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CAUSES OF AND SOLUTIONS TO EXAMINATION MALPRACTICES IN NIGERIA: THE PERCEPTION OF SOME STAKEHOLDERS

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Introduction

There is no gain saying the fact that examination malpractices have become a constant feature of public examining in Nigeria. There is hardly any examination conducted by Public Examination Bodies in the country that have not been characterized by examination malpractice. This tends to devalue international premium on public examinations and certificates obtained in Nigeria. Curbing examination malpractices requires finding out the causes.

According to Asimolowo (1997) examination malpractices are not a new phenomenon except that its current dimension is alarmingly high. A 1990 report of an examination malpractice shows that in the jurisdiction of Ibadan zonal office of WAEC, ten schools were involved in examination

malpractices. The report indicted parents, school managers, and Ministry of Education officials, students, WAEC officials and even teachers. Thus virtually all stakeholders within the sector were said to be involved in this unwholesome act. The sources and avenues of leakages according to Asimolowo (1997) include:

- i) The handlers of question papers
- ii) Printing of questions
- iii) Trailing of questions
- iv) Custodians of question papers
- v) Supervisors/invigilators

Thus examination malpractices perpetrators parade all facets of society. 1977 marked the watershed in the history of examination malpractices in Nigeria (Asimolowo, 1997). Examination malpractices manifest in all manners of unethical practices aimed at enhancing the students academic performance (Olanrewaju, 1999) the year 1977 Nigeria witnessed massive leakage of WAEC examination papers. In spite of the hue and cry that greeted this unfortunate incident, nothing came out of the judicial inquiry set up to look into the shameful examination fraud of that year. It appeared the government could not proffer any meaningful solution. Things fell apart and the result is the sophistication now being witnessed time and again whenever students are tested either privately or publicly all over the country. Getting out of the woods is necessary and therefore something has to be done.

The Objective of the Study

The objective of this study is to determine both causes of and possible solutions to examination malpractices in Nigeria.

Study Questions

The following questions were addressed in this study:

- i. What are the causes of examination malpractices in Nigeria?
- ii. What are the possible solutions to examination malpractices in Nigeria?

Methodology

Three different Focus Group Writing Panels (FGWPs) viz: teachers, parents and students were used in the study. A total of ninety persons made up of fifty students, twenty parents and twenty teachers were involved. Groups were asked to generate causes and solutions in writing and the resulting lists were compared to a mixed focus group (panel) of 30 persons consisting of equal number of teachers, parents and students. The final items of 24 causes and 15 item solutions were selected because not less than 75% of each of the groups agreed to them as shown below. The final items (checklist) were given to another mixed focus group discussion panel in the same proportion. This result was correlated with the first and a concordance coefficient of 0.73 was obtained

The instrument was administered on the sample for this study, i.e. three different Focus Group Discussion Writing (FGDW) panel(s). The views expressed were synthesized qualitatively. The benchmark for accepting a view was if 65% of the FGDWP members felt it was a cause or a solution.

Cause of Examination Malpractice: Some Stakeholders' Perception

Societal Apathy

The value system of every society rubs off on its members. In Nigeria today, society generally does not see anything wrong in doing things unethical to achieve success. This attitude manifests itself in the various ways that parents, teachers, students and officials connive to cheat in examination processes all over the country.

Examination Leakage

Some officials saddled with the responsibility of protecting examination papers in private and public examining have been found to reveal such secret documents to parents, candidates or friends for either a fee or a favour.

Lack of facilities

Facilities are an integral part of the teaching learning process. When facilities are lacking, the teaching learning process is hampered, the goals of the educational system is thus defeated. In all the levels of education in Nigeria, we have a situation where students sit on the floor to learn.

University students even outwit each other to find space on windows for lectures. Available libraries are stocked with outdated or few books. The result is that the large student populations prevalent in our schools have no adequate facilities to enhance their learning. The result is inadequate preparation of students for examinations. When students are not properly prepared for examination in these circumstances, they are most times tempted to cheat. Even the halls/rooms where examination places are usually over-crowded.

Indolence of the Teacher

As an important stakeholder in the educational system, the teacher is expected to discharge his/her duties and responsibilities diligently. The contrary is however at times the case. Instead of hardworking teachers, we have some teachers who have embraced laziness. Teachers these days are known to bring articles to school for sale. Even some lecturers do not find enough time to prepare for lectures or come to class. In spite of this reality, students still must sit for examination. The result is that students cheat to pass such examinations.

Indolence of the Student

There is the twin problem of the lazy teacher is the lazy student. The average Nigerian student does not want to give his/her studies the seriousness they deserve. They play away their time. They fail to do home works and assignments. They attend few or no classes at all. Yet these categories of students want to make good grades during examinations. They therefore resort to short and easy means to success. This leads them to look for ways of cheating during examinations.

Lack of Parental Monitoring

The socio-economic circumstance of the Nigeria family has forced some parents to pursue money to the detriment of their children. Some parents leave home in the early hours of the morning only to return late at night. Some parents also have handed the upbringing of their wards to teachers, maids and boarding houses. They scarcely devote quality time to the welfare and upbringing of their children. The result is that these neglected children fall into wrong companies who see no use in keeping moral values such as examination honesty when others cheat to pass examinations.

Lack of Adequate School Supervision

During external examinations, it is common to find that supervision in some school is inadequate or non-existent. A school presenting a thousand candidates for an examination for instance may have just two supervisors. This inadequate allows for cheating. It is common knowledge that students now choose to write their examinations in rural schools because in such areas, there is little or no supervision. Students thus connive with teachers in such schools to cheat, as they are very certain that they are protected from the vigilant supervision of invigilators.

Quality of Teachers

The quality of those who claim to be teachers these days is suspect. In spite of the numerous programmes encouraged and promoted by government and training institutions to enhance the quality of teaching and teachers, nothing seems to be happening to change the situation. Quality teaching seems to be getting worse, while the mediocre will seem unperturbed about their status. When mediocre teach, mediocrity is perpetuated. Mediocre certainly do not pass examinations. In a society where mediocrity is celebrated, examination malpractice will definitely be an attractive option to choose in order to join the already decayed society.

The Negative Role of Parents

Some parents go to ridiculous extent to ensure that their children pass examinations. They bribe school officials. They even buy over officials from public examination bodies. We have reported cases of parents buying examination question papers for their children. Parents have been known also to arrange for people to impersonate their children during examinations. All these efforts are to ensure their children's success.

Conspiracy by Teachers, Students, Parents and Security Officials

The changing value of Nigeria society has occasioned a grand conspiracy among students, teachers, head-teachers, and security officials to cheat during examinations. The head-teacher give the excuse that they want their schools make names and ensure the security officials watch the visiting invigilators to whip them to line rather than look out for the cheats at examination centres. The extent of the compromise of the security

operation is found those in cases where armed policemen have threatened those who complained about cheating in examination centres.

Overpopulation

The standard examination procedure is that enough space exists between one candidate and the other during examination. Some say arm-length distance. When candidate are many, supervisor are few and the examination hall is not spacious enough, the tendency is to put the entire candidates in the same hall, so that the supervisor or few invigilators would stay in the same hall with candidate. When students sit close together, there is room for cheating, due to their closeness, those who have prepared and give room for exchange of materials, which would have been pretty difficult if space were between the candidates.

Instability in School Calendar

Education is a programmed sector of life. The Nigerian educational sector however, has been experiencing instability in recent times. This is occasioned by different teachers unions. Governmental policies at times cause instability in the school calendar because a new government would refuse to implement some inherited policy. This event disrupts the teaching-learning process and students become necessarily anxious. This anxiety forces some of them to cheat at examinations in order to make up for their lack of adequate preparation occasioned by instability experienced in school calendar.

Inadequate Funding

This affects all of the examination process. It is however imperative to mention that when supervisors will promise to pay them handsome if only they would cooperate with plans to cheat during examinations, they are not adequately compensated for the inconveniences of the rural setting. When such people find themselves in such circumstances, anyone dangling an envelope to aid cheating is a welcome relief(s). He therefore cooperates with the one who brings money.

Ineffective Management

Management of institutions in Nigeria is grossly ineffective. That is why those put in charge of schools shirk their responsibilities. Effective management of a school for instance, would ensure that teachers and

students discharge their duties and responsibilities effectively. When teachers and students are not effectively managed, the result is that learning becomes inadequate and student with the connivance of some teachers cheat during examinations. The inefficiency displayed by public examination malpractices. At times examination questions are wrongly packaged thereby leaking such papers. Delay in starting examinations has led to people smuggling questions from one centre to another. When there is disparity in the time examinations begin around the centres, there is room for malpractices.

Inadequate Coverage of Syllabuses

When subject teachers do not cover syllabuses, the students are set on edge. There is a vacuum created. They resort to cheating to fill this vacuum. Inability to cover syllabuses also creates a sense of inadequacy and insecurity in the psyche of students. They do the wrong thing by manipulating the examination process to favour them. Some indolent teachers who fail to complete their syllabuses also try engaging in malpractice by aiding students during examinations as mercenaries or abettors.

Peer Influence

Bad habits die hard. It is also easy to pick up vices. When examination cheats are celebrated by the society and they seem to succeed, bad groups see them as being smart. Since groups exist to convince that examination malpractice could be profitable.

Lack of Good Learning Culture

Learning is a culture that is cultivated. The average Nigerian student these days seem to be interested only in the outcome of earning the certificate than the inputs – the efforts put into the learning process. Learning would entail reading, studying, diligence at carrying out assignments, punctuality to school, and obedience to school authorities among others. When students do not have good learning culture, the result predictably is failure. This is so because no one reaps anything other than what he sows. In order to cover up for this absence of learning culture, student resort to examination malpractices.

Lack of Political Will

When government makes policies, there must be an enabling environment for such policies to work. This must be brought about by a political will on the part of the government to enforce such policies. The Nigerian system is replete with beautiful laws purportedly made to check examination malpractices.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that virtually every examination in the country today has at least a cheat. We hear the news of examination cheats being caught but we hardly hear them facing the penalties prescribed by the law. Part of the duties of government is to enforce the law of the society. Until people in government entrusted with enforcing our laws have the political will to do so, examination malpractices will continue to thrive.

Manipulation of Legal Process

The rule of law exists so that the state of nature in which man existed would be improved. The law is commonly held to be no respecter of persons. The contrary seems to be the case in Nigeria. It is almost becoming the case that the ability to manipulate the legal process is a testimony to power and influence. If you can manipulate the legal process, then you should get someone who could do same. If culprits of examination malpractices are ever presented before the courts, corrupt and influential personalities, lawyers and judges manipulate the whole legal process especially in these days of *ex parte motion*.

Incapacitation of the Security Apparatus

For examinations to be conducted under appropriate environments, good security apparatus must be provided. It is a fact of the Nigerian society that our security officials are not adequately equipped for the tasks they carry out. For instance two securities operative may be detailed to an examination center with over one thousand candidates armed with batons. This situation is not only dangerous to the operatives themselves but also to invigilators and students as well. This is because desperate candidates these days come to examinations hall armed with sophisticated weapons.

Unemployment

With the high rate of unemployment in the country, more young people are becoming attracted to examination malpractices as candidates pay a lot of money for so called “mercenaries” and impersonators. This practice has been found to be an easy means of making quick money. Mercenaries most times succeed. Thus the situation is perpetuated.

Lack of counselling

In spite of the existence of counsellors in our schools students seem not to have proper counsel on the evils of examination malpractices. In some schools counsellors have been reported to aid and abet cheating at examinations. Lack of career counselling has also pushed student to choose subjects/ careers for which they are not cut out. No one wants to fail. The result is to cheat.

Desperate Desire for Awards /Promotion

It is common for examining bodies to reward students who excel in their examinations. Schools, which produce them, are equally rewarded. When we have unscrupulous teaches and principals, even Head of departments, the examination process is manipulated to favour promotion of teachers based on the performance of their students. Teachers and students tend to cheat for the promotion of their teachers.

Undue Emphasis on Paper Qualification

With the de-emphasis of technical and vocational schools and training by both government and people of Nigeria, paper qualification has become an unwholesome attraction. This rush for certificate is further fuelled by the proliferation of sandwich programmes and sundry school touting certificates. In Nigeria, a man is more to be assessed and promoted based on the kind and number of certificate he can present. This has forced a lot of people who are not cut out for academics to enrol for programmes that would lead to the award of a certificate. In most cases, they cannot defend such certificate either by job or academic performance. They have paid for these certificates or cheated to obtain them.

Lack of Confidence on the part of Students

There are many reasons why students fear examinations. One is due to insufficient instructions from teachers. Students who have not prepared well also fear examinations. There is also the natural disposition of student to be scared of examinations. The list of reasons can go on. When students are afraid of examination they resort to cheating to make up.

Solutions to Identified Problems

Having gone so far, it is also important to proffer some solutions to the hydra-headed problem of examination malpractice.

Promotion of good learning Culture

Old habits we know hardly die. In the same token, it is possible to cultivate a good culture. But concerted efforts have to be made. Both government and other categories of individuals must begin to inculcate good learning culture in students across the country. When students are get used to learning, they will erase the temptation of cheating at examination.

Provision of the Necessary Facilities

Since dishonest candidate who perpetuate examination malpractices have exploited lack of adequate facilities, it is only fitting that the concerned authorities provide facilities, in school so as to stem the tide of tide ugly incidence.

Adequate Funding of Education

Funding is crucial to the survival of any country's educational system. When all aspect of education is adequately funded, teachers are empowered, facilities are provided and education takes places in a conducive atmosphere.

This will definitely reduce the attractions which lack of funding/money holds for poorly paid teachers and inadequately remunerated supervisors and invigilators.

Recruitment of Well-Qualified Teachers

As we have enumerated above, unqualified teachers make up for their inadequacies by assisting students to cheat at examinations. It is expected that when qualified teachers are given the onerous task of teaching, they would do it well.

If they do their duties well, there will be no need to make up for any deficiency in their teaching, which unqualified teachers do by cheating.

Restoration of School Inspection/ Supervision

With the selective and pre-planned inspection going on in our educational system, standards would never be maintained. When proper school inspection or supervision is restored and done consistently, indolent teachers and students who would not want to cheat at examinations.

Promotion of good School Management

It is common knowledge that private education institutions in Nigeria are better managed than public schools. This better management entails discipline, which is needed for examination honesty. When good management is therefore introduced and promoted in both public and private institutions, in all its ramifications, then cheating for examination success would be eliminated.

Adequate Security Measure at Centres

An overhaul of the security measures available at examination centres would surely go a long way to scare the so-called mercenaries and other persons who at present are having unrestrained control of examination centres away from the centres. When these places are well policed, the possibility of cheating is virtually reduced if not completely wiped out.

Provision of Learning Materials by Parents/ Guardians

It is a fact of the Nigerian education system that some student go through schools without possessing adequate leaning materials. This is due to the simple fact that parents and guardians do not provide them. When students do not have learning materials of learning is hampered. The result is inadequately prepared candidate for examinations who cheat.

Promotion of Excellent Teaching

The result of excellent teaching is excellent performance of students who have benefited immensely from their excellent teachers. When excellent teaching is promoted the resultant excellent students would not be pushed to examination malpractices.

This is because excellent students are products of the ideal education setting, which abhors acts of indiscipline.

More Investment in Teaching Development

If you reap what you sow, then more investment in the development of teachers would certainly yield good material that would impact knowledge to students. When student are well taught, they stand the chance of facing examinations with confidence and would not look for the training and development of the teacher should be provided.

Teacher Personal Attention to each Student

True and complete leaning can take place if teachers have personal attention for their students. In that case, they become friends and share the problems of the students. The existence of personal attention would enable the teacher to assist each student know his/her weakness, strengths and aspirations.

Proper Guidance/ Counselling

The average science student in our secondary school wants to study medicine. This obviously is impossible. Proper counselling of students would assist them in career choice. When a student is learning what he/ she is naturally cut out to do, there is no undue pressure to pass examinations at all cost. Guidance/Counselling will also impress it on the student that examination malpractice is wrong and has dire consequences for the individual student, the family and society at large.

Promotion of Healthy Learning Competitions

When healthy rivalry exists among students, they appreciate the fact that passing at all costs is not a wholesome desire. This will translate to good conduct in both internal and external examinations.

Application of Appropriate Sanctions to Culprits

Until offenders are punished with appropriate sanction, and this is publicized or known, more people would continue to hold that examination cheat are usually let off the hook. The government must therefore summon up courage to sanction erring students no matter how placed their parents or sponsors may be.

Adequate Preparation

This would include diligence on the part of both teachers and students. Cooperation of parents with school authorities in provision of leaning materials for student would ensure that student prepare adequately for examinations. The government also will contribute to adequately preparation of student by providing leaning facilities and training teachers for the ultimate purpose of producing quality students for the country.

Conclusion

If the evil of examination malpractice could be reduced to cause and effect, it follows that hope is not lost. The problem could be remedied. However, solving the problem requires a lot of political will on the part of government and a lot of courage for change among the different categories of stakeholders in education. If the evil of examination malpractice is to be wiped out, the stakeholders in education need a lot of cooperation to attain this noble country. Nigeria can also join the league of examination malpractice-free societies.

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