

EMERGENCE OF HI-TECH EXAMINATION MALPRACTICES IN NIGERIA: ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

BY

**GOODLUCK IFIJEH, HAPPINESS MICHAEL - ONUOHA, JULIE ILOGHO AND
IFEAKACHUKU OSINULU**

**CENTRE FOR LEARNING RESOURCES, COVENANT UNIVERSITY,
OTA, NIGERIA**

- **Corresponding Author: Goodluck Ifijeh**
E- Mail : goodluck.ifijeh@covenantuniversity.edu.ng
Phone: 234 8036109216

Abstract

Examination malpractice is considered as a huge challenge to educational assessment and evaluation. This paper examines the dimensions and trends of examination malpractice, as well as the emergence of hi-tech examination malpractice (otherwise called e-cheating or digital cheating) in various levels of the Nigerian educational system. Causes, implications and strategies towards curbing the emerging phenomenon were discussed. The proliferation of mobile phones and other private digital assistants (PDAs) was identified as the driving factor for e-cheating. The paper also identified inadequate funding, corruption, issues bordering on morality and legality as challenges to curbing hi-tech examination malpractice in Nigeria. The involvement of all stakeholders in curbing this societal evil was recommended as the way forward.

Keywords: Education, Assessment, Evaluation, Hi-tech examination malpractice, e-cheating, Digital cheating, Corruption, Nigeria

Introduction

Education has been described as a process through which the young acquires knowledge and realizes her potentialities and uses them for self-actualization (Offorma, 2009). Arising from that definition, the main objective of education is knowledge acquisition and realization of potentials. Arguably, the most effective method to assess and evaluate the attainment of this educational objective is by means of examination. Therefore, the proper conduct of examination is a critical factor in the realization of educational objectives in any society. Failure to properly conduct examinations portends doom for the future of the citizenry of the society. This is because when examinations are not properly conducted, the educational objectives may not be achieved. Consequently, such evaluation leads to wrong judgments and decisions which negatively affect learners, teachers, education industry and the society in general.

Hornby (1995) defined examination as ‘a formal test of somebody’s knowledge or ability in a particular subject, especially by means of answering questions or practical exercises’. Balogun (1999) also defined examination as ‘the process through which students are evaluated or tested to find out the quality of knowledge they have acquired within a specified period’. Examinations are said to be internal when they are conducted by the school authorities; whereas, external examinations are conducted by recognized external bodies. Examples of external examinations in Nigeria include common entrance examination for admission into secondary schools, senior secondary school certificate examination conducted by the West Africa Examination Council and National Examination Council as well as unified tertiary matriculation examination (UTME) for admission into Universities, Polytechnics and Colleges of Education. However, Emaikwu (2012) posited that in recent times, these examinations have been bedeviled by misconducts and malpractices.

Educators have viewed examination malpractices variously. Busayo (2008) viewed examination malpractice as ‘an improper and dishonest act associated with examination, with a view to obtaining an unmerited advantage.’ Examination malpractice is any action carried out by stakeholders such as educational administrators, teachers, parents or students that is likely to render the assessment or examination ineffective or useless (Bruno and Obidigbo, 2012). Underwood (2006) views examination malpractice as dishonest practice which encompasses any action by an individual or group of students to gain an undue advantage in any form of assessment, be it coursework, test or examination. As earlier mentioned, examinations remain important tools for objective assessment and evaluation of what individuals have achieved after a period of training. It is not surprising that the Examination Malpractice Act (2012) defined examination malpractice as ‘any act of commission or omission 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 certificate issued’. Examination malpractice is called by various names and descriptions – examination misconduct, cheating, examination fraud and so on.

The reasons students engage in examination malpractices in virtually all levels of educational institutions are not far-fetched. Alonge (2003) identified the following as being the major reasons:

- Pressure from parents and the society to get good grades
- The value attached to certificates
- Fluid examination procedures
- Low intellectual ability

- Low moral judgment and inappropriate operation of continuous assessment
- Teachers/lecturers' inability to impart knowledge
- Laziness and indolence on the part of students
- Peer pressure
- Inadequate preparation
- Fear of failure

The crust of this paper arises from the alarming rate of examination malpractices in Nigeria education system and the sophisticated hi-tech cheating methods adopted by culprits in recent times. Sunday (2014) argues that with the advancements in information and communication technology, students are devising more and more sophisticated means to beat 'watertight' security and invigilation during examinations.

Magnitude of Examination Malpractice in Nigeria

Though examination malpractice is on the increase all over the world (Underwood, 2006), the rate of occurrence in Nigeria is alarming. It is now so widespread that it is becoming the norm rather than the exemption. Sule (2009) posits that the Nigerian Education system is presently in a state of serious crisis and painful stress as a result of examination malpractices. Busayo (2008) observes that 'schools have failed in their responsibility of producing citizens that are worthy in character and learning; instead they have become merely gateways to meaningless certification.' Rufai (2010) presented an increasing trend in occurrences of examination malpractices in senior secondary school certificate examinations organized by the West Africa examination Council between 2005 and 2009 (see table 1). Rufai also added that the National Examination Council in its May/June and November/December 2009 senior secondary school examinations recorded one million and over 263,000 cases of examination malpractices respectively.

TABLE 1: Candidates involved in malpractice cases in WAEC SSCE (2005-2009)

Year	No. of candidates involved	%
2005	73,050	6.86
2006	82,941	7.19
2007	74,734	5.97
2008	100,428	7.88
2009	118,608	8.74

Source: Rufai (2010)

In 2012, Nigeria was said to occupy number one position in the World Examination Malpractice Index (Omeri, 2012). Examination malpractices do not occur among secondary school students alone; their counterparts in higher institutions of learning are not left out. Emaikwu and Eba (2007) noted that widespread examination malpractice in tertiary institutions in Nigeria have led to a situation where the conducts of formal examinations as bases for evaluating the level of candidates' proficiency at absorbing, reproducing and applying knowledge have become impossible. The unwholesome incidences of examination malpractice account for several pre and post qualifying examinations that are currently conducted in Nigeria. Such examinations include post university matriculation aptitude tests, job placement aptitude test, and so on, organized with a view to authenticating the earlier examinations hitherto taken by examinees.

Forms and Dimensions of Examination Malpractices

Students perpetrate examination malpractice through various strategies, methods and dimensions. Ajayi and Ayodele (2002) identified the various methods and forms of examination malpractice to include:

- Bringing in of foreign or unauthorized materials into the examination hall
- Collusion between students , invigilators and examiners
- Examination leakage
- Mass cheating
- Smuggling of answer scripts
- Certificate racketeering of forgery
- The pairing method which involves students copying each other in the examination hall
- Copying from handouts, texts and notes.
- Stampede method – this happens when a candidate suddenly raises false alarm in the examination hall in order to distract attention and create opportunities for cheating
- Assault on examination supervisors
- Impersonation
- Substitution –this involves the replacement of legitimate answer booklets during an examination with those prepared outside the examination centre
- Plagiarism – this takes place more in unsupervised assessment. Underwood (2006) defined plagiarism as ‘taking someone else’s intellectual endeavor and presenting it as one’s own thought, ideas and work’. It involves copying from published materials without acknowledging the source(s), presenting another person’s ideas as one’s own, and submission of same or similar work for same course or assignment.
- Digital cheating – this is a more recent trend which involves the use of information and communication technology facilities to perpetuate examination malpractices in various forms. It is also known as e-cheating.

There are four key factors in examination malpractices. These are: the generators, facilitators, indicators and detectors. According to Busayo (2008), the generators are mainly students/candidates; the facilitators are interested parties like administrators and examiners, the indicators are the written and unwritten exhibits, while the detectors are few people of integrity who abhor the evil in examination frauds. It is important to note that the increase in the activities and relative successes of the above mentioned factors in recent times have been linked to the advent of information and communication technologies.

Information/Communication Technology and Examination Malpractice: What Role?

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) are ‘diverse set of technological tools and resources, used to communicate, and to create, disseminate, store and manage information’ (Blurton, 2002). They include computers, internet, broadcasting technologies (radio and television) and telephony (mobile technology). ICTs are powerful tools that can increase access to improved and quality education. For most students, the advent of mobile telephones, handheld devices including digital readers and the internet has greatly enhanced interpersonal communication and education. Handheld devices have enabled users to access and retain awesome amounts of information for future references. Indeed, the emergence of these technological tools has greatly enhanced scholarship. In Nigeria, the breakthrough in cell phone technology (otherwise known as

mobile technology) in 2001 has revolutionized the education sector. Sadly, cheating with the aid of mobile devices has become one of the major negative fallouts of the use of technology in education. Electronic cheating or e-cheating maybe viewed as the use of information and communication technologies to gain an undue advantage in an examination. This include (but not limited to) the use of cell phones, programmable calculators, pagers, personal digital assistants (PDAs), computers, internet and so on to gain unfair advantage. Technology was originally meant to enhance the education process and not to distort it. The use of technological tools for examination malpractices does not make technology a culprit. It is only a case of good things finding themselves in the hands of bad users. Possible abuse should not be a reason to discredit such technologies.

E-cheating has taken examination malpractices to a new dimension in Nigeria. Cell phone service o provide students with smart ways to beat the efforts of examiners and invigilators. The Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB), a body saddled with the responsibility of conducting admission examinations into tertiary institutions in Nigeria reported that out of 40,043 candidates caught cheating during the examination in 2007, 1,948 used mobile phones (Sunday, 2014). Sunday also reported that in 2008, the number of e-cheats increased to 3,039, while in 2009, about 200 mobile phones were seized during the examination, with evidence of prepared answers sent via short message service (SMS).In 2014, JAMB blacklisted 23 examination centres for massive examination malpractices including attempts to cheat via mobile devices. Okebukola (2014) posits that ‘the manifestation of the analogue methodology of examination malpractice in Nigeria reached new heights around 2005’. According to Okebukola, by 2006, the supremacy of the analogue started yielding to digital, driven in large part by the increase in the use of mobile devices by candidates.

Forms of e-cheating

The following are the observed ways through which students carry out e-cheating:

- Coded information is stored in handheld devices which are brought into the examination hall.
- Leaked question papers with answers are downloaded from dubious websites
- Use of mobile devices in exchange of answers among candidates and touts (outside the halls) during examinations.
- Copying of notes into ipods which are taking into examination centres.
- Stuffing needed information in cell phones and taking such into the examination hall
- Taking pictures of notes with cell phones and using same to gain unfair advantage during examinations
- Voice recordings of notes for use during examinations
- Taking a photo of question papers and sending same to someone outside the examination hall, with answers sent back as images or text messages.
- Storage of needed notes and formula in programmable calculators for use during examinations.
- Use of cell phones calculators in examination where calculators are not allowed.
- Use of handheld devices to browse for solutions during an examination.

Curbing Hi-tech Examination Malpractice

Hinman (2000) and Underwood (2006) proposed a three way approach to dealing with ICT based examination malpractice. The three approaches are:

- Virtues approach

- Prevention approach
- Policeman approach

The virtues approach involves developing students who do not want to cheat as well as creating an environment that does not encourage cheating. This begins with institutions of learning formulating and making relevant policy statements on examination malpractices. It is not enough to formulate policies; the students must be convinced that the institution is committed to such policies. One way to show commitment is for the institution or school to ensure that all its dealings and practices are ethically carried out as dictated by relevant laws. The institution will lack the moral right to condemn cheating among students if it is involved in shady, sharp and shabby practices. Brown and Howell (2001) posited that institutional commitments to policy statements on examination malpractice can influence students' perceptions. The teachers and lecturers should also show good examples to students. They should demonstrate commitment and forthrightness in their dealings with students. Underwood and Szabo (2004) observed that levels of malpractice decrease when students perceive that their teachers are committed and forthright.

Prevention approach consists of digital and non digital actions taken to reduce or out rightly prevent cheating before, during and after examinations. Some of such actions include, but not limited to the following:

- Ensuring the security of examination question papers and answer sheets before and after the examination.
- Producing multiple forms or versions of examination questions and ensuring that no two candidates having the same version of question papers are seated close to each other. This implies that the questions are same, but the numberings are different.
- Setting up of online multiple choice examination questions which present each candidate with questions randomly selected from the test bank; No two students are presented with identical questions. The Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) experimented with this method during the 2014 Universities, Polytechnics and Colleges of Education admission examinations and has confirmed that this method has potential to reduce examination malpractices (Sunday, 2014).
- Banning students from bringing in mobile technological devices into examination venues.
- Installation of jammers in examination halls. Jammers are devices which prevent radio equipment from sending and receiving signals relevant to their function. This will prevent communication between candidates and persons outside the examination hall. It will also hinder internet browsing during examinations.
- Installation of detection devices that could indicate whether a mobile device is being operated within an examination hall.

The policeman approach entails monitoring and enforcement of laws and regulation guiding an examination. Monitoring and enforcement involves proper invigilation, apprehending and appropriate sanctioning of defaulters. The sanctioning of defaulters will serve as deterrent to others.

Challenges to Curbing Hi-tech Examination Malpractice

Inadequate Funding

Initiating, implementing and managing technological infrastructure needed to curb digital cheating are quite expensive. Technological infrastructure and internet facilities will be installed in examination venues, qualified technical and professional staff must be employed, and there must be stable electricity supply. Being able to fund these programs is a challenging task to Nigerian academic institutions and examination bodies. Mordi (2008) reported that both Federal and State Governments have consistently allocated only 9% of their annual budgets to education. Recurrent expenditure consumes most part of the budget, leaving a meager sum for infrastructure that could boost ICT deployment. Between 1999 and 2007, the Federal Government budgeted \$5.2 billion for education (Editorial, 2008). Out of the sum, \$3.5 billion was spent on wages and salaries, leaving a meager \$1.75 billion for infrastructural development. Considering the number of educational institutions in the country, this budgetary allocation is far too small for a period of 8 years. Though there has been an improvement on budgetary allocation to education in recent times (with \$2 billion allocated to education in 2014), the amount allocated is not enough for massive ICT infrastructural development required in institutions and examination bodies to curb examination malpractice. Similarly, most examination bodies depend on fees collected from candidates to run such examinations. The fees are hardly enough to cater for production, personnel and other miscellaneous costs.

Corruption

In most developing countries like Nigeria, corruption has become a growing phenomenon of grave concern. It is wide spread and part of everyday life (Khan, 2006). Most societies consider corruption as an integral way of life in all endeavors. Public or official decisions, for instance, on the award of contract for the procurement of ICT facilities are compromised by corrupt practices. Similarly, access to a public service and the exercise of a right such as obtaining a mere document may need to be paid for, without official receipts.

Corruption maybe defined as a process through which public officials break the law in pursuit of their private interest. The most common forms of corruption are bribery and extortion. It could also include the allocation of resources sentimentally based on private interest on the short or long run. The education sector is not immune from corrupt practices. Corruption poses a great challenge to curbing both traditional and hi-tech examination malpractices.

Students, teachers, officials of Government and examination bodies, and parents are all involved in the web of corruption. The students who failed to prepare for examinations and want to have good grades at all cost are the major culprits. Some offer monetary gifts to invigilators so they could be allowed to come into the examination hall with programmed or web based mobile tablets and phones. It is reported that some female candidates engage in sexual seduction to entice and compromise male officials (Balogun, 1999). Interestingly, some parents provide their children with money to bribe examination officials or register in 'special examination centres' where examination rules and regulations are compromised.

On the part of teachers, they leave the students with no option than to cheat when they do not go to classes as and when due. Corrupt Government officials recruit teachers who do not have requisite qualifications and capability to teach and prepare students for examinations; thus leaving the students with no options than to cheat. Some teachers also go as far as collecting money or sexually harassing candidates in order to satisfy their selfish interests and compromise examination rules and standards. It is therefore not a surprise that Nwaorgu (2012) stated that "the graveyard tranquility which characterized exam halls in the good old days has suddenly disappeared and has been

replaced by “hullabaloo” as teachers read out answers to the questions asked and the inability of a greater percentage of candidates who cannot spell words, ask teachers to spell it for them, thus compelling the teacher to write the answers on the board”. Examination invigilators engage in corrupt practices when they join fraudulent teachers and administrators and allow themselves to be bought over with money, gifts and sex. Having collected bribes, officials look the other way when students go into examination halls with ICT facilities that could compromise the examination.

Moral Issues

In most schools in Nigeria, particularly the higher institutions, female students dress to entice their lecturers during examinations, some to intimidate them and others to provide a haven for their unauthorized materials. Sometimes these indecent dressings, distracts the supervisors and render them helpless. Some ladies insert their phones or PDAs (private digital assistants) in sensitive and private parts of their bodies. It may be difficult and embarrassing especially for a male supervisor to apprehend such ladies, without being accused of and prosecuted for sexual harassment.

Legal Issues.

The use of cell phone signal jammer to curb hi-tech examination malpractice has been suggested. However, the use of such jammers in public places has not been approved by the National Communications Commission. A cell phone signal jammer is a device used to prevent mobile phones from receiving signals in a given environment. If a phone jammer is installed at examination centres, it will interrupt signals and proper functionality of phones; thus helping to prevent some levels of hi-tech examination malpractice. Underwood (2006) is of the opinion that while technological solutions can and do support more conventional approaches to reducing academic dishonesty, they are not a total solution, not least because the use of technologies is currently illegal.

Recommendations and Conclusion

The implications of examination malpractice among students are frightening and devastating. Examination malpractice destroys the foundation and fabric of any educational system. It makes formal assessments unreliable, educational objectives unattainable and portends a bleak future for any society. The emergence of e-cheating has added to the challenges of conducting credible and reliable examinations. The way forward is a holistic approach involving all stakeholders, using technological and non-technological solutions. As earlier suggested, a prevention approach that involves developing students who do not want to cheat and creating an environment that discourages cheating is the best option. A periodic enlightenment campaign on the ills of cheating should be carried out by examination bodies and school authorities. Examination bodies, in conjunction with the relevant authorities should mount pressure on the National Communication Commission to allow the use of cell phone signal jammers in examination centres. Examination supervisors and invigilators should be trained and equipped to deal with the cheating antics of candidates. Female candidates must dress properly and be thoroughly searched by female invigilators, before and during examinations. Invigilators must enforce and ensure compliance to examination regulations especially with regard to prohibited items in the examination centres. Disobedient and unruly candidates must be severely punished so as to serve as deterrence to others. Officials should be well remunerated, so that they would not be tempted with monetary gifts and bribes from candidates and their parents. However, erring officials who help candidates to cheat in whatever form should be reported to their employers and adequately punished. Government at all levels must also wake up to their responsibilities by budgeting adequate funds for education. It may take a while to eradicate examination malpractice. But with the cooperation of all stakeholders, this societal evil can be tamed.

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