

***Examination Malpractice in Nigerian Educational System: Origin, Types, Causes, Effects and Implication for Counselling***

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**Abstract**

*Examination malpractice has been found in Nigerian educational system during examinations for a very long time and on a continuous process. It has been discovered that the forms and indulgence in examination malpractice has become more sophisticated, to the extent that the students feel nothing can be done to curb this trend of event. This paper therefore takes a look at the concept of examination malpractice. The origin of examination malpractice in the Nigerian educational system was also considered. The paper went further to examine the patterns adopted by those involved in examination malpractice, such as impersonation, copying, smuggling of foreign materials and the likes. It also looked at the causes of examination malpractice, such as acquiring good grades, undue emphasis on paper qualification to mention but a few. Its numerous effects on both the students and the Nigerian educational system are also articulated. Finally, the paper makes some recommendations, and also suggested some counselling techniques to be adopted in curbing this menace.*

**Keywords:** examination, malpractice, education, rational, emotive, therapy

**Introduction**

Teaching and learning go on in educational institutions from nursery school to the university. Whatever is the system of education, the learning outcome is determined with a view to assessing performance. Assessment is an integral part of teaching and learning process. It is a process of determining the worth and value of something and using the results in taking relevant decisions about a learner or a programme. The ability to get promotions in school and move from lower level to a higher level is measured by the performances of the students in examinations. It is expected that the child/students might have read their class work after attendance at lectures and passed the continuous assessment test.

According to Baker (2003), examinations are used to measure present proficiency, mastery and understanding of general and specific areas of knowledge. These descriptions

indicate the extent of academic knowledge, skill and competencies which learners must have acquired as a result of exposure to certain learning experiences and contents. Also Kalgo (2001) stresses the fact that examinations are important because their outcomes, which include promotion, certifications, selection and decision-making, determine manpower utilization in any country. Examination as an evaluative tool assesses the whole process and operatives in an educational endeavour; it provides room for an assessment of the curriculum contents, the teacher, the method of teaching, the teaching/learning environment and the capability of the learner (Oyatoye, 2004). In the teaching learning process, teachers require objective information on students' characteristics, which might prepare them to benefit enormously from school curricula. There are also the need for information on the effectiveness of procedures being used to impart knowledge and how these procedures have caused a change in the learners' behaviour patterns (Okpala, Onocha, & Oyedeji, 1993). In other to provide these invaluable needs of teachers, examination becomes inevitable.

In Nigerian educational institutions especially at the secondary school level, there are two main categories of examinations: internal and external. For a teacher to be able to do his work effectively, he must have a means of knowing the progress of his students. Students react to examinations in diverse ways, some with fear and anxiety, others with indifferent attitude while some with a "do or die" approach. Many students do not like examination and some teachers do not either but the student desires good results (Alonge, 2002). However, promotion to the next class depends on evidence of satisfactory attainment of the low level; therefore, examination becomes necessary.

Alonge (2002) is of the opinion that examination and assessment in the school system today have been misinterpreted, in the sense that parents and students have the impression that all that matter in schools is to obtain a certificate at the end of the course. This could be the possible reason why students, teachers and parents engage in examination malpractice.

### **Theoretical framework**

This paper is anchored on conflict theory. Conflict theory, first proounded by Karl Max, is a theory that believes that society is in a state of perpetual conflict because of competition for limited resources. Conflict theory holds that social order is maintained by domination and power, rather than by consensus and conformity (Wikipedia). Conflict theory's assumptions are that humans are self-interested. Secondly, that societies operate under perpetual scarcity of resources. Therefore, conflict is pervasive and unavoidable within social groups and between social groups. Conflict theorists believe that the educational system reinforces and perpetuates social inequalities that arise from difference in class, gender, race, and ethnicity.

Conflict theory is a sociological theory associated with Karl Marx. It seeks to explain political and economic events in terms of an ongoing struggle over finite resources. In this struggle according to literature, Marx emphasizes the antagonistic relationship

between social classes, in particular the relationship between the owners of capital which Marx calls the “bourgeoisie”, and the working class, which he calls the “proletariat”. Conflict theory reveals how examination malpractice generates various types of conflict in the social system and its role in perpetrating inequality, while the theory of symbolic interactionism points out how examination malpractice takes place through interaction.

Conflict theory focuses on the competition among groups within society over limited resources. Conflict theory views social and economic institutions as tools of the struggle among groups or classes, used to maintain inequality and the dominance of the ruling class (Hayes, 2022). In sociology, conflict theory opines that the society functions in such a way that everyone or group involved can make the best use of benefits which in the long run brings about social changes (Beirne & Messerschmidt, 2006). Most times, the theory is applied to explain conflict between social classes in ideas such as socialism and communism.

Theory of symbolic interactionism assumes that people respond to elements of their environments according to the subjective meanings they attach to those elements, such as meanings being created and modified through social interaction involving symbolic communication with other people (Blumer, 1986). Symbolic interactionism is a social theoretical framework associated with George Herbert Mead (1863-1931) and Max Weber (1864-1920). It is a perspective that sees society as the product of shared symbols, such as language. The social world is therefore constructed by the meanings that individuals attach to events and social interactions, and these symbols are transmitted across the generations through language (Blumer, 1986; Carter & Fuller, 2015).

### **Origin of examination malpractice in Nigeria**

Examination malpractice is a global problem as virtually all educational systems all over the world have had to contend with the problem at one stage or the other. It is therefore not peculiar to Nigeria alone. Barnet and Dalton (1981) observed that applicants for the civil service in China were searched and made to take examination in individual cubicles to prevent copying from one another.

Brickman in Denga and Denga (1998) also reported that death penalty was imposed on both examinees and examiners caught cheating to deter people from the act in Ancient China, but that the practice continued unabated despite these measures. In the same vein, the story is not different in the United States of America and the United Kingdom as researchers showed that students in these countries also indulge in examination malpractice.

Examination malpractice has been reported in both junior and senior secondary school examination, JAMB, internal examinations in primary, secondary schools and even in the universities. Examination irregularities have constituted a serious threat to the educational system and national survival; for a weak educational system give rise to socio economic backwardness. Extensive, profound and complex examination malpractices involve a

broad spectrum of the population and defy gender, social, and economic boundaries. As Anameze (1999) suggests, it encompasses school administrators, teachers, examination officers, security agents, staff of examination bodies, custodian of examination papers, printers, gatemen, transporters, education inspectors, schools communities and parents.

Umeh (2001) noted that WAEC statistics indicated leakages in 1991, 1992, 1993, 1994 and 1995. WAEC examination systematic leakages suggest defiance to the decrees. The recurrent question concerns the origin of examination malpractice. The root of examination malpractice could be traced to socio economic and political events of the 1970s and the 1980s. The oil boom of the 70s compounded the changing values, for it created economic elite who came to wealth with marginal education and modicum of efforts. This upstart formed a powerful class with dominant voice in society, commanding utmost respect and shaping the political structures of their communities.

The product of the 1970s and 80s examination fraud later swelled the workforce especially in the school system, for within the same period, secondary schools, teachers training institutions mushroomed, followed by the creation of new states that ushered in state universities; thus, examination malpractice intractably soared. Examination malpractice spawns incompetence and corrupt educational system produces people with low education, ill prepared for any skills in the world.

### **Meaning of examination malpractice**

Examination malpractice is any deliberate act of wrong doing contrary to the rules of the examination, designed to give a candidate an unfair advantage over others. It may therefore, mean any unacceptable conduct before, during or after examination that warrants, the application of a variety of sanctions against the alleged offender. Awanbor (2003) defines examination malpractice as the application of unusual means to obtain in an examination a score that is normally beyond the mental capacity of the candidate for that particular examination.

### **Types/forms of examination malpractice in Nigerian Educational System**

Examination irregularities include the various kinds at malpractices and conducts that invalidate the status and qualities of a particular examination thereby making the result both questionable and unreliable. Examination malpractice has taken several dimensions. Some of which are:

1. **Impersonation:** Impersonation involves assertion or declaration to be another person. It is common to find another student going in to write an examination for another one using the person's name, registration number and sometimes, even the real person's photograph. This plot only succeeds when the supervisors and the invigilators are not vigilant or they are involved. They connive with the offender and pretend not to know what is going on in the room.

2. **Collusion:** This is an agreement reached between some candidates to collaborate with some unscrupulous examination agencies or school authorities with the intention to cheat during an examination.

3. **Leakage:** This takes place when candidates have knowledge of live questions before the examination day. They prepare well using the questions. They are likely to do better than those who did not see the questions before hand; because they may have read relevant books, notes and even consulted other bright students to help them (Denga & Denga, 1998).

4. **Giraffing:** The extension of the candidate's neck to see what the colleague has written in order to copy.

5. **Hi-tech Practice:** This is the use of technological equipment such as microcomputers, calculators or handsets to get or decode some answers or information.

6. **Sorting:** This is paying some amount of money to examiner(s) so as to influence the grade of a particular paper or subject.

7. **Copying:** Reproduction of another candidate's work with or without permission.

8. **Smuggling of foreign materials:** Usage of unauthorized materials e.g notebooks, charts and booklets complete with answers.

9. **Ghost Centres:** These are fictitious exam centres established by corrupt exam officials where candidates write under no supervision.

10. **External assistance:** Individuals who are not examination candidates give unauthorized assistance to candidates. It usually involves invigilators dictating answers, writing answers on the blackboard, circulating sheets of worked-out answers in the course of examination.

Others include spying, assault and ghost voice practice.

### **Causes of examination malpractice**

1. The desire to pass at all cost.
2. Societal tendency towards low morality and corruption.
3. Undue emphasis on paper qualification as a criterion for selection of candidates for higher education and employment.
4. Anxiety over non-completion of syllabus.
5. Lack of commitment on the part of teachers.
6. Poorly equipped libraries.
7. Very high cost of examination entrance forms.
8. Lack of sufficient recreational facilities.
9. Overcrowded classrooms and examination halls.
10. Truancy: Students' playing of 'hide and seek' with their studies.
11. Teachers' poor training and lack of professional competence.
12. Some students are more prone to cheating than others because they are made so.

### **Effects of examination malpractice**

The consequences of examination malpractice on both the students and the society at large have been elaborated by Denga and Denga (1998) and Nenty (2001). These effects are stressed in the following claim, that examination malpractice is capable of not only ruining the educational system but also impairing the efficacy of the labour force. People who are mentally and morally defective are smuggled into public offices that they cannot

competently handle. Thus the wrong people are placed in the helm of affairs of the nation. Examination malpractice increases lack of confidence among students.

Examination malpractice has resulted to the production of some illiterates from even the institutions of higher learning. Obi (2004) reported that the universities in Nigeria with particular reference to the South East were producing illiterates; she further maintained that many of them could not speak good English and could not discuss anything intelligent even in their own acclaimed areas of study. Examination malpractice may lure some students into other areas of misconduct such as prostitution and/or armed robbery. In a case of established examination fraud that led to cancellation of such examination, the examination body incurs avoidable cost to procure materials and pay personnel for supervision for fresh examination. Examination malpractice makes fool of parents who continue to enrich tutorial teachers rather than encouraging their children to study hard in order to be successful in examination.

Students who engage in one form of examination malpractice or the other cannot defend their qualification or certificates bagged at the end of any academic level or course of study since they lack the necessary proficiency that a good educational foundation can provide. Stressing more on the dangerous nature of examination malpractice and its harmful effects on the students and the society at large, Onyechere (1996) views examination malpractice as an evil seed which when planted in the young minds can destroy the social, political and economic foundation of the country; examination malpractice plants evil seed of unethical values in the young and fertile minds of the students. This vice causes the education of children who are tomorrow's leaders to be laid on a sandy ground that cannot stand the test of time.

### **Counseling implications**

Examination malpractices, among school children, adolescents and adults, have implications for counselling. The counsellors who are experienced in using behaviour modification techniques can use such techniques to reduce examination malpractice in the school system.

The rational emotive therapy is applied in the modification of behaviour. Rational emotive therapy sees man as both rational and irrational. Ellis maintained that when man thinks rationally, he is effective, happy and competent. It is when he thinks illogically or irrationally that it results in emotional disturbances and he becomes unhappy and unproductive. Man is born with the tendency to help himself achieve the desired goals. Man is also inherently irrational, born with a tendency to defeat those same goals, and either kills himself too soon, kills himself slowly or stays alive miserably against his wish to be happy. Two popular tendencies exist in all individuals, and each person has the inborn tendencies in one direction or the other (Lannap, 2012).

The following are other counselling implications:

1. The counsellor is expected to counsel the students to modify their illogical thoughts, and behaviour by teaching or inducing them to re-perceive life events.
2. The counsellor should uncover the student's past and present illogical thinking by forcibly bringing them to his attention, show the student how they cause and maintain disturbances within themselves, teach them to rethink, challenge and contradict their internalized thoughts e.g lack of commitment to studies.
3. Counsellor should dispute the main irrational ideas so that the student does not fall victim again. Insight, interpretative and supportive techniques should be used to gain the student's trust and confidence.
4. Counsellor could use reinforcement skill like tape listening. Counsellor should be direct in attacking specific and general irrational ideas frankly e.g trying to cheat during examination, unwillingness to be directed and corrected, lack of preparation for examination.
5. Students should be given personal social counselling for the development of positive self-concept, self-adequacy, better motivation and confidence in themselves.
6. Parents should be counselled to re-evaluate their desires and aspirations about their children.
7. Reality counselling as well as behavioural counselling can be used by counsellor on the students to assist them on how to achieve their needs.
8. Finally, there should be value re-orientation for Nigerians.
9. Guidance services, such as orientation, appraisal, information and follow-up can help to curb examination malpractice.

### **Conclusion**

Examination malpractice has become part of Nigerian examination system to the extent that those charged with this important responsibility are, in most cases, aiding it in the country. Causes of examination malpractice in Nigerian educational system as discussed in this paper could be traced to incompetence of various examination bodies, the strong societal attachment to paper qualification for employment purpose and the preferential admission policy of the various educational institutions in the country. Although the government tried to eradicate this menace or monster bedeviling the society, its effort has not yielded the required result. However all stakeholders in the education industry (parents, teachers, students and the entire society) need to join hands to solve the problem. Students should be made to appreciate the virtues of honesty and hard-work (Faleye & Ojerinde, 2005). The schools should prepare students adequately for examination. While students should be encouraged to develop positive study habits and the society should cooperate in fighting examination malpractice, implementing these by the concerned stakeholders could help curb the menace. Counsellors should apply a cognitive intervention strategy of rational emotive therapy to curb the menace by modifying their behaviour.

### Recommendations

1. Teachers should engage in the actual classroom teachings and stop awarding random continuous assessment scores for money. They should also desist from promising students further assistance in examination.
2. There should be a change in the general attitude of the society. Emphasis should be in performance not merely on passing examinations.
3. Let there be mass campaign against examination malpractice.
4. Handset should not be used in examination hall by both the teachers and the students.
5. Parents should stop influencing school teachers/lecturers and principals for promotion to next class/level.
6. The reliance on certificates as the final means of deciding on the quality or fate of the candidate should be reconsidered. Employers of labour should use variety of means such as screening test and interviews to determine the quality of their employees.
7. The government should stop the establishment of special examination centres (passing centres). These centres are a threat to examination conduct in Nigeria. Such centres should be abolished and the culprit brought to book.
8. Employers of labour should emphasized job excellence not paper qualification.
9. The government should endeavour to provide conducive atmosphere for effective teaching and learning to take place rather than giving room for teachers and students to embark on industrial actions thereby causing crashed academic programmes to be resorted to after every strike.
10. Parents, students and guardians should begin to learn to accept defeats. They should encourage their wards to repeat classes if they do not perform well; rather than pushing them to the next level.
11. Sitting arrangement in examination halls must be devoid of opportunities for students to copy from one other.
12. Examination bodies should be vigilant to fish out bad eggs in their employment that have been aiding and abetting examination malpractices within the school system.

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