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EXAMINATION MALPRACTICE IN NIGERIAN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS OF LEARNING: DIMENSIONS, CAUSES AND IMPLICATIONS

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Abstract

The objective of higher education is to prepare future leaders for challenges in the society and therefore develop them to suit manpower requirements. This training therefore involves examination assessment from time to time in order to ascertain the level of knowledge and competence of the students. However, the over dependency on certificate has led to a mad rush by most people to try to acquire certificates either legitimately or illegitimately. Thus many candidates displayed various acts of academic dishonesty in examination, otherwise called examination malpractice. This paper takes a general look at the dimensions of examination malpractice, its multifarious causes and implications, and Suggest solutions aimed at curbing this phenomenon.

KEY WORDS: Examination, Giraffe Method, Leakages, Malpractice, Students, Teachers, Tertiary Institutions.

Introduction

One among many in the multitudes of deviant acts perpetrated by Nigerian Youths in the formal school system is the acts of examination malpractice. According to Oluyeba (1998):

Examination malpractice has become a recurring decimal in educational assessment in Nigeria. Apart from its frequent and increasing occurrences, examination malpractice has eaten deeply like canker-worms into the fabric of the nation's educational system as it has become a pollutant, which is having a serious debilitating effect on the assessment of curriculum objectives.

Passing examination has been erroneously conceived by many students as "life and death struggle", as passing examination to secure certificates is to many people the main goal of going to school rather than acquiring useful knowledge with which to cope with the demands of modern life. This attitude of an average Nigerian has made some people to doubt the validity and authentication of certificate issued to candidates at all levels of education. 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 this "critical path" as a means of attaining academic success from the primary to the tertiary levels (Oluyeba, 1998).

Examination malpractice is fast becoming an aspect of the student culture in higher educational institutions regardless of the school authority's preventive and punitive measures to discourage examination cheats. For instance, partial or total cancellation of results, suspension or expulsion of students from schools and the 21-years imprisonment stipulated by the Miscellaneous Offences Decree 20 of 1984, have not really deterred the culprits from the fraudulent practice (Oyekan, 1996). Also, according to the News Bulletin of Adeyemi College of Education, Ondo (June, 2005), 30 students of Adeyemi College of Education, Ondo who cheated in the Harmattan Semester Examinations of 2004/2005 academic year were subjected to a new disciplinary sanction of suspension from the college for either 4 or 5 academic sessions. But it is disheartening to note that this stringent measure did not deter some students as many other candidates were still caught cheating in the following Rain Semester Examinations of 2004/2005 session. This act does not only pose a veritable threat to the continued professional development of teachers but it is also capable of undermining the much needed morality vital to the overall productive education and progress of the society.

It is necessary at this juncture to undertake a theoretical discussion or definition of the concept of examination malpractice in order to place issues in proper perspective, Olumero (1992) defines examination malpractice as any examination not conducted in accordance with specified norms set up by the Examining Institution, Oluyeba and Daramola (1992) view examination malpractice as any irregular behavior exhibited by candidates or anybody charged with the conduct of examination in or outside the examination hall before, during or after such an examination. Oyekan (1996) is of the view that delicate acts of indiscipline adopted by the students or their privilege accomplices to secure facile success and advantage before, during or after the administration of tests and examinations are referred to as examination malpractices. From the various definitions above, it is clear that examination malpractice involves all types of irregularities or illegal behaviors which characterised examination and compromises its ability or credibility as a valid test of students competence and knowledge.

This paper takes a general look at the dimensions of examination malpractice in tertiary institutions, and its causes. It also discusses its implications and effects and proffers suggestions aimed at curbing this problem. The paper is concluded with a number of submissions on how examination malpractice could be effectively tackled in the tertiary institutions.

Dimensions of Examination Malpractice

Students of tertiary institutions have perfected various forms or techniques of cheating before, during and after the examinations in a desperate attempt to pass examinations. Some of these methods can be gleaned below.

I. Access to Examination Questions through Leakages

Leakages of examination question papers sometimes come through lecturers, faculty officers and examination officers. Students collect large amount of money and give to the above

- named accomplices so that examination questions can be leaked (Sofola, 2004). Observations have indicated that when students have access to life questions, students tend to carry out their dubious acts by preparing the questions on answer scripts and smuggling them into examination rooms for submission. Some clever ones among them may take the life questions to friends or even teachers to discuss before the real examination. This helps them to do better in the examination,

II. The Pairing Method

This method of cheating in examination is through collusion between two or more candidates who usually agree before hand to sit together and receive assistance from themselves. This formation of examination alliance is usually between the brilliant and dull students (Oyekan, 1996).

III. Impersonation

This method of cheating is also very common in our Tertiary Institutions. It is a malpractice in which a student who writes gets paid or sometimes gets coerced to go and sit for the real candidate in order to Pass the examination on behalf of the other candidate (Sofola, 2004). Some students have been found guilty of this act in Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye and have been expelled (OOU News, July 2006).

IV. The Giraffe Method

This method of cheating during examinations involves students stretching their necks unusually in order to have access to what others have written down with the intention of copying them (Ogunmola, 1998).

V. Copying from Handouts, Textbooks and Notes

Some fraudulent students often bring into the examination halls their notes, textbooks and handouts and copy directly from them. These materials may be hidden under their desks and are brought out for copying whenever the invigilator is out of sight.

VI. Prepared Jottings

Many of the students often bring prepared jottings to the examination hall. These jottings are key points in their notes or jottings on the life questions seen before the actual examinations. Most of these jottings are done on small sheet of papers, receipts, handkerchiefs, rulers, underwear; laps, palms and tissue papers; while most of the jottings done by some of the students on sheet of papers, handkerchief and tissue papers are kept in the private parts, socks, mathematical set box, pockets, pants, brassieres, under their shoes, and outside the examination hall which they take when they pretend to go to the toilet (Yakubu, 1998).

VII. External Assistance Method.

Some students nowadays adopt the method whereby they smuggle out examination questions when they are being distributed by the invigilators. They pass them to other friends who could help them answer the questions and later sneak out of examination hall under the pretext of going to the toilet to retrieve the answered Scripts and submit them to the invigilators.

VIII. Non-Submission of Answer Scripts

Occasionally, students may not submit their answer scripts at the end of the examinations, it could be as a result of their feelings that they have not done well in the examinations. They later raise alarm and pretend that the examiner has lost their scripts.

XI. Exchange of Examination papers

Students often pass their questions on which some answers are written, to their friends to aid them.

X. Other General Methods

Other unwholesome happenings inside and outside the examination halls include stealing of people's work, converting or misappropriating the scripts of other candidates, substitution of scripts at the end of the examination (known among students' as DHL); while there are those called 'towing', 'ECOMOG', and so on, which involve candidates arranging with people before hand to assist them in writing examinations (Sofola, 2004). Other methods also include substituting worked scripts during or after the examinations and inflation of examinations scores and grades. These methods often stem out of collusion between lecturers and candidates to cheat in examinations (Oyekan, 1996).

According to Sofola (2001), mass cheating is another dimension that examination malpractice has assumed, while the whole thing nowadays has become much more _ sophisticated with the use of electronically assisted materials like calculators, palm tops (which are mini-computers) and which are brought in unnoticed. Such materials also include organizers, small-sized compact discs, mobile phones, though not allowed in examination halls, are being smuggled in, because messages could be texted to them in the examination hall.

These multifarious techniques employed by the students to cheat in examinations and the large number of students affected in our tertiary institutions is a pointer to the fact that this crisis situation is definitely unhealthy to viable intellectual and manpower development in a developing nation like Nigeria. Table I below shows that between 1990 and 1997 about 4426 undergraduate students were reprimanded in some tertiary institutions in Nigeria for examination malpractices, while a greater number would have clearly escaped apprehension (JayeolaOmoyeni, 1999).

Table I: Students Reprimanded for Examination Malpractices in some Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria Between 1990 and 1997.

S/NO	Tertiary Institutions	Years
1	Federal University of Technology, Akure	446
2	Lagos State University, Ijanikin	724
3	Obafemi Awolowo University, Ife-Ife	867
4	Ondo State University, Ado-Ekiti	248
5	University of Ibadan, Ibadan	546
6	University of Ilorin, Ilorin	536
7	Adeyemi College of Education, Ikere-Ekiti	348
8	Osun State College of Education, Ikere-Ekiti	602
9	Osun State College of Education, Ilesha	109
	Total	4426

Sources: Compiled by Jayeola-Omoyeni (1999) from the Institutions' News Bulletins and

Academic Affairs Offices.

Causes of Examination Malpractice

Some of the major factors responsible for examination malpractice in our tertiary institutions are explored under this section.

I. Laziness and Nonchalant Attitudes Towards Academic Work

Laziness and inability of the students to apply themselves to the tasks which they have come to do in the higher institutions in the country cause cheating during examinations by some students. According to Akinola and Agun (1999), laziness of students manifests in forms of being absent from lecture for no just cause, engaging in late hour preparation for test or examination, and lack of planned personal academic programme which results in haphazard preparation and execution of academic exercise. Some other categories of students especially some of the females are also involved in sex commercialization or prostitution in their inordinate desire to accumulate wealth and hence would not have time for their academic work. Such ladies (usually called 'Aristo') always disappear from campuses with some opulent "Sugar Daddies" for some days of the week before returning back to the campuses again. Thus due to laziness and care-free or hedonistic lifestyles, such students in their bid to cover up their inefficiencies would invariably engage in cheating during examination, since they would not be well prepared for the examination.

II. Anxiety or Lack of Self-Confidence to Succeed

The incidence of examination malpractice at times could be due to the candidate's fear of failure and lack of confidence to succeed. Some students are imprisoned by anxiety in the form of uncontrolled fear (otherwise referred to as 'examination fever'). When examination comes such students are usually prone to cheat in examination in a bid to make up for their poor preparation.

III. Poor Teaching

Some students take to examination malpractice as a result of their not understanding the courses being taught by the teachers due to defective teaching methods. At times, this may be because such students are not taught properly by the teacher. Some lecturers are so engrossed with the sale of handouts to students and will not do meaningful or quality teaching in the classrooms, while others may be engaged in other profitable ventures in order to make ends meet as they are not motivated enough to face the teaching profession solely. Closely related to this factor is the inadequate coverage of course syllabus by such lecturers.

IV. Emphasis on Certificates

Passing examination to secure certificates is to many people the main goal of going to school rather than acquiring useful knowledge with which to cope with the demands of modern life. Hence, passing examination has now become "life and death struggle" (Oluyeba, 1998). Thus, over dependency on certificate has led to a mad rush by most people to try to acquire certificates either legitimately or illegitimately (Sofola, 2004).

V. Other General Causes

According to Oyekan (1996), other causes of examination malpractice include insufficient

conducive instructional facilities, poor invigilation in congested rooms, disclosure of likely topics or questions, influence of bad peer groups, pressure from the parents and absence of stringent punishment for examination cheats. Also, administrative lapses and overloaded examination time-table do not help the situation. For instance, some students are made to write two or more papers in a day and in some cases, at a rate of three days in succession (Akinola and Agun, 1999).

Implications and Effects of Examination Malpractice

It is clear from the above survey that examination malpractice is both a legal and moral issue that should be seriously addressed and it has serious implications and effects which affect the students, the school authorities, the parents and the society at large. Some of these implications and effects are highlighted below.

I. Threat to the Education System

According to Boateng (1979), the rampant examination leakages, irregularities and malpractices which have become 'a serious moral scourge in the country constitute one of the sources of the greatest threat to the nation's education system. This has made some people to doubt the validity and authenticity of certificates issued to candidates at the tertiary level of education. Also, examination malpractice has negated one of the vital objectives of conducting examinations. It has deprived both the assessor and the candidates alike the opportunity of determining how much knowledge a learner has acquired in relation to the desired objectives of the curriculum.

II. Destroys the Moral Integrity of the Culprits

Fraudulent practices in examination not only destroy the moral integrity of the culprits, it also gives them false sense of value and false impression of their capabilities. The dangers examination malpractice pose include perpetual condemnation of one's conscience whereby the carrier of the fake certificate is constantly under the persecution of carrying something that is false; and this also leads to professional inefficiency as the carrier knows that he is not entitled to what he is carrying (Sofola, 2004).

III. Frustration and Loss of Self-confidence

Another danger of examination malpractices is that it paves way to frustration and loss' of self confidence in the culprits. When invariably these culprits are caught, they are usually punished.

This could be suspension or expulsion. Others in addition face prosecution which might lead to imprisonment or paying heavy fines. Thus, they bring shame and embarrassment to their families and schools and dent the society and also spill over to the parents and relations.

IV. Menace to the Society

Culprits involved in examination malpractice constitute a menace to the society as they will go into the society to exhibit the performance premised on hypocrisy. According to Akinola and Agun (1999), such will include those teachers who will not teach their students all that is needed to be taught and when examination comes, they will engage in the unholy acts of leaking examination questions and answers to students. Also, the same thing applies to the businessmen who will not be found in their offices or in attendance of business meetings but who will be all over the places living flamboyant lives with loans secured for their businesses to cover up their

inefficiency in business operations. Undoubtedly, such culprits who join politics and find their ways into public offices will become economic saboteurs as they would take to corruption. Those who are expelled from the Tertiary Institutions form a frightening proportion of the drop-outs with its attendant negative social consequences. For instance, they would eventually be at the forefront of armed robbery, cultism, ethnic militia and political thuggery and electoral rigging in the society.

Thus all hands must be on deck to curb this problem in view of its negative implications and effects generally.

Remedies for Examination Malpractice

The following suggestions can be put forward, though some of these suggestions have been put into use at various times. What is needed is to have the will and resources to carry them out.

First, the increasing trends in examination malpractice make the establishment of Guidance and Counselling unit an essential component of higher education system. Its functions may include regular provision of academic guidance, reduction of stress, remediation of students' problems and enlightenment discussions to refrain students from examination malpractice.

Second, the parents and guardians are enjoined to provide their wards with all necessities of education such as upkeep allowances, textbooks, items of stationery and clothes in order to ensure more concentration on their academic work.

Also, teachers should cautiously avoid unwholesome familiarity with and gratification from the students so as to prevent unnecessary emotional attachment, leakage or inflation of examination scores, mid grades before knowing the dire consequences. According to Oyekan (1996), all students should be equally and equitably treated and assessed with marking guides that are humanly consistent with the learning objectives. When regular class attendance is taken and incorporated into the continuous assessment, many students will brace up to the expectations of their academic work for greater achievement.

Moreover teachers should be motivated the more through enhanced salary package so that they can be more dedicated to their jobs. This might help in solving the problems of poor teaching and poor assessment techniques. If teachers have better recognition, the 'settlement saga' whereby teachers are bribed for marks will be a thing of the past.

Furthermore, the school authorities should plan the school examinations carefully in order to avoid unnecessary lapses which may lead to examination leakages. They should, provide tight security for production and keeping of examination questions. They should ensure thorough invigilation and adequate spacing of students in the examination halls, proper identification and searching of students before entering the examination rooms and utilize only honest and senior cadre officers who have their jobs to protect jealously for examination activities. Also, tertiary institution managers should ensure that lecturing was effective before conducting examination. Lecture effectiveness in terms of adequate coverage of the academic programme both by lecturers and students, irrespective of how many times the institution was closed down. Production and sale of handouts should be regulated by the institution and any abuse should be restrained and sanctioned. There should also be instant appropriate punishment for examination cheats and their accomplices.

Again, public enlightenment of students and parents on dangers of examination malpractice would be helpful. The dangers inherent in examination malpractice will be explained to the students and parents during public enlightenment programmes and parents' fora. The purpose is to enhance moral rectitude and dissuade the parents from aiding their children to commit

fraudulent practice during examinations. Also, parents should be counselled about the need to allow their children or wards go into professions they have abilities for and not the ones they feel they should do. Thus, students who are not academically inclined should be enlisted in vocational schools where they can be better actualised.

Finally, the craze for certificates should be de-emphasised. Since emphasis has been placed on the attainment of certificates for recognition for placement at work and remuneration in Nigeria today, hence everybody wants the certificate at all costs. If emphasis is on skill competency and certificates, it is more likely that success would be sought through personal efforts in our educational institutions. Thus emphasis on skill competency rather than certificates alone should be reflected in all interviews and promotion exercises in all sectors of the economy.

It is clear from the above suggestions, that it needs the concerted efforts of the whole society to eradicate the phenomenon of examination malpractice as it has become a canker-worm that has eaten deep into the fabric of the Nigerian educational system. This critical problem could take quite some time, but it is not an impossible task.

Conclusion

This paper has taken a general look at the incidence of examination malpractice in Nigerian tertiary institutions of learning. Some of the various techniques of cheating, students of tertiary institutions have perfected in a desperate attempt to pass examinations as highlighted in this paper include: access to examination questions through leakages, the pairing method, impersonation, the giraffe method, prepared jottings, external assistance method and so on.

Also, the major causes of examination malpractice in our tertiary institutions examined in the paper include: laziness and non-chalant attitudes towards academic work, anxiety or lack of self-confidence to succeed and emphasis on certificates, on the part of the students, and poor teaching on the other hand, on the part of the lecturers.

Moreso, the implications and ruinous effects of examination malpractice could be seen in the threat it posed to the education system, the destruction of the moral integrity of the culprits and frustration and loss of self confidence on the part of the affected students and in the menace the problem constitutes to the society.

Finally, the paper is concluded with a number of submissions on how examination malpractice could be effectively tackled in the tertiary institutions.

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