

INNOVATION STRATEGIES FOR CURBING EXAMINATION MALPRACTICE IN PUBLIC EXAMINATIONS IN NIGERIA

OWO EMMANUEL CHINONSO

E-mail: emmanuelsonco@gmail.com

Department of Council Matter,
Registry Division

Abstract

Examination occupies a very strategic position in our lives especially in education sector. Teachers rely on them for a comprehensive evaluation of their students to decide whether a student merits being promoted to another level. Despite the strategic importance of examination, the integrity and credibility of public examinations have been greatly eroded and tarnished with increasing incidence of examination malpractice. This paper defined the concept of examination malpractice, trends in examination malpractice in Nigeria, forms of examination malpractice and innovation strategies to curb examination malpractice in Nigeria. Finally, while emphasizing the urgent need for institutions to embrace integrity on a sustainable basis, the paper x-rayed what the stakeholders should do to remedy the odious and unacceptable act of examination malpractices.

Introduction

Sustainable development requires the availability of competent and committed human resources. Using education as a tool, the government hopes to produce manpower that will serve in different capacities and contribute positively to the nation's socio-economic and political development. In Nigeria, achievements at any level of education are crowned with certification for those who successfully completed the course of study with good academic records. Thus, at the end of secondary school education, students are expected to sit for public examinations such as the West African Senior School Certificate Examinations (WASSCE), conducted by West African Examination Council (WAEC), Senior School Certificate (SSCE), conducted by National Examination Council (NECO), the National Technical and Business Certificate Examinations (NTCE/NBCE), also conducted by the National Business and Technical Examinations Board (NABTEB). In addition, there are various certificate examinations conducted by the Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) for admission into Universities, Polytechnics and Colleges of Education. Examinations occupy a very strategic position in our lives (educational and industrial) today. Teachers and counsellors rely on them for a comprehensive evaluation of their students and clients. To decide whether a student merits being promoted to another class, a series of achievement tests that will eventually culminate in a well - founded decision has to be given. In industrial setting, experts in human relations and employment bureaux utilise tests in reaching a decision as to the

employability of an individual applicant. Despite the strategic importance of examination or test taking for diagnostic, placement, classification and quality control in Nigerian institutions, the integrity and credibility of public examinations have been greatly eroded and corrupted with increasing incidence of examination malpractice. Olagboye 2014, lamented that, the situation appears so bad that many Nigerians and interested stakeholders including employers of labour have almost lost confidence in the values of examinations and their results. In a study conducted by Arijesuyc 2010, he warned that Government and major stakeholders should feel sufficiently concerned because of the threat of examination malpractice to the educational system and national development. He further noted that, the majority, scope and sophistication of examination malpractice in the country, has rendered the products, and credentials of the schools doubtful. Each year billions of Naira is lost by parents and governments when examination bodies cancelled hundreds of thousands of results as a result of examination irregularities. Describing the trend which examination malpractice has taken since the last decade, Arijesuyo 2010 observed that Examination malpractice had become a well-organized business in which supervisors/invigilators of examination subject teachers and even school authorities and their host communities have played prominent roles. It is no longer news that invigilators are often beaten up by desperate students who accuse such invigilators of standing in their way to cheat. Ukoha (2017) reported that some host communities in Nigeria have chased away invigilators considered to be uncooperative during examinations all in the name of securing key to success for their wards. From the foregoing therefore, one may conclude that various group of people partakes in encouraging examination malpractices. Most of the time, the family, the school and the society serve as reinforcers that promote anti-social behaviours of examination malpractice. This paper therefore examines the concept of examination malpractice, trends in examination malpractices in Nigeria, forms of examination malpractice and innovation strategies to curb examination malpractice in public examinations.

Meaning of Examination Malpractice

Examination malpractice is any illegal act committed by a student single handled or in collaboration with others like fellow students, parents, teachers, supervisors, invigilators, printers and anybody or group of people before, during or after examinations in order to obtain undeserved marks or grades (Adesina, 2015). The means of perpetrating this illegal act may range from bringing in un- authorized materials to the examination hall, disrupting the conduct of examinations, buying examination papers, changing of grades after examination and impersonation to using money or candidate's body to earn marks. Examination malpractices constitute one of the greatest problems that have generated a lot of discussions among Nigerians because it threatens the very foundation of the educational system. Examination as an instrument for decision-making, is always prone to fear and anxiety. Many examinees would want to pass the examination by all means. Also, many school authorities and parents would want to explore means of getting good

grades for their students and children. Hence, they resort to different forms of malpractices before, during and after examinations. According to Adesira 2015, examination malpractices include leaking out questions to students, giraffing and smuggling of material into examination hall. Others are deliberate extension of time by supervisors and invigilators, change of scores, buying and selling of examination grades, question papers and prepared answers, and trading sex for question papers, marks and grades. Also, Ekukugho 2011, identified impersonation, collusion between candidates, collusion between candidates and officials, assault and intimidation, mass cheating, teacher-student affair, bribery, spying, submission of multiple scripts, use of coded or sign language, multiple entry for the same examination among others, as different forms of malpractices in Nigeria.

Trends in Examination Malpractices in Nigeria

The phenomenon of examination malpractice is not new in Nigeria and indeed all over the world. In Nigeria, the history of examination malpractices could be traced back to the colonial days when the “Nigerian Chronicle” of January 9, 1912 widely reported how the questions of Senior Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate leaked (Fasasi, 2018). After independence, there was hardly any year when there was no examination malpractice recorded by the leading examining bodies in Nigeria. Adesina, 2015 reported incidences of examinations leakages in West African Examination Council (WAEC) papers in 1963, 1967, 1971, 1977 and 1981 as a result of which administrative panels of enquiry were set up. The Federal Government panel of enquiry was set up to investigate the 1977 examination leakage; the panel recommended as follows; “sanctions for WAEC officials who were involved in the malpractice, introduction and use of continuous assessment as a factor for award of certificate and shedding of WAEC workload and the establishment of new examination bodies” (Adesina, 2015). Consequently, new examination bodies were established. These were Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) established in 1978 now renamed Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) in 2010 to conduct matriculation examinations for admission into universities, polytechnics and colleges of education; National Business and Technical Examination Board (NABTEB) established in 1992 to conduct business and technical examinations; National Board for Educational Measurement (NBEM) established in 1992 and changed to National Examination Council (NECO) in 1999 to conduct school certificate examination (Arijesuyo, 2010). As a result of the alarming and worrisome trends in the figures and statistics of examination fraud given by the leading examination bodies in respect of post- primary public exit examinations in recent years, and the attendance crises on the country’s educational system, a number of legislative and administrative promulgation were enacted by the Federal government between 1984 and 2000. The Federal Government’s promulgation of Decree 20 in 1984, which stipulated a 21-year jail term for those found guilty of examination malpractice. Also, there was decree 33 of 1999 stipulating imprisonment for a term up to five years or fine of N50,

000.00 to N100,000.00 for any person convicted of examination malpractice (Arijesuyo; 2010). In spite of these measures, the menace continued to occur in virtually all public and institutionally organized examinations and the situation appears to have defied recommended solutions. Despite all the efforts of the government, examining bodies and other major stakeholders in the nation's educational industry at curbing the problem of examination malpractices, it has remained persistent and intractable. The West African Examination Council (WAEC) annual statistical report of examination malpractice for the WAEC/SSCE post-primary exit examinations between 2000 and 2010 indicated that 781,019 (8.25%) of 9,465,978 candidates who sat for WASSCE were either withheld or cancelled during the period as a result of examination malpractice. The report further showed that the national Examination Malpractice Index (EMI) has remained persistently high ranging between 5.47 and 12.87 during the period surveyed. This means that of every 100 students who wrote WAEC between the period of 2000 and 2010 in Nigeria, at least 8 of them were involved in examination malpractice. Arising from the above considerations and coupled with the commitment of Federal Government to implement the decisions reached at its summit on "Confronting the scourge of examination malpractice: Threat to the Nigerian Educational system", held between 21st and 22nd of August 2006, the Federal Ministry of Education in 2007 blacklisted and derecognized 324 secondary schools across the nation as centres for conducting public examinations from 2007 to 2010. In order to further explain the sophistication of examination malpractices in Nigeria, JAMB's public relations officer confirmed in 2007, that two candidates were caught during the 16 May, 2007 University Matriculation Examinations (UME) having received text messages on their phones and the text messages received were seen to contain information relevant to the examination that was in progress. Such problems led to the resolve by the Nigerian Universities to conduct post-UME examinations to further screen the candidates before admission since they doubt the validity of the UME scores of the prospective students. Similarly, available record from the National Examination Council (NECO) indicates that 6,465 cases of examination malpractice were recorded in the 2020 Senior School Certificate (NECO) Examination, whereas in 2019, 17,004 cases were recorded (Premium Times May 6, 2021). From the report above, it could be concluded that this national problem which started as a mustard seed in form of mere cheating in early 60's to collusion in the 70's, smuggling in of scripts into the hall in the 80's and later metamorphosed to impersonation, and hiring of contractors in the 90's has today grown to become an organised crime among the stakeholders. It is now like a fig tree. And the problem is still pending in the Nigerian society.

Forms of Examination Malpractice

1. Impersonation: Impersonation is the hiring of touts to write examination by appearing in the halls as the genuine candidates. Atonka (2010), stated that it involves male candidates sitting in for girls and verse versa in some sensitive papers, twins writing examinations for each other in connivance with the school examination officers/invigilators or supervisors and other examination officials.
2. Collusion: This arises when an assigned invigilator or supervisor is receiving or giving assistance to candidates in the examination hall for gratification.
3. Examination leakages: This is a situation where question papers are seen by candidates prior to the writing of the examinations and are traceable to the printing press or persons connected with the custody of the question papers.
4. Mass cheating: This is a traceable large scale organized cheating involving school authorities, examination officials and candidates through the answering of the questions on the chalkboard for the candidates to copy.
5. Smuggling of answer scripts: This involves candidates having external assistance to take to and fro the examination hall answer scripts duly prepared by syndicates in connivance with invigilators and/or supervisors and other examination officials.
6. Dubbing: Dubbing is an arrangement involving the invigilators or supervisors whereby candidates are allowed to copy from each other in the hall.
7. Insult/Assault on Supervisor, Invigilators/ Inspectors by candidates: This takes the form of beating of examination officials, destruction of examination official's cars and manhandling of examination officials and/or using indecent language on supervisors and invigilators who fail to cooperate with them.
8. Bringing foreign materials into the examination hall: Such as textbooks, cribs, past questions papers either containing numerous notes or used as disguise for current ones that have been smuggled out, photocopies of prepared answers.
9. Procurement of answer booklets: This is one of the ways the syndicate operates; whereby they have enough current answer booklets through the assistance of the examination body personnel. They tactically exchange written answer booklets with their candidates before stoppage time and/or in connivance with the school examination officer and the assigned supervisor.
10. Enrolling syndicate and self: This happens during the enrolment, the syndicate will be enrolled alongside with the candidate using fake names. in the examination hall, the syndicate will be doing the writing and at the end exchange answer booklet with the candidate.
11. Inscription: Students have now advanced to the level of inscribing materials or information on anything like parts of their body, for example palms, thighs, baby pampers; dresses, handkerchiefs, rulers, purses, chairs, tables, walls of examination halls and so on. Some student even code points and synthesize their notes in such a way that they will be the only one that could understand and use them for cheating.

12. **Personality Connection:** There are cases where some influential students make use of godfathers in politics, economic high towers, parents, and cult members to influence the outcome of examinations.

Innovation Strategies to Curb Examination Malpractice in Public Examinations in Nigeria

Despite various efforts of the Government and examination bodies to curb the menace of examination malpractice especially in public examinations in Nigeria, the perpetrators kept on devising new strategies to execute the act. It is therefore needful that stringent measures are invented to eradicate examination malpractice in Nigeria. These measures include:

1. **Introduction of web-based biometric data capture:** This is the most suitable means of identifying and authenticating individuals in a reliable and fast way through unique biological characteristics. It involves the computer based registration of candidates for the examination.
2. **Biometric verification of candidates:** This involves the identification and verification of candidates for the examination based on recognizable and verifiable data. It compares data for the person's characteristics to that person's biometric template to determine resemblance.
3. **Introduction of Computer Based Test (CBT):** This is a paperless process by which examinations are designed, developed, delivered and scored by computer with the key element of Multiple Choice Question (MCQ) "The questions are authored and loaded onto the servers, these questions are then delivered to the test-taker base on a randomization algorithm. The assessment is marked by the computer and result is instantly made available.
4. **Provision of uniform writing materials to candidates.**
5. **Introduction of customized question paper booklets.**
6. **Installation of Short Message Service (SMS) tracking devices at all examination centres that can access network.**
7. **Screening of candidates with metal detectors.**
8. **Juggling/scrambling of question.**
9. **Installation of Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) cameras in all examination halls to check malpractice.**
10. **Introduction of question paper types.**
11. **The use of security bags to carry examination materials as against metal boxes thereby making the carriage of examination materials very easy and less cumbersome.**
12. **The use of examination watch groups.**
13. **Increase in the number of scanners for speedy processing of candidates scripts.**
14. **Improvement in Examination Administration.**

15. The creation of more examination towns and custodian points for easy distribution and retrieval of examination materials.
16. Upward review of salaries and allowances of examination resource person.
17. Retrieval of examination materials right from the examination day in order to forestall any form of post-examination malpractice.
18. Prohibition of mobile phone in examination hall.
19. Prohibition of the use of ear piece in examination hall.
20. Maintenance of high integrity by examination officials at all times in order to serve as deterrent to other stakeholders.
21. Enormous deployment of security personnel to all exams centres during the conduct of any public examination; and dismissal of any security agent that is caught aiding and abetting examination malpractice.
22. Schools in both rural and urban areas must meet all needed requirements before they are recognized as exams centres. Only the schools that have required facilities must be recognized by the supervisory body.
23. Sending of only credible staff to monitor public examinations by examination monitoring unit of the Ministry of Education and examination bodies.
24. Punishing of schools and individuals involved in examination malpractice.

Conclusion

Examination malpractice, which started in Nigeria as a minor misdemeanour has not only assumed a frightening dimension, it seems to have become a permanent feature of Nigeria education system. Efforts by governments, examining bodies, institutions, individuals and concerned groups towards eradicating it have not yielded meaningful results. Rather, the situation has become worse in recent times. The new trend involves an organized system of the supervisors, invigilators, teachers, and in some cases heads of schools. There is therefore the need for a team effort to stem this social malaise that has become inimical to educational development in the country. Examination malpractice is a social problem that has wrecked unimaginable havoc to the entire fabric of Nigeria. It is a hydra headed problem that requires a multidimensional approach to its resolution. Any effort aimed at resolving this problem must be collaborative, that is, involving all stakeholders in the education sector, if not, such efforts will end up being an exercise in futility.

References

- Adesina, S. (2015). Growth without development: Nigeria's educational experience 1914-2004. Abeokuta: Educational Industries Nigerian Ltd.
- Arijesuyo, A. E., & Adeyoju, C. A. (2010). Effectiveness of cognitive restructuring counselling strategy on students' attitude towards examination malpractice: Implications for social re-engineering. *Nigerian Journal of Applied Clinical & Counselling Psychology*. (In Press).
- Atonko, B. (2010). CAN Holds Education Summit ask Government to Tackle Examination Malpractice through Special Court. *Sunday Trust*, September
- Edukugho, E. (2011). WAEC's Conflicting Results: Minister Blames Lack of Communication for Confusion. *Vanguard Newspaper* 15th September Pg.30
- Ekukugho, R. (2011). WAEC to publish the list of indicted Supervisors, Invigilators. *Vanguard Newspaper* February 17
- Fasasi, Y. A. (2018). Quality Assurance: A Practical Solution To Examination malpractices In Nigerian Secondary
- Olagboye, A. A. (2014). Introduction to educational management in Nigeria. Ibadan: Daily Graphics (Nigeria) Limited
- Omebe, C.A. (2012). Fundamentals of basic science and technology. Fred-Ogah Publishers Emene-Enugu.
- Ukoha, K. (2017, February 17, 18). Names of banned schools. *Week End Times*, p.4
West African Examination Council (2000-2010) Annual Statistical Report of Examination Malpractice.