



Examination Malpractice: The Hydra-Headed Monster and Virus in Nigerian Education System

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1. Introduction

Education is the hub and vital instrument for the achievement of full potentials and overall development of individuals in every society. According to Maduiké (2011) education is the antidote to poverty and ignorance and the key for unlocking natural resources. Maduiké (2011) also maintained that no nation striving for accelerated development does so without huge investment in education. Effort is being made by the government to ensure that individuals in the society are equipped with necessary knowledge, ability and skills to maximize their full potentials as human beings in order to contribute optimally to other sectors of national development. To achieve this, the individuals need to be well equipped in basic skills as to be able to contribute to the national development. To this end, education is supposed to serve the need of man and take cognizance of the survival of the individuals in the society. Thus, if examination is fraught with malpractice; this all important feedbacks mechanism becomes

defeated and the educational system becomes distorted (Nwanekezi and Kalu, 2012).

1.1 Concept of Examination

The term examination has been viewed in different ways by different authors, educationist and researchers. Hornby (2000) defined examination as a written, spoken or practical test at school or college, especially an important one that you need to do in order to get a qualification. Balogun (1999) viewed examination as a device employed to inquire into or test how much knowledge, skills and competence a learner has acquired in a course of study or activity. Kailani and Usman (2009) defined examination as an organized assessment technique which presents individuals with series of questions or task geared towards ascertaining individual acquired skills and knowledge.

From all these barrage of definitions, one can define examination as the process of finding out either in written or oral form the extent candidates or learners have acquired and mastered all

the necessary skills and competencies expected of them.

1.2 Examination Malpractice (Defined)

The term examination malpractice has been defined differently by educators, authors, researchers, administrators and supervisors. Onuoha (1996) defined examination malpractice as unfair practices or irregularities or infringement of regulation during the conduct of examination. Nwahunanya (2004), opined that examination malpractice could be any act of omission or commission intended to make a student pass an examination without relying absolutely on his/her independent skills, capabilities, intellectual ability or resources. In the same vein, Ganiyu (2006) viewed examination malpractice simply as failure on the part of the examinee, examiners and others connected with the conduct of examination to comply fully with the rules and regulations guiding the conduct of examination. It could occur before, during and after the examination. Kailani and Usman (2009) viewed examination malpractice as any irregular behaviour exhibited by candidates or anybody charged with the responsibility of conducting examination, in or outside the examination hall, before, during or after such examination.

From all these plethora of definitions, one can define examination malpractice as any irregular or illegal behaviour exhibited by students or candidates or any other individual either before or during examinations which is against the rules governing the smooth conduct of examinations.

This can equally occur after examination.

1.3 Origin of Examination Malpractice in Nigerian Education System

Examination malpractice has been and is still a serious cankerworm to Nigerian education system. Ifeakor and Anekwe (2011) viewed examination malpractice as hydra-headed monster that has eaten up into the bone marrow of Nigerians even from primary schools to the tertiary institutions. Reports have shown that examination malpractices are neither new nor peculiar to Nigerian education system. Maduemezie (1998) reported that examination malpractice was recorded to have occurred in Nigeria in 1914 in which questions of the senior Cambridge local examination was obtained before examination was taken. It was also reported in STAN (2001) that students in the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States of America (USA) are the world biggest cheats in examinations. When compared with the above in this dishonest behavior, Nigerian students seemed to be novice. Examination malpractices in recent years appear to be a canker-worm which seems to have eaten deep into our fabric. Examination malpractices previously existed at cow-ebb with simplistic methods but it became more pervasive from 1970 with the involvement of persons other than the candidates (Maduemezie 1998). It was observed that out of twenty-one categories of people identified as perpetrators of examination malpractice, students constituted only about three categories which is less than 14%.

Ivowi (1996) reported that 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 leakage of question paper and make appropriate recommendations to check future occurrence of such practice. Ivowi observed that despite steps taken by the examining bodies and Federal Government to abate this ugly situation and even the promulgation of decree No. 20 of 1984 with its amendment in 1986 and the suggested improvement on inadequacies of these decrees in 1994, the problem has remained intractable.

Before the 1977 episode, two commissions were set up by the federal government and one of such commissions came up in 1963 to look into the case of some WAEC candidates who were found with question papers in Lagos; a day before the examination. Similar case came up in 1967 which necessitated the constitution of a committee on 30th December, 1967 with Justice Darnley Alexander (the then chief Justice of the federation) as the Chairman to look into the causes of examination leakages of the First School Leaving Certificate (FSLC) and the West African Examination Council (WAEC) of that particular year (Onwubuariri, 1996).

It has been reported that students, teachers, ministry of education workers, parents and guardians, principals, academic staff of tertiary institutions, invigilators, politicians, officials of public examination bodies, university lecturers, junior staff and non-academic staff of departments in

the university examination invigilation and supervision, printers and publishers, custodians to communities and traditional rulers are all involved in examination malpractices (UNESCO, 2000 and STAN, 2001).

1.4 Typology and Forms of Examination Malpractice

Examination malpractice entails all unethical behavioural attitudes of students in examination. This unethical behaviour of students in examination can take different types and forms. Researchers have shown that examination papers leak most times before the examination, this is contrary to the ideals of the society and education system. It is surprising that most paper leakages are spearheaded by the subject teachers or individuals close to them. In most cases students fake questions and answers for money. Apart from paper leakages, examination malpractice can occur when students construct likely examination questions, put down the answers on pieces of paper, part of their bodies, writing items such as ruler, mathematical sets, desks and even on their under-wears, handkerchiefs etc and take them to the examination halls by any means. This type of cheating in the examination halls has various nick-names such as 'micro-chips, kirikiri-stars, bullets, omo-kirikiri' etc (Onyeachu, 2012). It has been observed that friends collaborate to transcribe answers to different questions and rotate them amongst a particular group and sometimes to those who may be willing to settle in cash or kind after the examination. Copying or “giraffe”

from one another is very common among students.

Impersonation is another serious examination fraud where students hire people to write examination in their place. Most often examination question papers are sneaked out of the examination halls for the same purpose.

Other forms of examination malpractices have been identified in West African Examination (WAEC) by Umo and Shonekan in Ifeakor and Anekwe (2011) as follows:

- Bringing in foreign materials e.g pieces of paper, note books, textbooks, handkerchiefs, programmable calculators, shirts, waist slips, currency notes and photocopies of prepared answers, dangerous weapons such as, guns, knives, daggers etc in the examination halls.
- Irregular activities inside and outside the examination halls e.g use of mathematical set, log tables, rulers and calculators to exchange information, use of 'touts' or 'contractors' to answer questions outside the examination hall, mystery voices etc.
- Collusion among candidates e.g exchange of answer scripts, dictating answers to candidates and supervisors pretending to be sleeping; some school principals distract supervisors and inspectors to facilitate cover up of examination malpractice.
- Impersonation e.g a brilliant students writing papers for another student, brothers, sisters,

teachers, husbands, boyfriends etc.

- Leakages or foreknowledge of results from improper handling of examination questions during the printing and production process.
- Mass cheating results from over population and supervision facilitated by presenting gifts to the supervisors.
- Forging of continuous assessment scores for external candidates.

1.5 Causes of Examination Malpractices

Examination malpractice can be as a result of so many factors. Research literature as outlined by Maduabum, cited in Nwokolo and Nwokolo in Ifeakor and Anekwe (2010) revealed that causes of examination malpractice in Nigeria can be grouped into five categories, viz:

- Society-related factors
- Institutional-related factors
- Teacher-related factors
- Learner-related factors
- Grouped-related factors

Society-Related Factors: These include undue emphasis on certificates, poor staffing of schools, laxity in persecuting offenders and inadequate funding. The society places high premium on paper qualification than the mastery of one's claim. In many schools, it has been reported that many teachers are asked to teach outside their subject areas due to under staffing. Since no one gives what he does not have, there is tendency that the teacher would "cheat" rather than

'teach'. In this case meaningful learning cannot take place.

Institutional Related Factors: This refers to poor condition of learning in Nigerian schools and lack of conducive environment for examinations such as examination halls, classrooms, furniture's, laboratories etc. when these are not adequate, it can amount to poor examination conduct on the part of the students, invigilators and other examination officials.

Teacher-Related Factors: Most teachers are not resourceful, once teaching materials are inadequate; they may not bother to look for alternatives. By so doing students become frustrated. It has been observed that in some schools, teachers use students in the higher classes to invigilate those in the lower classes. This could be a license to examination malpractice. Some teachers aid examination fraud directly or indirectly by falsifying individuals' assessment and examination scores. Some even leak question papers to their preferred students.

Learner-Related Factors: Examination phobia due to fear of failure, lack of confidence, anxiety, insecurity, inferiority complex, unpreparedness, lack of commitment and lateness in school attendance have been reported as factors that lead students to examination fraud. Onyeachu (2012) stressed that majority of Nigerian students are perpetual latecomers. A situation where a student will be missing the first two lessons every day, one wonders how such a child can perform well. The most dangerous aspect of this problem is that it will be very difficult for the

teacher to cover the content of the curriculum and to teach for mastery.

Group-Related Factors: 'Class' syndrome can lead one into examination fraud either for money or to keep ego. For poor and greedy ones, it may be to get money. For rich and well placed ones it can be to keep their ego either for their children, relations or themselves as mature students. In this case they pay money for better grades.

In addition to the above factors, government whether federal or state can be a related factor. The system of education in Nigeria has become victim of many afflictions. It is either strike actions or change in government policy. Neglect of public schools by the government 'ranks' as highest factor of the examination malpractice in Nigeria. Teachers are no longer committed to their work as a result of either non-payment of earned allowances or delay in salaries. The incessant strike action cause by this neglect in the school system becomes an outstanding factor that contributes to the persistent examination malpractice.

It has become a tradition in the Nigerian university system that when strike action is suspended, the usual announcements by the school authorities read thus, "students are requested to report back on the so so date and examination starts immediately". Yet, the course outline has not been covered and the lecturers are expected to perform magic in a shortest given period. The students have no option than to write and pass the examination through fraudulent

means. This situation is not peculiar to the universities alone but to other tertiary institutions, secondary schools and primary schools as well (Nwanekezi and Kalu, 2012).

Proliferation of private schools in Nigeria is yet another hidden factor that causes examination malpractices in the Nigeria school system. Since proof of the best performed school is the learners' grade. The private owners of schools apply every mechanism to meet the standard. The rate of competition among these private owners of schools becomes very high. This ugly competition results in the application of all kinds of fraudulence means in both internal and external examination to get best grades for their products.

1.5 Consequences of Examination Malpractice in Nigeria

There are many consequences of examination malpractice in Nigeria. These include:

- Laziness on the part of students: Most students become lazy, knowing that whether they study hard or not, they are going to pass their examination.

Offorma (2006) enumerated the consequences of examination malpractice, thus:

- Invalid and unreliable data are supplied to the system;
- Learners become lazy as many do not want to work hard since they can cheat and succeed' in the examination.
- Indiscipline in schools and the society in general as students do not bother about their academic work, rather, time is spent

planning for different evils-absenteeism, cultism, rape, theft, e.t.c.

- Disparity in the curriculum objective and the attained objectives.

Other consequence of examination malpractice abound. They are:

- **Poor examination:** Examination malpractice had made most students to perform poorly both in written and in performance of practical task after spending six good years in secondary school. To that end, Salogun (1999) emphatically remarked that it is a very unfortunate situation that most of our secondary school leavers in Nigeria can hardly perform as expected.
- **Students become hardened criminals:** This is one of the dangerous consequences of examination malpractice, where you see a student get used to examination malpractice. The implication is that the student gets hardened. On this note, Abbas (2006) regretted that examination malpractice has now become a vicious cycle and once students get involved and go through undetected, they easily become addicted and therefore fine-tune a "critical path" as a means of attaining academic success from the primary to the tertiary levels.
- **Doubting the validity and authentication of certificates:** This is another consequence of examination malpractice. Examination malpractice has led

to doubting the validity and authenticity of certificates issued to candidates at all levels of education in Nigeria.

- **Teachers can longer rely on examination results:** It is disheartening to note that examination results are no longer reliable. This is because it is now very difficult for the teacher to determine the extent the learners have gotten the knowledge of what is taught. As a consequence, it is difficult to determine what remedial action to be taken in relation to the students' academic achievements and moreover, it is difficult to determine students' future career.
- **Disappointment:** Examination malpractice brings about disappointment to the students involved in that most of the students who got admission through examination malpractice get disappointed when they did not meet up with their course of study in tertiary institution.
- **Cancellation:** Examination malpractice may lead to cancellation of results. This may also lead to frustration. Most students are frustrated when their results are cancelled or withheld; as a consequence some become school dropouts. That may perhaps be the reason why Orame (2011) and Maple (2011) described examination malpractice as a social evil that can damage society to the extent of possibly leading to a failed state. It has very serious

economic, political and social consequences.

- **Truancy and absenteeism:** Many students are truants, they absent themselves from class activities. Noticing this, Ozurumba (2011) stressed that truancy and absenteeism in class activities make some students to be ill-prepared for examination, hence, they look for easiest way of passing examination at all cost. What a big setback in our educational system

2. Attempt to Eradicate Examination Malpractice in Nigeria

Under the Nigerian law on cheating in the examination, there is a special tribunal (miscellaneous offences) Decree 20 of 1984, Section 3 (2) (L). This provides as follows; any person who before, at, during or in anticipation of any examination:

- By any fraudulent trick or device or an abuse of his office or with intent to unjustly enrich himself or any other person procures any question paper produced or intended for use at any examination.
- By any false pretence or with intent to cheat or secure an unfair advantage for himself or any other person procures from any other or induces any other person to deliver to him/herself or another person any question paper intended for use at any examination.
- By any false pretence, with intent to cheat or unjustly enrich himself or any other person or

for any other purpose whosoever buys, sells, procures or otherwise deals with any question paper intended for use or represented as genuine question paper in respect of any particular examination shall be guilty under this decree and shall be prosecuted against and punished as provided in this decree.

The punishment is provided in section 6 (3) (L) of the same decree. The punishment is twenty one years (21 years) imprisonment (depending on the gravity of the examination fraud) for any person found guilty of cheating at examination, but if the person is a child who has not attained the age of seventeen years, he shall not be punished for an offence under this section i.e section 3 (2) (L). On the Other hand, when the accused is an employee of anybody concerned with the conduct of examination; a head teacher, teacher or other person entrusted with the safety of question papers, he shall be proceeded against and punished as provided in this section, notwithstanding that the question paper concerned is proved not to be life, genuine or does not relate to the examination concerned.

In view of the above law, effort is being made to totally eradicate examination malpractice from Nigerian education system. The government is making effort to reduce examination malpractices to the lowest minimum, the JAMB examination is now, a pre-requisite to write Post UME examination which is handled by each Nigerian university. Some universities make this examination computer

based; all in attempt to fight examination fraud. Still the ugly hydra-headed monster is on the increase.

3. Conclusion

Examination malpractice has been identified as virus, a menace that will soon ruin our education system if allowed to go unchecked. This calls for more effort and more effective mechanism to ameliorate the situation. Many students are no longer serious with their studies because at the end of the day, they still find means of making high grades in their various courses. The incessant strike actions by ASUU, ASUP, COESU, in the school system becomes outstanding factor that contributes to the persistent examination fraud.

4. Recommendations

To reduce drastically examination malpractice in Nigerian education system, the following recommendations become imperative:

- Students should be well prepared both in oral and written examinations before entering the hall for Senior School Certificate Examination.
- More emphasis should be laid on skill acquisition in any level of education instead of on certificate gotten.
- Orientation and re-orientation programmes should be organized by school guidance counselors. This will enable the youths and even parents to know the evils associated with examination malpractice and the harms it does to the society.

- Parents should stop sponsoring examination malpractice by not giving money to their children/wards. Parents should equally stop paying mercenaries to write examination for their children rather they should encourage their child to work harder. Any child of theirs that is studying harder than others should be rewarded.
- Teachers should be re-orientated on the ethics of their profession and to face their jobs and do it honestly.
- Adult members of the society should begin to live exemplary lives, because teachers are role models.
- Parents should provide all the needed relevant instructional materials such as text books to their children/ward.
- Federal and state governments should provide very conducive learning environment for secondary school students and tertiary institutions.
- The government should equally build big halls in every school. This is to avoid students being overcrowded during examination.
- Teachers should ensure adequate coverage of their syllabus, moreover, they should teach for mastery.

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