

MANAGING EXAMINATION CRISIS: THE MENACE OF EXAMINATION MALPRACTICE IN NIGERIA

BY

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Abstract

Education and examination are inseparable, and the importance of examination at any level cannot be overemphasized. It has remained a potent instrument for judgement of knowledge acquired. In recent times, the conduct of examinations has generated serious concern and discussions among stakeholders. The conduct of examination has been fraught with various dimensions of examination malpractices. Just like corruption, examination malpractice has permeated the entire educational system in Nigeria. Government functionaries, school authorities, invigilators, examiners, parents and students are all guilty of the iniquitous trend of examination malpractice and the consequent undermining and rubbishing of the examination process and examination bodies. This therefore raises the issue of examination management strategies for qualitative education. This paper examines the concept of examination malpractice, identifies various dimensions of examination malpractice, highlight causes and menace of examination malpractices. A number of suggestions (strategies) for the way forward towards effective management of examination crises are proffered.

INTRODUCTION

Examination Malpractice (EM) is now a common phenomenon in the educational system, and indeed the society. In fact, it can rightly be termed “the great Monster” in the Nigerian educational system. EM has caught up with all stakeholders in the education of the Nigerian child. The menace is a cause of worry for all stakeholders as well as adherents of moral and ethical uprightness in the Nigerian society. Sometime ago, a non-governmental organization known as Examination Ethics Project came up and conducted researches across the nation on issues of examination malpractice. For instance, in 2003, the Examination Ethics Project reported that out of 929,294 candidates that sat for the May/June WAEC O’ level in Nigeria in that year, 111,969

representing 12.05 percent were caught cheating in the examination. The following year, 2004, the Examination Malpractice Index (EMI) had increased to 16.9 percent. This means, for every 100 candidates in the examination, 16 -17 of them were caught cheating. Most cases are not even recorded and reported.

According to West African Examination Council Reports in DAILY SUN newspaper of August, 29, 2006, in Nigeria, between May/June 1996 and May/June 2005, a total of 14,408,336 candidates sat for WAEC and 1,367,726 of them, representing 9.4% over that period were involved in examination malpractice. This means for every 100 candidates that took examination, about 10 of them cheated. Of course, these were the ones reported.

These frightening figures show how presently, the menace of examination malpractice has eaten into the very fabric of the educational system, with its attendant negative effects. To magnify the malignant nature of the problem, in 2007, then Minister of Education in Nigeria, Mrs. Obiageli Ezekwesili announced to the nation, the 324 blacklisted schools barred from serving as centres for any examination conducted by West African Examination Council (WAEC), National Examinations Council (NECO), Joint Admissions and Matriculations Board (JAMB), due to their reported involvement in Examination Malpractices. The Minister said this as quoted by Edukugho (2007) in Vanguard newspaper of February, 22, 2007. *"The schools through the proprietors, principals, teachers as well as compromised supervisors invigilators and community leaders work in concert to facilitate cheating by students. The evidence comes in various forms and is usually overwhelming clear"* (p. 3).

The schools barred from being examination centres included those of private, government and Missions or faith based organizations. The picture is dim; hence the need for all those concerned about moral sanctity to rise against this 'Monster' and 'malignant disease,' called examination malpractice before it consumes us all in the families, schools and the nation at large.

THE CONCEPT OF EXAMINATION MALPRACTICE

Examination malpractice has been defined variously by many authors; some ten (10) definitions/views are presented here:

- (i) Chukwuemeka (1982) referred to examination malpractice as violation of examination rules and regulations by candidates.

- (ii) Aliyu (1996) looked at examination malpractice as any irregular behaviour related to the examination exhibited by candidates or any body charged with the conduct of examination in or outside the examination hall before, during and after the examination.
- (iii) Argungu (1997) defined examination malpractice as any irregularity which is premeditated and perpetrated by candidates or their agents with the intention of gaining undue advantage over others in an examination.
- (iv) Jega (2006) saw examination malpractice as any form of misbehaviour that leads to the alteration of or a tempering with the prescribed ways of conducting examination in any given system.
- (v) Examination Malpractice is a punishable offence which is committed during the process of normal and recognized examination (Saye, 2003 in Jega 2006).
- (vi) Olagungu; (1994) in Jega (2006), defined examination malpractice as the absence of the adherence to the rules and regulations guiding the conduct of examination.
- (vii) Any wrong doing, misconduct, dishonesty or improper practice for personal gains, or violation of set rules of conduct during examinations. (Jegade, 1996 in Jega, 2006).
- (viii) Any act of omission or commission which compromises the validity, reliability and integrity of any assessment or evaluation system (i.e. the violation of, or disregard for examination ethics (Obo, 2008).
- (ix) Obot (1997) defined examination malpractice as wrong (illegal/immoral) doing in terms of acts of commission or omission during the construction, custodianship, administration, marking and release of results of examination before, during or after such examinations.
- (x) Joshua (2008) synthesized many definitions of examination malpractice by defining the concept as
 - any unauthorized or unapproved action, inaction, activity, behaviour or practice that is associated with the preparation, conduct and processing of examination and other forms of assessment, and carried out by any person involved in preparing for, giving, taking and processing that examination at any level (p. 1).*

From these various definitions presented, and many other ones in the literature, examination malpractice is noted as fraud within the school system, and does occur at all levels of education, right from nursery/primary, through secondary to tertiary levels of education in Nigeria. Infact, examination malpractice is a peculiar 'corrupt practice' within the educational system. This practice is thriving strongly in our system, irrespective of religious affiliations of the various stakeholders in the school system, thus making it a real "monster". This concept is a real monster because the culture of hard work, academic excellence, honesty, decency are fast eroding the present generation of youths in different institutions of learning. This Monster, Examination Malpractice, tends to weaken the validity of any examination, and to make examination results worthless and unreliable. Actually Examination Malpractice produces "error scores" in examinations, where students earn marks/scores above/below their abilities, and the long terms effect is wrong placement in schools and employment of unskilled workers into various sectors of the economy.

USE OF THEORY OF MEASUREMENT ERROR TO EXPLAIN THE MENACE OF EXAMINATION MALPRACTICE

The harm perpetuated by EM can be properly understood using a popular Educational Measurement Equation, which is:

$$X = T \pm E$$

Where X = observed score (one given by examiner to any student in a given examination as representing the student's ability)

T = True score (one representing the actual or true ability of the student devoid of all mistakes/errors).

E = Error score (one representing the errors/mistakes purposely or inadvertently introduced into the measurement process to either inflate or deplete the students' score in a given examination)

It is to be noted that the undeserved or strange score brought about by examination malpractice is embedded in error score (E). A cursory look at the equation shows that:

- i) The difference between X and T is the Error Score (E);
- ii) It is our noble desire that as much as possible, X is close to, if not equal to, T;

- iii) The smaller the value of E, the closer is X to T (in fact, if E is zero, $X = T$). Conversely, the bigger the value of E (courtesy of EM), the farther is X from T.
- iv) If E is very large, T diminishes, and X approaches E. This implies that the higher the value of error score occasioned by examination malpractice, the more the school and public examination scores deviate or diminish from true abilities of those who make or own those scores. Those scores essentially but embarrassingly represent/reflect errors and intangibles, and everything else apart from the actual/true abilities of their owners. Little wonder then that some owners of high scores in our school/public examinations can hardly perform or exhibit behaviours that are consistent with the high scores; and how some school graduates can hardly perform to the expectation of the society/employers. That is the harm by EM.

VARIOUS DIMENSIONS OF EXAMINATION MALPRACTICE

Examination Malpractice (EM) occurs in various dimensions in the school system, and at different stages of the examination namely:- pre-examination phase, during examination and post-examination phase. At each phase, the forms/dimensions differ; sometimes, the dimensions are peculiar to institutions of learning where EM is practiced

(a) Pre-Examination Phase

Before the commencement of most public examinations, some misconducts normally occur, which include:-

- (i) Registration of non-school candidates for monetary gains by the school administrators.
- (ii) Migration from towns to interior villages by students/candidates, some of them supported by their parents/guardians.
- (iii) False Continuous Assessment (CA) scores by teachers.
- (iv) Registration of more candidates than the available functional sitting capacity in most examination centres.
- (v) Collection of money from candidates prior to examination dates by invigilators/supervisors to facilitate malpractices at examination halls.

- (vi) Imposing impersonators' photographs on original registration forms by school administrators.
- (vii) Sometimes, some candidates do pay for two registration forms.
- (viii) Leakage from examination bodies where questions are circulated either through soft/electronic or hard copies to anxious candidates for payments of various amounts of money.

(b) During Examination Phase

It is almost impossible to enumerate the various forms of examination malpractice that occur in schools. At this stage, the students are daring, ready to implement their pre-planned dimensions of cheating "manufactured" by them. However, some common malpractices include, copying from neighbours through girraffing, use of prepared materials, notebooks, textbooks, magazines, asking questions from fellow candidates, using the back side of question papers, using handkerchiefs, underwear's (skirts, pants, singlet, pockets of trousers) to write answers, use of cell phones within the hall with stored answers to receive and send text message to their friends/mercenaries outside examination halls, use of prepared materials copied on mathematical sets, stockings and socks, wrappers, etc, use of under caps/hats to hide prepared materials, writing on designated desks and walls near seats in examination halls, placing of reading materials in toilets to be used when using conveniences, strapping of prepared materials to their thighs with rubber bands, deposition of prepared materials in braziers (common among female students), and many other nefarious ways of cheating during examinations.

(c) Post-Examination Phase

Examination malpractices often occur also after the examinations must have been taken. Common forms at this stage include:-

- i. Re-packaging of scripts to include those written outside examination hall in collaboration with invigilators/supervisors.
- ii. Payment of money to examiners/markers for some favours, including re-writing the examination
- iii. Corrupt practices of computer operators in examination bodies who obtain money from candidates to change grades/scores.

- iv. General “sorting”, particularly with officials of examination bodies and examiners to post grades that they never earned or merited. (Joshua, 2008; Ojerinde, 2005 in Obo, 2008).

PERPETRATORS OF VARIOUS FORMS OF EXAMINATION MALPRACTICE

Examination Malpractice is perpetrated by most stakeholders in the education sector of our nation. They include:

- i. **The Students:** The primary culprits in this menace are the students themselves. Students are no longer hardworking, they have little or no interest in studying to know and studying to face examination on their own, they lack concentration during studies, have poor study habits and are generally restless, lazy, and easily distracted by activities in the environment. Most students care less about culture of hard work and academic excellence, and so become ill-prepared for most examinations. Students no longer have confidence in themselves to write and pass any examination, without cheating. Dishonesty has become the order of the day, while honesty during examinations is no longer a virtue to covet by students. Dishonesty in examination halls is now an acceptable behaviour and life style.
- ii. **The Teachers:** Often times, shamefully, some teachers who are supposed to be custodians of academic honesty and discipline, are perpetrators of examination malpractices in schools. Some shameless teachers help students during examination by bringing into examination rooms worked answers to the test items, writing the answers on the boards, and distracting invigilators/supervisors by offering refreshments in the teachers’ offices during examinations to the officials. This is done with the sole aim of allowing the students to cheat at will during examinations with the full support and co-operation of teachers.
- iii. **Parents and Guardians:** Some parents/guardians and other significant others in the family also aid students to cheat during examinations. The parents become syndicates in perpetuating examination malpractice because they are the sole financiers of some of the malpractice activities. They provide monies to their children/wards for payment to different persons and agents of examination malpractice. Often times, some parents go outright to

negotiate with officials at examination centres to look the other way, and allow their wards to cheat in examination halls, or help in sending unauthorized materials to them. Some go directly to the examination bodies to negotiate higher scores for their children/wards.

- iv. **School Administrators:** Most school administrators in private, government and Mission schools such as headmasters/headmistress, principals often times are shamefully involved in examination malpractice to maintain “100% pass” in public examinations.
- v. **Private School Proprietors/Proprietresses:** These groups of people take part in examination malpractice for the reasons of obtaining increase in enrolment for more personal financial benefits. Again, most proprietors/proprietress of private schools get involved in examination malpractices of various forms to increase or maintain the popularity in/of their schools.
- vi. **The Government:** The government at various levels also contributes indirectly to encourage examination malpractice in areas of poor condition of service to teachers and setting unrealistic and intimidation standards/expectations. Teachers are very poorly paid and so often engage in long strikes which often result in pupils/students staying more at home than being in schools, yet they have to face public examinations. Some state governments require their principals to record certain percentage pass by students in their schools or face sack, demotion or stagnation. Such policy definitely encourages cheating by principals.
- vii. **The Society:** The Nigerian society views certificate as evidence or proof of knowledge, rather than skills exhibition. Every parent is eager to see his/her child obtain 5-10 credits at O’ level at a sitting. We all are in a hurry, and so pay extra for the children to go to rural areas to register for examinations where cheating is at a very high rate.
- viii. **Examination Bodies/Invigilators:** Many examination officers who conduct examinations for West African Examination Council (WAEC), National Examination Council (NECO) and Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) are perpetrators of examination malpractice. Money is at the centre of the many reasons these officers refuse to adhere to examination ethics.

- ix. **Poor/Inadequate Infrastructure:** Most examination halls are grossly inadequate for examinations, no adequate writing desks, no adequate lighting, no good ventilation etc. Most often, overcrowding and discomfort due to poor facilities, aid cheating in examination.
- x. **The Law Enforcement Agents:** Unfortunately for Nigeria, the law enforcement agents such as the police personnel often drafted to maintain discipline, keep rules and regulations, are often greatly involved in examination malpractice. They do this by collecting large sums of money from students and school authorities to allow students to cheat during examinations. This in itself is very disappointing for a developing nation like Nigeria.

CAUSES OF EXAMINATION MALPRACTICE

Examination Malpractice is caused by many factors which include:-

- A. Students Factors:** The students are the primary culprits in all matters of examination malpractice. Factors under student issues include:
 - i) Laziness and lack of interest in academic work. Most students are generally lazy, they do not attend classes as at when due, and so become ill-prepared for examinations. Students often think they will be helped during examinations, therefore they pay little or no attention to hard work.
 - ii) Inability of the students to cope with school work (examinations expectations).
 - iii) Inadequate preparation for examination by the students is another major student factor that contributes to examination malpractice. Most students have very poor study habits and cannot cover their syllabuses before examination.
 - vi) The desire to pass examination at all cost to please parents and themselves, even when they have little or no preparation before examination.
 - v) Poor self-respect/self-discipline and low self-esteem by students. Most students lack self-confidence to face examination on their own without being helped to pass.
 - vi) Poor value orientation. The students in this 21st century have lost values like honesty, integrity and self-respect, hence cheating in examinations.
 - vii) Wrong choice of subjects of study/career. Some students make wrong choices in school subjects due to ignorance, parental pressure and other personal reasons leading to poor performance in their academic work and ill-preparation for

examinations. They resort to examination malpractice to survive in the school system.

- vii) On the part of the students also is the issue of stress and anxiety in trying to meet the various demands of subjects often lead to examination malpractice.

B. Teachers/School Administrators'/Proprietors' Factors

Some teachers, school administrators and proprietors of private schools are just dishonest and allow themselves to be involved in examination malpractice. The “my school scored 100%” syndrome, also contributes to examination malpractice by this group of stakeholders. Some teachers are lazy and unable to cover the stipulated syllabuses in subjects they teach, leading to the students being ill-prepared for examination, and therefore pushed into malpractices during examination.

C. Undue Emphasis on Certificate

In Nigeria, there is undue emphasis placed on certificates, and this causes examination malpractice. The certificate mentality has made Nigerians to perceive education as being synonymous with obtaining certificate as the only means of getting a job. As a result of this trend and pressure, honesty in examination is no longer a cherished value. The economy in the country also causes examination malpractice. The officials who are responsible for conducting public examinations as well as teachers, invigilators/supervisors have low income to meet their ever-growing human needs/wants, and so they often see examination malpractice as a quick way of getting money to meet these needs (Joshua, 2008).

D. None Application of Sanctions by Government

The relevant laws in the school system have prescribed different sanctions for different forms of examination malpractice. But often times, the government agencies (which include school administrators, Ministry of Education, University senates, governing boards, etc) do not have or display the willpower to enforce the relevant sanctions and punish the offenders. This nonchalance or impotence on the part of agencies/bodies to implement the laws encourages other people to perpetuate EM, as “nothing will happen, even when caught”.

E. Environmental Factors

Most examination centres in Nigeria do not have enough writing desks for students, and other necessary facilities. This often results in over-crowding and cheating during examinations. Within the learning environment (classrooms), most teachers have obsolete instructional materials and unexciting classroom environments that are not conducive for teaching and learning.

F. Poor Library Facilities

Most secondary schools have very poor and inadequate library facilities that are of little or no use to both students and staff. Some libraries, where they exist are filled with outdated books with non-usable information.

RECOMMENDATIONS ON MANAGEMENT/INTERVENTION STRATEGIES OF EXAMINATION MALPRACTICE

Combating examination malpractice is one major challenge needed in the management of examination crises, and it is a battle that must be fought and won in public and internal examinations by all stakeholders in education. Many strategies could be used in managing examination malpractice. They include the following:

1. The students should determine by themselves not to be involved in examination malpractice. Parents should encourage hard work and help their children to prepare well for examination, rather than provide money to aid cheating. The value of honesty should be inculcated into students by their parents/guardians.
2. The government should recruit only well qualified and disciplined teachers to teach. The teachers themselves should be disciplined as educators, cover their syllabuses before examinations. The teachers should consciously bring honour and respect to themselves by refusing to be bribed with money or any other incentive to perpetrate examination malpractice.
3. The parents/guardians as a matter of honour should desist from providing money to their wards for examination malpractice of any form. They should also inculcate into the children values of hard work, honesty, diligence and integrity in their studies.
4. School administrators in private, government and Mission schools should maintain integrity and stop the “my school normally makes 100% success” syndrome at public examinations. They should rather work hard to maintain

discipline in schools for greater academic output in both staff and students, rather than provide enabling environment for cheating.

5. The government at different levels should pay priority attention to the educational sector. A nation with faulty educational system through poor infrastructure and poor remuneration, is bound to face disasters such as collapsed buildings and bridges, which we are experiencing frequently now in Nigeria. Therefore, the government should implement without delay, the Teachers Salary Scale (TSS) for motivation of our teachers. Teaching should be made attractive with good pay and incentives. More classrooms/examination halls should be built. Infact, each secondary school should have "Examination Hall" of sitting capacity of 500-1000, well spaced, ventilated and away from noise.

The government should give accelerated promotion to teachers and school administrators whose schools do not record examination malpractice in any public examination. This will motivate the honest teachers and cause the corrupt ones to desist from taking part in examination malpractice.

6. The educational policy for the nation should include the teaching of "values" from nursery to tertiary levels of education in the country.
7. In the society, emphasis on "certificate" should be reduced and re-focused on skill acquisition. This will help to reduce the craze for obtaining "credits" at public examinations at all cost. The public needs to encourage hard work by awarding scholarship to hard working and honest students in the various schools.
8. Examination Bodies should strictly monitor their staff before, during and after every examination, and any staff involved in examination malpractice, of any form should be dismissed from office to serve as a deterrent to upcoming or existing perpetrators of examination malpractice.
9. The conduct of oral examinations should be encouraged to avoid massive examination malpractice. Oral/practical examinations should be conducted for true test of knowledge at the various domains of learning—cognitive, affective and psychomotor.
10. Law Enforcement Officers should be well paid by their employers to reduce collection of bribe to perpetrate examination malpractice.
11. Law against examination malpractice should be enforced fully without fear or favour. There should be no sacred cows, all offenders, including students, examination officials, teachers and school administrators should be punished.

12. Research on examination malpractice should be continuous to uncover new forms of cheating and to assist in decision-making. The results of such researches should be made public for the benefit of all stakeholders in the education of the Nation's youths.
13. Creating awareness on the ill effects of examination malpractice on all aspects of our economy through seminars and workshops for teachers, parents and officials of examination bodies, should be a frequent programme to discourage involvement in cheating at examinations. The awareness could also include the running of Radio/Television jingles against examination malpractice at close intervals, for public information.
14. Examination malpractice is a behaviour; therefore, the Faith-Based Organizations should be up to their responsibilities by stressing the religious aspects of upright living and change in behaviour in the society, rather than dwell much on prosperity messages without emphasis on hard work, honesty and integrity, particularly during examinations. This is very crucial since the students belong to different religious groups in the country.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Examination malpractice is dishonesty during examinations. Many forms and dimensions do exist. All stakeholders in education seem to be guilty in perpetrating this monster. Many causes have been identified and many intervention strategies have been presented in this paper.

In conclusion, examination malpractice has come to be a monster among us, and poses a very serious threat to educational standards and credibility of certificates awarded in Nigeria. Examination malpractice should be the concern of every well meaning Nigerian, and all hands must be on deck to curb this menace. Teachers in particular who prepare children for examination and their future, and who are invigilators most of the times have the key to curbing this menace. Until teachers rise up with the support of school administrators/proprietors and parents, against examination malpractice, this monster, will continue to loom in our midst, destroy our fabric gradually, and violently consume us ultimately. We must not allow this, to happen. That is why all the stakeholders in the school system and everyone in the entire Nation should rise-up to wage a relentless war on examination malpractice.

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