

EXAMINATION MISCONDUCTS: A THREAT TO ACADEMIC AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

The qualitative merit of examination or test-taking for diagnostic, evaluation, placement and quality control is usually measured in terms of its appropriateness and the quality assurance of its outcomes. Consequently, it becomes inevitable that for any examination to be credible, it must possess key elements which are validity and reliability. These key elements can only be present if examination is free and fair, devoid of cheating and all sorts of malpractices. This presupposes that examination conduct must be guided by a set of rules and ethical standards. The examination misconducts is perpetrated by a number of stakeholders ranging from parents or guardians who buy papers or bribe examiners/invigilators, educators who collect money and turn a blind eye, lazy students who do not take their studies serious and still desire to get the best score, the examiners who set and mark the papers, typists of the questions papers, printers who supervise printing arrangements or transport printed questions, supervisors who supervise the conduct of the examinations, invigilators at the centers/halls, proprietors are all guilty of various examination misconducts. Societal misfits, low standard of education, unsustainable education and community, unproductive societies, Insularity of Nigeria school systems from the global academic world and others are the results of examination misconducts.

Keywords: National development, Examination, Examination misconducts

Introduction

In Nigeria, achievements at any level of education are crowned with certification for those who successfully complete 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 Examinations Council (NECO), the National Technical and Business Certificate Examinations (NTCE/NBCE), also conducted by the National Business and Technical Examinations Board (NABTEB).

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 bureau utilize tests in reaching a decision as to the employability of an individual applicant.

Despite the strategic importance of examination or test taking for diagnostic, evaluation, 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 misconduct. Olagboye (2004) 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.

Arijesuyo (2010) observed that examination misconduct 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 role. 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 (2007) 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.

There was a story of a candidate who traced his paper from Enugu to Kano and another from Kano traced his to Ibadan as reported by Ojerinde (2004). Some examiners also could trace the candidate if they know how influential the parents of such a candidate are. Some candidates especially girls enclose money and photographs (especially girls) describing how they could be traced in case their papers happen to be handled by men considered to moral perverts. In higher institutions, post-examination malpractice could take the form of lobbying the examiners by begging and sending close friends and senior colleagues to the examiner to be lenient while marking.

In view of the above, the paper attempted to examine some of the causes, forms and the threat of examination misconducts to both the academic development of students and the national development at large.

The Concept of Examination Misconduct

Examination misconduct has be defined as a deliberate act of contrary to official rules and regulations, and is designed to place a candidate at an unfair advantage or disadvantage; it is a careless, illegal or unacceptable behavior by a candidate in a formal test of his knowledge or ability in a particular subject (Philemon, 2007). It has also been said to be an act of omission or commission, which compromises the validity and integrity of any examination (Okwu, 2006). Examination malpractice is counter-practice that is against ethics of examinations, an act that disrespect all rules and regulations guiding the good conduct of any examination or any evaluation process. Consequently, cases of examination misconduct have been on the increase in various institutions of learning across the nation. Its growth has reached an alarming dimension in recent times (Olatunbosu, 2009).

Examination misconduct is any illegal act committed by a student single handed 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. 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 misconduct constitutes 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 Adesina (2005), examination malpractices include leaking out questions to students, girraffing 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, Magaji (2006), cited in Arijesuyo and Adeyoju (2010) 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 examination misconducts in Nigeria.

Odongbo, (2002) cited in cited in Alimako (2013) says that examination misconduct refers to an act of wrong doing carried out by a candidate or groups of candidates or any other person with the intention to cheat & gain unfair advantage in an examination. Awanbor, (2004) cited in Arijesuyo and Adeyoju (2010) opines that examination misconduct is the application of unusual means to obtain a score or set of scores that is normally beyond the mental capability or the state of preparedness of a candidate for that examination. In summary, Makoju, Adewale, Nwangwu and Shu'aibu (2004) cited in Arijesuyo and Adeyoju (2010) say that whenever rules and regulations governing the conduct of any examination are not adhered to by parties involved (i.e. candidates and any other person involved in the conduct of examinations from setting the question to the release of result), then we can conclude that examination misconduct has occurred.

This practice seems to have become a monster that defiled different measures put in place to curtail its growth. Parts of such measures are; Decree 21 of 1985. Examination Malpractice Act No. 33 of 1999. Examination Ethics Project of 2003 (EEP) led by Ike Onyechere, Public Relations Workshop Organized by the Lagos State Police Community Relations Committee-PCRC (Ijaiya, 2004). This therefore should be a concern to

stakeholders in education because if examination misconducts are well tackled and eradicated, Nigeria will become a better place where credibility and integrity is upheld.

3.0 Causes of Examination Malpractice

The study of Makoju (2004) cited in Arijesuyo and Adeyoju (2010) reported the responses of parents of secondary school students when asked the factors they think encourage examination malpractices in Nigeria? Many parents (1375 out of 3289, representing 41.8 percent) indicated that questions are not related to the syllabus and as a result, examination malpractice is encouraged. There are two types of syllabi, one developed by an examination body referred to as examination syllabus and the one developed by Nigeria Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) known as teaching syllabus. Although these two syllabi should be common in scope, the report has always been that JAMB syllabus is overloaded and difficult for candidates, so candidates often times find it difficult to cope. About 28 percent of the parents were of the opinion that insufficient time for writing papers encouraged examination malpractice. Insufficient time is not likely to pose a serious threat to candidates to warrant examination malpractice because if candidates know what they should write, they are not likely to have time for cheating, as they will be pre-occupied with trying to beat the time. Some parents were of the opinion that objective questions encourage examination malpractices. This is because many students have developed different skills in using their fingers to pass information to their colleagues on the “correct options” in objective tests.

In the same study by Makoju (2004), cited in Arijesuyo and Adeyoju (2010) in which secondary school teachers were asked to indicate their views on factors responsible for examination malpractice? Out of 1685 teachers, 879 (52.17%) said that students are not ready to learn. In most public schools, students are seen roaming the streets in twos and threes, some with video cassettes and some playing football. Since they are not ready to learn, the next thing they can do when examination is coming is to engage in examination malpractice. Other factors responsible for examination malpractice such as emphasis on paper qualification; parents’ desire for their children to pass at all cost; and corrupt supervisors and custodians of examination papers are reflections of the wider society. Apart from those two potent factors, another strong reason for examination malpractice is the emphasis on paper qualification. Until less emphasis is laid on paper qualification and we place emphasis on the skills acquired in order to function well in the society, the issue of examination malpractice will continue to persist. The craze for paper qualification is the offshoot of the poor implementation of our national policy on education. Emphasis is gradually being removed from proper acquisition of demonstrable skills and academic excellence to possession of paper qualification not backed up with practical experience to show for it. One social menace the governments in Nigeria have fought from one regime to another checking examination malpractice.

Forms of Examination Misconducts

There are different forms of examination misconduct as categorised by WAEC. They include bringing in foreign materials to exam halls irregular activities inside and outside examination hall; collusion; impersonation; leakage; mass cheating and insult/assault on supervisors. Others include assistance of candidates by invigilators to answer or have clue to difficult concepts. Some invigilators also go to the extent of answering some parts of the question for candidates. The definition of examination malpractice does not suggest that it is limited to the time and place examination is taking place. These misconducts can classify into pre-examination, during examination and post examination misconducts (Alimako, 2013).

Pre-examination Misconducts: In this form, candidates considering their ability tend to offer something (cash or kind) to somebody (examiner, messenger, typist, examination officer, invigilator, or head of department) so that examination materials could be released to them before hand (leakage), they then study the materials with the view to memorizing answers to the questions raised in the examination question they had access to. A more important aspect of pre-examination misconduct is in the process of registering candidates for examinations. Ojerinde (2004) cited one of the commonest forms is the registration of non-school candidates for school examinations. In spite of instructions against this practice, the principals of schools continue to perpetuate this practice every year. What they do is to register candidates who are not in SS 3 (the final years). Most of these candidates are no more in school and they are referred to as private candidates. Many are from urban areas, who prefer to register in less urban centres where monitoring is not likely to be strict. Since these candidates are not students of the school, they do not have any record of continuous assessment, which is compulsory for SSCE certification. The principals falsify continuous assessment results for them depending on how much money the candidates are able to pay.

Registration of too many candidates over and above the facilities available in a school is another vice some school principals employ to perpetuate examination misconduct. With limited facilities and unlimited candidates, supervision becomes extremely difficult as many candidates are crammed into a hall. A situation was reported where 200 candidates registered in a school which equally has a hall that could accommodate them, but the candidates were scattered over 5 classrooms with 40 candidates in each. The arrangement was such that when the supervisor was in one of the classes that were so wide apart, dictation would be going on in the remaining 4 classrooms (Ojerinde, 2004). The registrar of that body whose examination was being written then ordered that all of them should be accommodated in one hall. Protest from the candidates made the Registrar to understand that cooperation fees of N300.00 had been paid by each of the candidates in that school.

Registration to allow for impersonation is another type of pre-examination misconduct. There are two types of impersonation. In the first form, a candidate registers with his/her names but submits the photograph of another person, the mercenary, with

whom arrangement has been made to take the examination on his/her behalf. In this arrangement, the candidate may enter another arrangement with the invigilator to replace the mercenary's photographs with his/her own or the mercenary submits a poorly taken photograph which will fade within a few months of production. When they fade and replacement is demanded, those of the original candidate are then submitted.

The second aspect of impersonation is a situation where a candidate pays for two examination registration forms, he/she completes one and his/her mercenary completes the other, both go for the examination, the mercenary writes in the name of the one who hired while the original candidate may not bother to submit anything.

During Examinations: In this case, materials either hard or soft copy which candidates feel could assist them answer the questions could be brought in. This form involves copying something in a small sheet of paper like the size of a complementary card which could be tucked into shoes or mathematical sets, the information could be written on unexposed parts of the body like tattoo on girls' thighs and palms or any other parts of the body.

Super print is copying information on pieces of cloth like, brassieres, inner lining of shirts, jackets blouses and underskirts. Another method of bringing in foreign materials which has been prepared by 'mercenary' into the examination hall is through courier or contractor. The courier or contractor may be junior students, examination assistants or even policemen that are charged with the responsibility of ensuring order in the examination hall.

Mobile phones are used by examination misconduct perpetrators. This is done in text form so as not to attract much attention. If a candidate is able to smuggle out a question paper especially the objective test, the 'mercenary' outside of the examination hall could text the correct options to the candidate inside the examination hall. Candidates could also collude by discussing or passing materials among themselves with a view of copying from each other. There are two types of copying, a candidate copying from his neighbour without the knowledge of the neighbour (giraffe) and the other type has something to do with mutual agreement of the two parties. Where both of them are copying each other (two-way traffic), we also have what Ojo (1999) cited in Alimako (2013) referred to as 'ECOWAS,' a symbiotic relationship between or among two or more candidates. Other forms of examination misconduct during examination could be impersonation where somebody writes an examination for another.

Another form of examination misconduct is when un-cooperating supervisors/invigilators are assaulted or insulted. There are cases of candidates insulting un-cooperating supervisors/invigilators; some go to the extent of intimidating them with weapons like gun or acid. Other types of insult could be verbal attack and threat to invigilators. Apart from insult and intimidation, some candidates go as far as pouring acid on invigilators.

Post Examination Misconduct: This includes such activities after examination as a supervisor leaving the envelope containing examination scripts open on previous arrangement, so that submission of script(s) written outside the hall could be included in the envelope before sealing and submitting it to the examination body. Substitution is another method of post examination misconduct. In this case, a candidate submits his/her script and later, another script (already prepared for him/her is brought in under special arrangement and the supervisor is supposed to remove the first one submitted and substitute the one brought in from outside. In some cases, the supervisor may forget and that implies that a candidate has two scripts against his number but with different handwritings. Another form of post examination misconduct has to do with officials in the computer department of an examination body changing a candidate's result on a computer storage facility, or illegally issuing certificates or statements of result to candidates to enable them gain admission into tertiary institutions or gain appointment.

Conclusion

Examination misconducts ruin the credibility, validity and reliability of examinations, which are necessities of examinations. The current trend of examination misconducts have diminished the standard of education, leading to the award of certificate to people who are not found worthy in learning and/or character, such occurrences discourage good students from studying hard as they see others get away with their corrupt acts. Best brains that could help in research and development via generation of data useful for promotion, certification, selection and prediction, instructional and motivational aid, are frustrated or thrown out in admission/job seeking process by the corrupt ones. The prevalent bank failures, collapse of buildings, economic sabotage, drug trafficking, fake drug manufacturing and sales are practical effects of moral decadence, emanating from examination malpractice

The inability of Nigerian school system to translate the nations' educational philosophy into reality is obviously due to the inculcation of inappropriate attitudes and values by many Nigerians for such values are inimical to personality growth and development, and correspondingly to the nations' attempted leap to higher heights. Examination malpractice is one of the bottlenecks associated with the conduct of examinations in Nigeria. Although examination malpractice started before the early 70s, the situation became worse in 1977 when people began to question the credibility of examinations conducted by the West African Examinations Council which was the only organ saddled with the responsibility of conducting public examinations in Nigeria then. The forms of examination malpractice that have been identified include bringing in foreign materials; irregular activities inside and outside examination hall; collusion; impersonation; leakage; mass cheating; insult/assault on supervisors and others. If less emphasis is placed on paper qualification, it is likely that many of our students would not engage in examination malpractice. It is the believe of some educators that if continuous assessment practice is encouraged and is done and the problem of comparability of

standard is addressed, each school can then administer its examination which can serve as entry requirement for students who are seeking admission and certification for those who are finishing from such schools.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are put to curb examination misconducts to barest minimum.

1. Many students who engage in examination malpractice have been found to be academically weak which are traceable to the faulty placement from JSS I to SS I in their educational ladder. School Principals should ensure that the placement exercise was done objectively by placing students where they suppose to be placed.
2. School principals should organize pre-examination orientation to the students about the dangers of examination misconducts.
3. School Principals should ensure that the facilities in their schools should accommodate the number of students that registered for the examinations such as examination halls and laboratories.
4. School Principals should not allow the existence of special centres/classes in their schools to save the educational system from total collapse.
5. The use of mobile phones as the new devise for examination malpractice should be curtailed. School Principals should completely ban the use of mobile phones in the examination halls.
6. The integrity of the school teachers is equally important in curbing examination misconducts. Undue familiarity which can make some students to have advanced knowledge of the examination should be totally discouraged. The invigilators should be very vigilant in the supervision of examinations and should be fair to everyone. The question of double standard should not be mentioned.

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