misconduct or improper practice before, during or after any examination by examinees or others with a view to obtaining good result by fraudulent means. Examination malpractice therefore is a form of academic corruption which entails the act of deviation by examiner or examinee from formal rules that regulate their behavior in the examination. Bruno and Obidigbo (2017), defined examination malpractice as anything done by the examination candidate that is likely to render the assessment useless. It is anything made by the stakeholders such as examination's administrators, teachers, parents or students that is likely to render the assessment useless or ineffective. Similarly, Wilayat (2009), defined examination malpractice as a deliberate wrong doing contrary to official examination rules designed to place a candidate at an unfair advantage. Furthermore Wilayat (2009) opined that examination has two main distinct concepts, firstly, to achieve the purpose for which it was designed and secondly, to be a reliable consistent means of measurement. But when irregularity or examination malpractice occurs, then the validity and resulting outcome is questionable. Atakpa (2025) described examination malpractice as any practice that negatively affects the conduct and purpose of any examination; whoever that is involved in subverting the process of any examination is involved in examination malpractice.

Okorie (2015) posited that examination malpractice is an act of wrong doing carried out by a candidate or group of candidates or any other person with the intention to cheat or gain unfair advantage in an examination. It is a deliberate wrong doing contrary to official examination rule designed to place a candidate in an unfair advantage. UNESCO (2021) described examination irregularities and malpractice as any unauthorized or unfair actions that compromise the integrity, validity or fairness of an examination process. Examination malpractice is a deliberate act of indiscipline adopted by students or their accomplices to secure success and advantage before, during or after administration of test and examinations (Ogbonnaya, 2012). It has become a recurrent issue in the Nigerian educational institutions. Examination malpractice has been posing serious challenge to the integrity and assessment process in Nigeria educational institutions from primary to tertiary level but prevalent in the secondary and tertiary levels. According to Ajudeonu (2015) examination malpractice is an illegal act committed by a student single handedly or in collaboration with others like fellow students, parents, teachers/lecturers, supervisors, invigilators, principals and anybody or group of people before, during or after

examinations in order to obtain favour to his advantage.

3. Forms of Examination Malpractice in Higher Institutions in Nigeria

Examination malpractice is one of the evils which is fast becoming a threat to the survival and relevance of Nigerian higher institutions. It is developing very fast and in different forms, this is because Nigeria today has placed so much emphasis on success goals without commensurate emphasis on institutional means of achieving these goals. As such higher institutions in the country has trained into a commercial venture and no longer a place for selfless service but rather a place to make quick money and obtain quick certificate. Examination malpractice in Nigerian higher institutions in recent times is one of the results of gansterism. It comes in various forms and involves all kinds of people especially the students. Worthington and Farrar in Okwuenu and Eneogwe (2017) viewed plagiarism as a form of examination malpractice which students are often involved in, such as:

- Stealing of the examination paper ahead of time;
- Copying from someone else's paper;
- Sending or receiving signals during a test;
- Using unauthorized notes or "cheat sheets" during a test;
- Taking an examination for other students or letting someone else take an examination for you;
- Turning a paper that is being bought from a commercial research firm (also known as term paper mill).

They further stated that plagiarism means passing out another person's work as one's own or using peoples' ideas without acknowledging the source. All these forms of malpractice identified by Worthington and Farrar are common in Nigerian higher institutions. Such as giraffing, lateral connection, life wire and contract, sorting, mercenary, microchips, wholesale, conversation or talking, heat and run and tattoos. All these appear to be the commonest ones in the compasses, but there are still some common ones which may have been ignored despite of their magnitude.

Examination malpractice in various campuses is much more than those listed above in magnitude. There are uncontrollable forms of cheating in examinations in Nigerian higher institutions today. Onyechere (2014) referred to examination malpractice as a monster with thirty-three faces. Onyechere also listed other types of examination malpractice like bringing foreign

materials into examination hall, collusion between candidates, collusion between candidates and officials, impersonation, assault and intimidation, mass cheating, leakage, teacher student affairs, assessment malpractice, examination funds malpractice, comfort fund malpractice, spying, passing papers in the hall, whispering answers, submission of multiple scripts, coded or sign language malpractice, snatching of question papers or answer sheets, passports photograph malpractice, marking malpractice, mass promotion, in-tech malpractice, sale of live question papers or answer sheets, expo, multiple entry for the same examination, sale of handouts by lecturers among others. From these various forms of examination malpractice, it is evident that examination malpractice is no longer the business of just one person.

However, other forms of malpractice according to (Ajudeonu 2015: and Okorie 2015) include bringing unauthorized materials into examination hall such as notes, mobile phones, smart devices, page of books, photocopies of prepared answers, candidates tattoo on their bodies with notes on palms and thighs, students carrying materials in wigs or hairs. In addition to these are grafting, passing papers to all, spying, whispering answers, coded or sign language malpractice, submission of multiple scripts, use of magic slippers, customized t-shirt, sorting and so on. Thus, Alozie and Nnorum (2018) noted that sorting is the most recurring thorn in the flesh of Nigerian education system as lecturers lure students into paying specific sums in order to pass examination or get better results. Examination malpractice in Nigerian higher institutions today is perpetuated by a team of examination malpractioners. Onyechere (2014) therefore accuses some parents, school administration, teachers, invigilators, boyfriends and girlfriends, the students, communities as well as the higher institutions of being responsible for the monster called examination malpractice in the country. However, the dimensions of examination malpractice and the caliber of people involved especially in higher institutions portrays that there is a danger ahead.

4. Causes of Examination Malpractice in Higher Institutions

Today in Nigeria certification have become an evidence of educational attainment, it does not mean that acquisition of certificates is bad but their usage as sole indicator or evidence of academic attainment has led to its acquisition by hook or crook. This is true because much emphasis has been placed on certificates than in knowledge and skills. The causes

of examination malpractice are multifaceted and influenced by many factors:

Academic pressure to succeed: Pressure to succeed is one of the factors that lead students to indulge in examination malpractice since they want to succeed at all cost irrespective of the after effect of their actions and consequences. Therefore, students may feel immense pressure to achieve high grade and maintain a competitive edge over their peers thereby making them to resort to malpractice. In addition, students cheat to avoid failure due to high expectation from lecturers, parents and the communities.

Phobia for failure: The fear of failure often times make some students to cheat during examinations in order to obtain good grades and avoid negative consequences. Phobia for failure can be seen as curiosity to achieve better result than poor result. As such students do everything within their power to attain better scores and grades.

Indiscipline: Some students lack integrity. This means that they are unable to appreciate the distinction between being honest or dishonest in relation to academics. Thus, students who lack a strong sense of discipline and integrity often resort to examination malpractice to gain an unfair advantage over selfishness.

Poor attitude of students towards their studies: Some students in Nigerian higher institutions waste their time engaging in social activities in campuses or what is called 'flexing', at the detriment of their studies. As such they are poorly prepared for examinations and often resort to examination malpractice to make-up for their inadequacies.

Peer group influence: Some students who belong to cult group on campus do not normally attend lectures, group mentality and pressure to conform to the group condition and rule on the campus often lead this cult group members to resort to cheating in examinations.

Institutional weakness and inadequate supervision: Most institutions of higher learning in Nigeria lack enough space for their students during examinations, this may lead to packing students in overcrowded halls during examination. This scenario coupled with inadequate supervision invariably enable students to resort to malpractice like grafting and copying from each other.

Bribery and corruption: Which may be inform of monetary or sexual inducement to obtain answers or better grades during examination.

Lack of surveillance system (CCTV) in most higher institutions in Nigeria.

Favoritism and bias: Most students are given preferential treatment during assessment or invigilation by their teachers/lecturers.

However, all these points mentioned are not encouraging, something has to be done to remedy the situation.

5. Effects of Campus Examination Malpractice

Examination malpractice is an evil that has engulfed campuses of Nigeria higher institutions with regrettable consequences. Its impact ranges from cancellation of examination results to national dishonour. Examination malpractice is a crime as such anybody involved in it is a criminal. Noel in Okwenu and Eneogwe (2017) noted that there is a great difference in the academic achievement of those involved in examination malpractice and those who rely on hard work. Those involved in examination malpractice may record a higher score at the initial stage but this academic achievement is never sustained due to their obvious self-concept which does not enhance success and persistence in school work. Examination malpractice demeans the individual involved. His/her integrity and self-worth are quickly eroded as he/she is treated like a thief in the midst of his fellow students and among teachers.

Examination malpractice especially in the Nigerian higher institutions is a cog on the wheel of both personal development of the people involved and that of the nation. Achigbe in Okwenu and Eneogwe (2017) posited that examination malpractice threatens national development and the validity and authenticity of certificates, increase attrition rate, encourage wastage, create social misfit among the students. It is an evil wind that blows no one any good. It generally makes students to lose confidence in themselves and makes them to feel that academic success can only be gotten through examination malpractice. It also makes the generality of the wider society to lose confidence in Nigerian graduates as they perceive all of them to be products of one form of examination malpractice or the other. As a result of this, one can graduate with any grade from any Nigerian higher institution without being sure of securing job either in public or private sector.

Anybody caught cheating in an examination feels inferior before his course mates and those around him

as well as his peers forever. This also affects his performance and ability to cope with life in future. Even when there is high competitive pressure anybody caught in examination could be suspended or expelled and this will have a noticeable effect on the persons scholastic and personal records in future. However, no grade is worth cheating for, since the sense of guilt by short changing fellow students will continue to hunt the person for life. However, the student examination malpractice brings shame to himself, and his entire family including his friends and church members. His ego will be affected for life as he is nicknamed “expo” “dub-dab” among others.

Examination malpractice often destroys standard and the spirit of hard work among the students. In most cases the weak students spend their time planning to cheat in an examination while others are working hard to meet up with their academic works. Sometimes the weak students succeed in completing the examination with good grades but they cannot defend it anywhere within or outside the campus and even in the performance of a very easy task. According to Onyacho (2024) examination malpractice encourages laziness among students, lower standard of education by default, affects employment and productivity, has deadly multiplier effects on the practice of medicine; does serious harm to the national image, has very serious implications on the culprits, can lead to dismissal of student and can make teacher/lecturer lose his job. Involvement in examination malpractice can be very disgraceful and even when the student successfully completes his programme through cheating, he often feels very jittery to present his certificate to any serious-minded person, including employers because he knows that the certificate is gotten through fraudulent means and he cannot defend it.

Examination originally is meant to test candidates' comprehension and ability thereby leading to the award of certificate, but with examination malpractice invading the education system the certificate will lack credibility. When the country educational system is characterized by examination malpractice other countries will not respect such country's education system. A country that is ranked highly in examination malpractice loses international credibility (Anzene, 2014). With examination malpractice poorly prepared and half-baked graduates will continue to emerge in the society. These graduates will end up cheating the students instead of teaching them thereby reducing the quality of education in Nigeria. According to Okoli and Oranusi (2019), when students continue to indulge in examination malpractice, they will end up graduating with little or no skills imparted in them. As

a result, are commonly half baked and not suitable for employment.

6. Possible Ways of Eliminating Examination Malpractice in Nigerian Higher Institutions

The alarming rate at which examination malpractice takes place, especially in higher institutions, its spread and caliber of those involved in it have made many Nigerians to believe that it has become part of the Nigerian education system. It is however, believed that examination malpractice can be eliminated totally if there is change of attitude from the students, the parents, guardians and the Nigeria society at large.

The unnecessary emphasis on certificates instead of acquisition of useful skills and knowledge have made examination malpractice a common phenomenon in Nigerian higher institutions. Since it is being perpetuated by the students it is students who can stop it. The very first thing the students will do to curb examination malpractice is to shun it in whichever dimension it may come. To shun examination malpractice means to work hard and rely on one's effort which will be adequately rewarded. When the students are sure of themselves, they can set the standard for others to emulate. Their hard work, determination to succeed without being involved in examination malpractice and their exemplary attitude towards examinations will be enough to motivate the lazy and criminally minded one's around them to shun examination malpractice in its entirety. Whoever shun examination malpractice will ensure that those who plan it do not succeed as they will always take a prompt action against them. The very committed students should form a vanguard against examination malpractioners, to ensure that all those things that facilitate examination malpractice are not encouraged in the campus and examination malpractioners should be treated as outcasts in the campus.

Parents of Nigerian higher education students should wake up to their responsibilities as responsible parents. They should stop sponsoring examination malpractice by enticing or intimidating teachers/lecturers to award pass grades to their children when it is obvious that such children have failed the course. They should stop bribing admission officers to admit their unqualified children for certain programmes. Such students when admitted insist on doing anything within their power including the use of violence to pass examinations. Studies have shown that it is parents who make money available to their children for 'sorting' and sorting can only stop if they withdraw their sponsorship. It is necessary that parents

should encourage hard work among their children; as hard work is the only way to success and also provide them with the basic necessities they might need to succeed.

The higher institutions should discourage examination malpractice by employing only the best brains and honest ones and not mediocres and corrupt individuals to teach and handle examinations. A situation where all kinds of people are recruited through godfatherism to teach and handle examinations, is not advisable as they will see it as an opportunity to make money through indiscriminate distribution of scores and sale of grades. Selling of continuous assessment scores is very common in Nigerian higher institutions; such a practice should be discouraged. Thus, teachers/lecturers and the higher institutions authorities should purge themselves of examination malpractice by laying greater emphasis on personal integrity, prompt and decisive actions against examination malpractioners and establishment of environment that discourages cheating.

The entire Nigerian society cannot be completely exonerated from examination malpractice since the unnecessary emphasis on acquisition of certificates instead of knowledge and skills encourage examination malpractice. The notion among the populace that every child is a material for higher education often make some people who are not candidates of higher education force themselves into higher institutions in the country. Levine and Associates (2017) remarked that this is often the basis for the demographic problems of some higher institutions. The crowded nature of some campuses is a source of examination misconduct. The society therefore has to understand the importance of higher education and assist the higher institutions in realizing their noble objectives instead of separating examination malpractice.

7. Conclusion

Examination malpractice is an irregularity premeditated and perpetuated by the students or their agents for the purpose of having undue advantage in the examination, it is a social ill that can destroy a society. Examination malpractice has serious economic, political and social consequences. It makes the goal of examination which is to access the candidates and assert their performance for placement and decision making almost impossible.

Though examinations in Nigerian higher institutions have been denigrated there may not be any other alternative to examinations in higher institutions. It is

still the only route to certification of a student's character and learning. However, both the students, parents and the authorities of Nigerian higher institutions still have an important role to play in restoring the dignity of higher institutions and make them relevant to national development through the worthiness of their certificates and product.

8. Recommendations

There should be enough lecturers/invigilators during examinations to avoid the current situation where some students start the examination in their own hall much earlier than those in other halls for the same course due to lack of enough invigilators. Examination must start on schedule in all the halls to avoid students running away with answer scripts to another hall or into the bush.

There is need for government to properly equip all Nigerian higher institutions to avoid congestion in examination hall as well as avoid situations where students share desks and question papers because they do not have enough.

Adequate security should be provided for all examination materials and invigilators to avoid leakage of examination papers through violence or fraudulent means either before or during examination.

There should be proper identification of students before entry into the examination halls. This is very important to avoid any case of impersonation.

There should be a serious and aggressive campaign against examination malpractice in all higher institutions of learning in Nigeria. And installation of surveillance system (CCTV) should be provided if possible.

Adequate facilities, such as classrooms, lecture halls and laboratories should be provided to ensure effective checks and control of candidates during examination. Candidates that may be caught and found guilty of examination malpractice should be severely punished without fear or favour to serve as deterrent to others.

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