

Examination Malpractice in Nigeria: Causes and Effects on National Development

C. O. Onyibe¹ Uma U. Uma¹ Emmanuel Ibina²

1. Department of Electrical /Electronic Engineering Technology, Akanu Ibiam Federal Polytechnic, Unwana, P. M. B. 1007, Afikpo, Ebonyi State, Nigeria
2. Ebonyi State Independent Electoral Commission (EBSIEC), Abakaliki, Ebonyi State, Nigeria

Abstract

Education, being a process of teaching and learning is evaluated through examination at the end of the learning period. Examination not only serves as a feedback for the trainer to ascertain the level of knowledge acquisition but also serves as a measure of knowledge retention by the trainee. Any misconduct or irregularity distorts this feedback mechanism and gives a false outcome of the learning process. This paper examines the causes and forms of examination malpractice in Nigeria, the consequences on the national development, previous efforts made at curbing it and recommended ways of eradicating examination malpractice in the country. Relevant journals and conference papers consulted, and the writers' personal experiences during examination invigilation were the sources of data used in the paper. It is discovered that the perennial lack of political will on the part of government to enforce the Decree 20 of 1984 and now, Examination Malpractice Act 33 of 1999 has caused the examination misconduct to remain on the increase in Nigeria. This paper recommends strongly that the Examination Malpractice Act of 1999 should be amended to incorporate that section of Decree 20 of 1984 which stipulated twenty-one years imprisonment without option of a fine for a convicted culprit. And the Act should be diligently enforced no matter whose ox is gored.

Keywords: Education, Examination Malpractice, Institutions, National Development

1. Introduction

According to the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (5th ed.), education is a process of teaching and learning. Akaranga & Ongong (2013) says that education is a necessary process through which young adults are equipped to lead productive lives according to their talents and interests. Through education, learners are not only taught, trained, and adequately guided to acquire relevant skills and knowledge but also how to adapt to acceptable public life. To some people, education is seen as a means of overcoming handicaps, achieving greater equality, and acquiring wealth and status for all. It is also often perceived as a place where children can develop according to their unique needs and potentials, with the purpose of developing every individual to their full potential, (Wikipedia). The early years of schooling focuses around developing basic interpersonal communication and literacy skills. Later, education turns towards gaining the knowledge and skills needed to create value and establish a livelihood. Also, people pursue education for its own sake to satisfy innate curiosity, out of interest in a specific subject or skill, or for overall personal development.

Education could be formal or informal. Formal education occurs in a structured environment whose explicit purpose is teaching of students. Usually, formal education takes place in a school environment with classrooms of multiple students learning together with a trained, certified teacher of the subject. Whilst informal learning occurs in a variety of places, such as out of school time, in youth programmes at community centres and even village squares. Informal learning does not follow a specified curriculum and may originate accidentally, sporadically, in association with certain occasions, from changing practical requirements. It is not necessarily planned to be pedagogically conscious, systematic and according to subjects, but rather unconsciously incidental, holistically problem oriented, and related to situation management and fitness for life.

In the traditional African educational system, teaching and learning were basically practical. The students learned orally and through close observation of their master. In fact it was through imitation, no issuance of certificate to prove completion of course of study since the society was interested in skill acquisition and practical demonstration of the arts learned. Definitely, there was no need for certification, since education was viewed as a means to an end and not an end in itself (Akaranga & Ongong, 2013).

The western knowledge acquisition system or formal education is measured on certificates. Yet, certificate is not a full proof of knowledge retention. Before certificate is awarded, the students have to be assessed or examined in the field they have been trained. Nnam & Inah (2015) notes that examination is a yardstick against which students or candidates' competence and progress are formally measured and appraised in the education sector. According to Emaikwu (2012), examination as part of evaluation in education is aimed at determining a learner's level of skill acquisition or intellectual competence and understanding after a given training. Evaluation usually enables the teacher to be effectively ready for further teaching as this forms a feedback. George & Ukpogon (2013) opines that examination is the most common tool around which the entire system of education revolves, it is the instrument used to decide who is permitted to move to the next academic

level. Malik & Shah (1998) cited in Akaranga & Ongong (2013) observed that examination is not only a process of assessing the progress of students but, it also motivates and helps them to know their academic strengths and weaknesses apart from providing teachers with opportunities to try new methods of teaching. But when examination is not properly conducted, the expected feedback may not result. Hence, the result of such evaluation leads to wrong decision and judgement which affect the teacher, the learner, the entire education industry, as well as the society (Ojonemi et al., 2013). Whenever there is examination irregularity or malpractice, the validity and resulting outcome is questionable.

The common belief on certificates as the only yardstick to measure ones qualification has led many Nigerians into buying educational certificates to prove their academic worth. Examination malpractice in Nigeria is as old as the country herself. According to (Anzene, 2014; Uzoigwe; Onuka & Amoo), examination malpractice was first reported in Nigeria in the year 1914, when the question papers of the Senior Cambridge Local Examinations were reportedly seen by candidates before the scheduled date of the examination. The Examination Malpractice Act (1999) explains examination malpractice as any act of omission or commission by a person who in anticipation of, before, during or after any examination fraudulently secure any unfair advantage for himself or any other person in such a manner that contravenes the rules and regulations to the extent of undermining the validity, reliability, authenticity of the examination and ultimately the integrity of the certificates issued. Again, examination malpractice is commonly defined as a deliberate wrong doing contrary to official examination rules designed to place a candidate at an unfair advantage or disadvantage, (Wilayat, 2009 quoted in Akaranga & Ongong, 2013). Alutu & Aluede (2006) cited in Jimoh (2009) remarked that examination malpractice is any irregular behaviour exhibited by a candidate or anybody charged with the conduct of examination before, during or after the examination that contravenes the rules and regulations governing such examination. Onuka & Amusan (2008) cited in Onuka & Durowoju (2013) defined examination malpractice as any dishonest or unauthorized action or deed committed by a student on his own or in collaboration with others like fellow students, guardians, parents, teachers, head teacher, examination officials, supervisors, invigilators, security officers and anybody or group of people before, during or after examination in order to obtain undeserved marks or grades.

From all the definitions, it is clear that examination malpractice tends to confer undue advantage or undeserved grade to the perpetrators of the act. Again, it may be committed by not only the candidates but also by other bodies charged with the responsibilities of examination management. Undoubtedly, examination malpractice has been a social problem for decades, but the rate and manner it is perpetrated nowadays calls for serious concern. The rate of this crime has become so widespread that there is virtually no examination anywhere at all levels and outside the formal school system that there is no one form of illegal practice or another, (Nnam & Inah, 2015; Ojonemi et al., 2013). Examination malpractices are common everywhere and every examination season witnesses the emergence of new and ingenious ways of cheating, (Nnam & Inah, 2015; Anzene, 2014; Ojonemi et al., 2013; Jimoh, 2009).

2. Forms of Examination Malpractice

In every examination, students develop new methods of perpetrating examination malpractices. The instances of examination malpractices vary. They range from impersonation, leakage of questions, tampering with results, and computer fraud to fraudulent practices by invigilators. Some forms of malpractices are discussed below.

1. Collusion among candidates themselves and between them and examination officials: Collusion occurs when candidates writing the same examination copies from one another. When examination official leaks the examination materials to the intended examinees, parents, or over zealous school managers prior to the examination time, the malpractice committed also falls under collusion. Collusion leads to mass cheating in examination.
2. Impersonation: This is a case where another candidate or hired mercenary sits for examination on behalf of the genuine candidate. Male candidates sitting in for girls or vice versa, and twins writing examinations for each other.
3. Giraffing: This form of cheating takes its name from one of the African wild animals with an extremely long neck, legs and small head, (Akaranga & Ongong, 2013). It is a process in which an examinee stretches out his neck as long as possible to view and copy what a fellow candidate has written down for a given question. Giraffing is among the oldest and the commonest form of examination malpractice.
4. 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; handkerchiefs, rulers, purses, chairs, tables, walls of examination halls and so on, (Oredein, 2006). Nursing mothers convert the tender skin of their baby to white board; intermittently during examination seek for permission to breastfeed their baby only to use such avenues for note reading or revision. A new examiner will be dumbfounded during NTI Distance Learning and universities part-time programmes' examinations.
5. Irregular activities inside and outside the examination halls: Students, who have made up their minds to cheat,

exhibit unwholesome behaviours during examination. For instance, smuggling out question papers out of the examination hall, sending and receiving information from other candidates or from agents and touts outside the hall, tearing part of the question paper or answer booklet during the examination to perpetrate malpractice.

6. Scientific malpractice/ the use of mobile phones during examinations: Nowadays, candidates employ unauthorized scientific calculators, organizers, compact disc, and mobile phones to take undue advantage. Mobile phones with camera (imaging functions) are used to take snapshots of a whole textbook in a much reduced format for use during examination. For examination that involves multiple choice questions, candidates inside the examination hall receive the answer through the handsets from their agents even outside that geographical location.

7. Bribery: This form of malpractice may be used to enhance teacher-student collusion to cheat. It brings in the economic perspectives in examination malpractices. A student may pay an examination official some money not necessarily to buy the question paper, but to be allowed to use illegal materials smuggled into the examination halls or to extend the examination scheduled period. In Nigeria, bribery often referred to as sorting in tertiary institutions is rampant. Male students offer money or other valuables while female students use money or sex to bargain for “upgrading” of their examination scores. Bribery is common in both secondary and tertiary levels of education examination.

8. Intimidation / Assault on examination officials: There are reported cases where students and touts brandish dangerous weapons like daggers, pistols, axe, etc in the examination venues to intimidate invigilators to have a free day while committing the heinous crime. Students who indulge in secret cult activities are more prone to this violent act. The case of intimidation is more evident during external WASSCE / NECO examinations popularly referred to as GCE or during final semester of undergraduate examinations.

9. Other forms of examination malpractice includes the use of coded sign languages by some candidates, exchanging of answer booklets for note comparison or outright impersonation, mass cheating, leakage of question papers, etc.

From the forms of examination malpractices aforementioned, it is clear that examination malpractice is not limited to the time and the place of examination. In fact, it occurs either before, during or after examination. A typical pre-examination malpractice in Nigeria is in the process of registering SSCE candidates for examinations. Ojerinde (2004) cited in Anzene (2014) reported that one of the commonest forms of pre-examination malpractice is the registration of non-school candidates for school examination by principals in spite of clear regulations against such practice. This explains why secondary schools located in rural areas with no access road or difficult terrains that hinder external monitoring or supervision witness influx of candidates during SSCE examinations. Such “miracle centres” are established for pure economic gains and not to impart knowledge to students. The introduction of Global System for Mobile Communication (GSM) in the country has revolutionized examination malpractice in all tiers of our school system. A lot of academic information is now stored in these electronic gadgets for direct use in examination halls or for onward transfer via short message service (sms) to other students in any other parts of the country. Post examination malpractices include such unwholesome activities occurring after the examination, for instance, candidates tracing their answer booklets to the marking centres. During SSCE examinations (WASSCE, NECO, & NABTEB), some candidates use pencil to write their telephone numbers, urging the marker (examiner) to contact them for price negotiation. Some female candidates also attach their semi-nude photographs in the answer booklets praying for a sexual promiscuous male to mark their answer booklets. Such photographs bear telephone numbers for contact. In the tertiary institutions, sorting and sexual gratification is a major form of post examination malpractice. Continuous assessment scores and even examination scores are altered by the unscrupulous lecturers to give undue advantage to their cohorts. Intervention by highly placed school officials for their wards or relative to be passed or given a specific grade at all cost is also a rampant case of post examination malpractice.

3. Causes of Examination Malpractice

Many reasons have been adduced to be the cause of the prevalent cases of examination malpractice. Petters & Okon (2013) identifies the causes to include fear of failure, craze for certificate, desire of parents to have their children in choice professions and university, pressure on students to pursue courses which they have no aptitude, pressure on teachers who want to gain favour of student and overcrowded sitting arrangement. George & Ukpung (2013) links the increasing rate of examination malpractice to poor teaching, ineffective preparation by students, ill-equipped library facilities, and dubious admission policy.

Akaranga & Ongong (2013) views the cause of examination malpractice to parental upbringing. They opined that because of social status and economic ability, most parents are easily persuaded to bribe their way through for the sole success of their children and self gratification. According to Ejimogu (2001) cited in Nsiong (2011), general moral decadence and the high premium placed on achievement and certificates by Nigerians has in recent times spawned examination fraud. The overdependence on educational certificates as a measure of ones knowledge and competence has led to a mad rush by most people for educational certificates

through unethical means.

The disjunction between culturally acclaimed goals and the institutionalized means of achieving these goals coupled with the cultural context of great emphasis on success-goals without equivalent emphasis upon institutional means of attaining these goals have created an environment that predisposes some students, teachers, parents and others to examination malpractice, (Jimoh, 2009). The Nigerian society today is characterized by a heavy emphasis on success and wealth without a corresponding emphasis on legitimate means and avenues to be used in achieving the success. The country has become a commercial venture and no longer a place for selfless service.

The CWO Voice (2010) links examination malpractice to the following factors: rapid growth and demand for education in Nigeria, poor teaching and learning environment, lack of well equipped teachers who do not have the necessary pedagogy to impart the contents to the learners, lack of viable teaching materials/ equipment like standard laboratories, libraries and other things.

4. Effects of Examination Malpractice on National Development

1. In a society that examination malpractice is predominant, its impact are visibly seen in the type of human resources the education system has produced. Again, educational system strives to inculcate high level of discipline, diligence, moral love for others; to the recipients where the examination is fraught with malpractice, all the important feedback mechanism becomes defaulted and the educational system becomes distorted, (The CWO Voice, 2010).

2. Examination malpractice leads to irreversible loss of credibility. A country that becomes notorious in examination malpractice loses international credibility. The implication is that documents or certificates emanating from such country will be treated with suspicion as is the case of Nigeria today. Such country's educational institutions are as good as dead as far as international cooperation in education is concerned (Jimoh, 2009).

3. Examination malpractice has grave consequences on the individuals and institutions of learning, communities and the country at large. Dismissal, termination, loss of position, and lack of self-confidence are effects and have caused a lot of embarrassment and suffering to individuals, families and the nation. The guilty ones who were not caught and punished cannot defend the certificates procured not to talk of delivering at their duty posts.

4. The prevalent rate of bank failures, collapse of buildings, economic sabotage, vandalism, kidnapping/hostage taking for ransom, drug trafficking, fake drug manufacturing and sales are practical effects of moral decadence, emanating from examination malpractice. Effects of examination fraud are displayed in the filling stations, churches, homes, hospitals, markets and everywhere.

5. The fight against corruption cannot be realized if examination malpractice continues to be rampant in our educational system. As future leaders who have been equipped through a school system characterized by academic fraud and dishonesty, will certainly manifest this fraudulent behaviour in any organization they may find themselves. Those that cheated to pass examination will cheat to get employed, have spouse, and even to win election through electoral violence or other sharp malpractices.

6. Other effects of examination malpractice includes discouragement of students from hard work, low productivity and poor job performances, bribery, corruption, and certificate racketeering.

Examination malpractice with its disadvantages is affecting all the facets of the society negatively. The potentials of this nation will be difficult to be realized socially, economically, and technologically until the individuals, governments, and other stakeholders in the education sector collaborate to eradicate this malpractice.

5. Efforts Made at Curbing Examination Malpractice

After the leakage of the West African Examination Council (WAEC) question papers for the West African School Examination in 1977, the public outcry by WAEC led to the setting up of a tribunal by the federal government of Nigeria to investigate the mass leakage and suggest possible measure to forestall future occurrence. The recommendations of the tribunal led to the promulgation of Decree 20 by the federal military government in 1984 to deal with this menace. Part of the Decree reads thus:

Any person who fraudulently or with intent to cheat or secure any unfair advantage to himself or any other person or in abuse of his office, produces, sells or buys or otherwise deals with any question paper intended for the examination of persons at any examination or commits any offences specified in section 3 (27) (c) of this Decree shall be guilty of an offence and on conviction be sentenced to 21 years imprisonment.... (Fagbemi, 1998 cited in Oredein, 2006).

Incidentally, Examination Malpractice Act 33 of 1999 revised the Decree 20 of 1984 and stipulates punishment ranging from a fine of ₦50,000.00 to ₦100,000.00 and imprisonment for a term of 3 – 4 years with or without option of fine. Despite all these laws, examination malpractice has been on the increase and this is as result of government inability to enforce the laws.

The West African Examination Council being one of the oldest examination bodies in the country has

adopted and applied several measures to curtail malpractice. The efforts by WAEC includes: public enlightenment on the dangers of examination malpractice, information to candidates on rules and regulations guiding its examinations, sensitization of government and other stakeholders, sanctioning candidates and officials caught in examination irregularities. Other measures by WAEC include use of security bags for collection of security materials, photo-embossment of certificates, mounting of anti-malpractice billboards among others.

Akanu Ibiam Federal Polytechnic Unwana, Ebonyi State and other tertiary institutions in the country have their own sets of examination rules and regulations published in examination guidelines /students handbooks. The handbooks are given to students during admission process to put them on the right pedestal for academic hard work. The sanction for malpractice in Nigerian tertiary institutions ranges from expulsion, withdrawal, repeat to award of “F” depending on the degree of the malpractice.

Non governmental organizations and church groups are not left out of the war against examination malpractice in the country. Worthy of note is Examination Ethics Marshal International, an NGO championed by Mr. Ike Onyechere which has criss-crossed the country campaigning against examination misconduct.

Despite all these efforts by both government and non-governmental organizations, examination malpractice is increasing geometrically in the country because the remote cause that necessitated the malpractice is yet to be addressed.

6. Ways of Curbing Examination Malpractice in Nigeria

No one can claim to have all the solutions to the eradication of examination malpractice in Nigeria, but the writer believes strongly that the following suggestions will curtail malpractice to the barest minimum.

1. Societal re-engineering and re-orientation to revamp moral values:

Good moral values should be properly inculcated into our youths, and parents counselled to stop aiding their children to cheat in examinations. Again, there is need to engage only honest persons in examination management. Petters & Okon (2014) also suggests effective counselling services in schools to assist students acquire techniques of effective study habits.

2. Retraining and reassessment of teachers: Teachers should be equipped for the technological-driven world, (Uzoigwe, n.d). Teachers cannot provide experience and activities that guide students’ progress towards understanding of ideas if they themselves do not know what these ideas are; neither can they provide experiences that challenge students if they themselves share in the same misunderstanding, (Jimoh, 2009). Since some of the teachers in our various level of education are beneficiaries or products of malpractice, a compulsory nation wide retraining of teachers is very important to re-equip them to impart knowledge. And those found non-trainable should be reassigned with administrative duties.

3. Appropriate recognition and remuneration of teachers / examination officials: Enhanced salary should be paid to teachers and special welfare package given to examination officials to dissuade them from financial and material inducements from students, parents, and others who may want to subvert examination process. The examination officials include teachers who invigilate examinations, supervisors who oversee the conduct of examinations in schools, officers of examination bodies who monitor the conduct of examinations and law enforcement agents charged with the security of the examination centres.

4. Promulgation and enforcement of examination malpractice (prohibition) laws: The Examination Malpractice Act 33 of 1999 should be amended to re-introduce the parts of Decree 20 of 1984 which advocated for twenty-one (21) years imprisonment for convicted culprits of examination malpractice without option of fine. If this is fully implemented, it will serve as deterrent to students, invigilators, security agents, and other collaborators in the malpractice business.

5. Employment of qualified teachers at all levels of education: The need for qualified manpower cannot be overemphasized. The era of agricultural science tutor teaching chemistry, physics, or integrated science under the guise that “science is science” should be over. Trained teachers should be deployed to handle subjects only in their field of specialization. Remember that a medical doctor practising engineering is a quack.

6. School libraries and laboratories should be adequately equipped: Tools for effective teaching and learning include current and quality textbooks, up to date laboratory equipment, and workshop tools. These vital equipment should be provided and the libraries and laboratories made conducive for learning activities. In fact the whole school environment should be learning-friendly and conducive for human habitation.

7. Proper funding of education sector: Federal and states annual budgets should be implemented in accordance with UNESCO recommendation of 26% of states annual budgetary allocation for education. The Nigerian government should realize that education is the bedrock of every society and a springboard for development in a complex and competitive world of today. What we have in our schools today especially in the primary and secondary schools are dilapidated classrooms and classrooms without chairs and tables.

8. Less emphasis on paper qualifications /certificates: Nigeria’s education system is largely certificate oriented. Excessive value placed on paper qualification or certificates is the major contributing factor for examination

malpractices, that is why candidate would not spare any effort to ensure that they obtained whatever they needed to make a living, whether by a just or unjust way, (Onuka & Durowoju, 2013).

9. The use of effective continuous assessment techniques: Akanni & Odofin (2015) defines continuous assessment (C. A.) as a continuous updating of teachers' judgement about the learners' performance in relation to specific criteria which will allow at anytime a cumulative judgement to be made about his /her performance. Continuous assessment compels students to make adequate use of their time for studies by completing notes, doing homework, and assignment. On the side of the teachers, it affords an early opportunity to review one's teaching methodology and students' assimilation of the subjects taught. Again, C. A. reduces the anxiety associated with one-shot examinations.

7. Conclusion

Since education is the bedrock of every society, any factor or vice that tarnishes the outcome of the learning process must be fought standstill by all stakeholders and well meaning Nigerians. From the discussion so far, examination malpractice which has remained a cancer in the education sector requires a multidimensional approach for total annihilation. Development of any nation relies solely on its human resources, and human resources are refined to be productive through education, hence eradicating examination malpractice which destroys human resources development should be taken as a full scale war. Restoring that section of Decree 20 of 1984 which stipulated twenty-one years imprisonment on conviction without option of fine into the 1999 constitution (as amended) will be a right step in the right direction in winning this war.

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