The Challenges of Examination Management in the Developing Societies: The Nigerian Scenario

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Abstract
Formal examination, as old as the 2nd century B.C., and as used by the Chinese Civil Service, can rightly be defined as the assessment of a person’s performance, when confronted with a series of questions, problems, or tasks set him/her, in order to ascertain the amount of knowledge that he has acquired, the extent to which he is able to utilize it, the quality and effectiveness of the skills he has acquired. During the 19th century, formal written examinations became regular in universities, schools, and other educational institutions. Examinations were also increasingly employed for the selection of recruits to the civil service, and the professions, and to posts in industry and commerce. Over the ages, standardized testing has been the most common methodology, yet the validity and reliability of the expected range of contemporary assessment techniques have been called into question. This brings into focus the issue of examination malpractices. Malpractices can be defined as dereliction from professional duty, whether intentional, criminal, or merely negligent, by one rendering such professional services, that result in injury, loss or damage to the recipient of those services, or to those entitled to rely upon them, or that affect the public interest adversely. Examination malpractices have varied ramifications, Salami (1987); Omotosho (1988), and cuts across all segments of the formal education hierarchy, Russell (1994); Obibi (1994), and is usually brought about by a plethora of factors, including poverty, and an undue emphasis on credentialism, which are common features of the developing world.

Introduction
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The Jesuits introduced written examination into their schools in the 16th century. The Definitive Ratio Arque Institution Studiorum of 1599, which was not revised until 1932, contains a code of rules for the conduct of school examinations, which were held annually, and determined whether or not children were promoted to a higher class. During the 19th century, formal written examinations became regular in universities, schools, and other educational institutions. Examinations were also increasingly employed for the selection of recruits to the civil service, and the professions, and to posts in industry and commerce.

Over the ages, standardized testing has been the most common methodology, yet the validity and credibility of the expanded range of contemporary assessment techniques have been called into question.
Uses of Examination

(i) Evaluation of Progress: It generally recognized that a pupil cannot be successfully educated, if he is required to assume a wholly passive role. He must be given the opportunity to practice his skills, if they are to be effectively developed, and to apply his knowledge, if it is to become systematically organized. The examination results will indicate how far those objectives are likely to be attained, and therefore the extent to which they can be regarded as appropriate goals for the pupils.

(ii) Evaluation of Effectiveness of Instruction: An examination that measures the performance of pupils may also be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the teacher, and the method he employs. Examinations are increasingly used to investigate the conditions in which successful learning takes place, to compare the effectiveness of different methods of teaching, to examine the influence on the pupils’ progress, particularly of the various forms of school organization, among others. It also includes the conditions in which successful learning takes place, to compare the effectiveness of different methods of teaching, to examine the influence on pupils progress of various forms of school organization, among others.

(iii) Guidance: In most contemporary schools, examinations serve a wider purpose than that of progress assessment alone. The allocation of pupils to appropriate educational courses is an important task, and a considerable amount of research is devoted to discovering suitable techniques for it.

(iv) Selection: A complementary process to that of guidance is selection of individuals for a particular educational institution, or type of employment. The procedure of selection, which sometimes include examinations, is also used to fill posts in the civil service as well as in the many branches of industry and commerce.

(vi) Certification: Another important purpose of examination is to provide evidence that a person has achieved a specified standard of attainment. It is also pertinent to mention the different types of examination. These include written essay type and objective; and internal and external examinations, among others.

Concept of Examination Malpractices

It is hereby conjectured that one of the challenges of examination management in the developing societies, and particularly in Nigeria is examination malpractice. According to Encyclopedia Britannica (1769), the concept of malpractice is defined as dereliction from professional duty, whether intentional, criminal or merely negligent, by one rendering professional services, that result in injury, loss, or damage to the recipient of those services, or to those entitled to rely upon them, or that affect the public interest adversely.

Examination malpractices has varied ramifications, Salami (1989); Omotosho (1988); and cut across all segments of the formal education hierarchy, Russell (1994); Obibi (1994), and is usually brought about by a plethora of factors, including poverty, and undue emphasis on credentialism, which are common features of the developing world.
Forms of Examination Malpractice

Examination malpractice in Nigeria manifests in a variety of forms. These forms can also be classified in different ways. For the purpose of this paper, we shall adopt a chronological classification scheme. By this scheme, there are three stages of the public examination administration process during which malpractice can be perpetrated. These are pre-examination stage, examination stage and post-examination stage.

Pre-Examination Stage

The Report submitted by N.E.C.O. on the conduct of the examination over a period of time, submitted that a good number of malpractices at this stage have to do with registration of candidates. One of the commonest forms is the registration of non-school candidates for school examinations. In spite of instructions against this practice, principals of schools continue to perpetrate this malpractice every year. In this form, candidates who were not Senior School (SS III) students of a school are registered in the Senior School Certificate Examination (SSCE). Many of these candidates are from urban schools but prefer to sit their examinations in relatively remote rural locations where monitoring is likely not to be strict. They may also be undergraduates of tertiary institutions who have deficiencies in their core subjects. These candidates are usually exploited by principals of their examination schools who usually demand payment of whole session’s fees and, at times, myriad other usually illegal levies. In view of their desperation, these candidates pay up the fees that are demanded by the perpetrators. They eventually constitute grave problems during examinations, at times, leading to cancellation of the school results. Since, they were never students of such schools, and they do not have records of continuous assessment. Knowing fully well that continuous assessment is a compulsory component of certification for SSCE, the schools forge continuous assessment data for such candidates. By way of clarification, continuous assessment is divided into three parts: $5: 12^1/2: 12^1/2$ respectively for year I, II and III of secondary education at both Junior School Certificate Examination (JSCE) and SSCE level. The external examination takes 70% of the certification while the school based assessment is 30% ($5 + 12^1/2 + 12^1/2$).

In order to continue to attract the patronage of non-school candidates, principals of rural schools that are usually poorly maintained, go out of their ways to ensure high scores for their candidates, not by providing effective teaching/learning opportunities but by organizing fraudulent activities during the examinations. To this effect, candidates are encouraged to pay “co-operation fees” for “settling supervisors and examination officials”. Those who pay are allowed free range of movement seeking help during examinations. In some schools, the degree of freedom candidates enjoy in this respect depends on how much they pay. Supervisors, teachers or even principals harass those who fail to pay during the examination. In extreme cases, supervisors might even write reports to the examination body charging such un-cooperating candidates with examination malpractice.

To ensure cooperation of some supervisors in this type of malpractice, certain people who are morally mean, are recruited on purpose by equally mean Ministry of Education officials, on whom examination bodies depend for recommendation of supervisors. Such recommendations are acts of examination malpractice. Another form of pre-examination malpractice perpetrated by schools is registration of candidates that are too many for available physical facilities. This makes supervision very difficult, as candidates have to be crammed, as they are too many on a bench in a room, (N.E.C.O.Report 2004). Registration to allow for impersonation is another type of pre-examination malpractice that is prevalent in schools. In one form, a candidate registers with his/her names but submits
In yet another situation, a school arranges and registers a subject teacher or even the proprietor, for the Senior School Certificate Examination (SSCE). During the examination, the registered school official sits as bona fide candidate. He is expected to finish the examination in time, and depending on whether or not the supervisor is aware of, or involved the deal, he arranges for the duplication of the answers for distribution to other candidates at the centre. At times, after registration of candidates, a prospective candidate may come calling, usually appearing desperate. A principal or registration officer who realizes that some of his originally registered candidates for one reason or another, including death or travel overseas, might not be coming to take the examinations, might decide to “sell” the registration slip, which the school usually keeps for the candidates, to this person. He is made to pay all the “necessary fees,” and even more. For his payment, an original registration slip containing the registration number is given to him. The unsuspecting “candidate” often an undergraduate of a tertiary institution falls into the trap. He has no registration form, which ought to have been sent to the examination body carrying information on the original candidate, scanned into the database of candidates. So, the examination body’s computer captures all the scores of this desperate person, and the data recorded against the registration number which the computer recognizes as belonging to the original, probably even dead candidate/s. In the end, the one who took the examinations receives no result, as the examination body does not even recognize his/her existence, while the one that took no examinations has results published in his name. Who do we blame here? There are a number of registration blunders that we have on record, whose effects could be quite embarrassing. But since these may not in themselves be designed to cheat, they cannot qualify as malpractice and need not be discussed here (N.E.C.O. 2004). We can now proceed to take a look at malpractices that can be perpetrated during examinations.

**Malpractice During Examination**

The National Examination Council (NECO) has observed that examination malpractice in Nigeria has developed a register, in its own right, which appears quite interesting. Most of the expressions in that register have to do with malpractices perpetrated during examination. The malpractices are of different types and each type manifests in different forms. The types include copying, importation of foreign materials, intimidation, impersonation, obstruction of detection efforts, mass cheating, leakage of examination questions and other irregularities.

**Copying**

This involves a candidate helping himself with production from another candidate within the examination hall. There are two forms of copying. When the one copying is doing so without the consent of the original owner. If, however, the copying is on the mutual agreement of both parties, especially where such agreement is to the effect that copying
could be a two way affair, then we have a case of ‘ECOWAS’. Originally, ECOWAS is the acronym for Economic Commission for West African States. NECO has however noted a variant of ‘ECOWAS’ called academic alliance. This is a symbiotic relationship between a brilliant male student (called the provider) and a below average female one (the subscriber) in which the subscriber receives academic help in the examination pays for it in cash or kind. Where ‘ECOWAS’ part collaborators are not sitting adjacent to each other in an examination hall, they can develop a communication code by which information can be shared.

**Importation**

This involves an attempt to bring into the examination hall materials prepared outside the examination hall. Dubbing is a major way of preparing materials for importation. It involves copying such materials on some medium to facilitate importation. The media could be the palm or arm. But because these do not usually accommodate many materials and constitute a lot of risk detection, the tattoo is now a preference. This involves copying on sensitive parts of the body such as the thigh. For a female candidate, a tattoo can easily be shielded with the skirt or a rapper and difficult for a male invigilator to prosecute without exposing his “sense of decency” to doubts.

Super print is dubbing on items of clothing such as underskirts, inner lining of shirts, jackets, blouses, brassieres and handkerchiefs. Other forms of dubbing which are in circulation include missiles which are materials copied on small pieces of paper microchip which is not larger than a complementary card but is installed in other materials such as shoes, mathematical set packs, brassieres, or even ballpoint pen cases to avoid detection.

Walkie-talkie and mobile phones are other forms by which information is transmitted to candidates by ‘mercenaries’ outside the examination halls. If a candidate is able to sneak out a copy of an objective paper, all he needs is to text the alphabetical responses to the candidate in the hall (N.E.C.O.2004).

**Intimidation**

This involves a candidate or his accomplice engaging in an act aimed at striking fear into the invigilator, supervisor or some other official charged with responsibility for good conduct of the examination. Intimidation can be in the form of verbal attack or physical attack. It could also take the form of a mental attack such as exposing a weapon for an invigilator to see and “caution himself”. Some candidates even bring guns into examination halls.

**Impersonation**

In the main, this involves arrangement for someone other than a candidate to write the examination for the registered candidate, usually for a fee or some other considerations. Although impersonation has been found to exist in school-based public examinations, it is much more prevalent in private candidates’ examinations. The different forms in which impersonation has manifested in examinations in Nigeria can be inferred from relevant discussions under pre-examination malpractice.

There are many university undergraduates who have become professional impersonators. Sometimes in June/July 2001, about 5 undergraduate students of Federal University of Technology (FUT), Minna were caught impersonating for others, at a fee.
Obstruction

Obstruction, in the context of this paper may be defined as “any scheme aimed at impeding detection of examination malpractice”. It is usually a design of school officials and may manifest in variety of forms. A common form involves use of classrooms instead of a hall in the conduct of public examinations. By this, a supervisor would have to move from room to room giving invigilators who want to commit fraud latitude to do so when he is not in their room, (N.E.C.O. 2004).

In another form of obstruction, schools locate their examination halls in obscure corners such that candidates can sight any examiner or monitoring official before the officials locate the examination hall. In some schools, gatemen are under instructions not to open school gates to any visitor without first receiving clearance from the principal. In that way, such principal would have arranged to keep his house “in order” before the visitor is admitted.

Some schools have been known to use hospitality to divert the attention of supervisors from doing a good job. Some serve food and snacks to supervisors, in secluded rooms, during examinations. While such supervisors are enjoying such hospitality, anything can go on in the examination hall.

Mass Cheating

This involves malpractice in which the majority of candidates participate. It could involve a teacher dictating solutions to question, writing on the chalkboard for all candidates to copy or couriers importing materials that are distributed very widely. When the whole lot of students in a school make the same mistake for example spelling mistake, there is a need to suspect the school.

Imagine the case of objective test items. Let us assume that the correct option is B. If all the candidates or majority under a seating arrangement chose option C, then there might be a need to suspect the school. The probability that everyone would choose the same wrong option is supposed to be low. A concept has been developed using probability theory to detect this type of collusion.

Leakage

When candidates or unauthorized persons access the contents of a question paper before the examination, a case of leakage (or expo) is said to have occurred. It has been observed that this type of malpractice is, probably the most devastating to the credibility of an examination body because the general public is aware that something has gone wrong whenever there is an “expo” N.E.C.O.Report 2004).

Prospective sources of leakage of public examination papers could include:

(i) Examiners who set the question;
(ii) Officers of the examination body who process the question papers, handle the printing arrangements and transport;
(iii) The printers of the question papers;
(iv) The custodians who keep the question papers; and
(v) Supervisors.

Many of the other malpractices may appear pardonable, but leakage is the least pardonable.
**Post-Examination Malpractice**

This type of malpractice can take different forms. For instance, a supervisor on previous arrangement could leave examination script envelopes open, awaiting the submission of script or scripts written outside the examination hall before sealing such envelopes, and submitting same to the examination body.

In another form, the arrangement may be with officials of the examination body who receives such worked scripts and slots them into the appropriate envelop and, at times, withdrawing the ones written in the examination hall. This is generally referred to as substitution. They, at times, forget to remove the original and examiners could now find two scripts with different handwritings for one candidate, N.E.C.O. Report, 2004).

Another form of post-examination malpractice involves officials in the computer unit of an examination body changing a candidate’s scores on a computer storage facility with the aim of falsifying his certificate of statement of result or illegally issuing results or certificates to enable the applicants gain employment or admission into a tertiary institutions. At times, however, alterations are sent out without affecting the original (authentic) database, (N.E.C.O.Report, 2004).

It is on record that some candidates or their friends have made attempts to trace certain scripts to where they were being marked with a view to obtaining undue advantage for certain candidates. Some examiners, in a reverse process, have also been known to attempt to trace candidate’s scores for some form of gratification. Someone from Enugu traced his or her papers to Kano, while another traced it from Kano to Ibadan, a distance of well over seven hundred kilometers. Such cases are usually detected by either the team leaders or checkers.

Examiners have also reported finding money enclosed by candidates in their scripts with notes requesting enhanced scores from such examiners. Some female candidates have also been reported to enclose their photographs and address with the script, in the hope that an interested male examiner would be assigned to mark such scripts, (N.E.C.O. Report, 2003). The deal is usually that such an examiner is assured of ‘good times’ with the candidate.

**Rate Of Examination Malpractice Between 2000 And 2003 At The SSCE Level**

The foregoing suggests the depth of problems a public examination body in Nigeria must grapple with if its certification effort is to be considered credible. It has not been easy with the National Examinations Council (NECO). That, notwithstanding, NECO has not allowed perpetrators of examination malpractice to go away without a battle. The Council had its maiden edition of the SSCE in year 2000, the arrangement by State is as shown in Figure 1 a below.

Another Examination body, the West African Examination Council (WAEC) as in Appendix A also reveals that in year 2000, Rivers State had 5,288 (12.9%) results cancelled; while no result was cancelled in Zamfara (a Sharia) State. Figure 1b below shows the cancellation per State.

**Solutions To Examination Malpractices**

The Federal Military Government of Nigeria on 10th of May 1999, promulgated a Decree No 33 on Examination Malpractices, for offences such as cheating at examinations, impersonation, disorderliness at examinations, disturbances at examinations, obstruction of supervisors, forgery of result slips, breach of duty, and conspiracy, and aiding, among others.
All aimed at curtailing this ugly tide. Despite this however, the situation continues, even though on a reduced scale.

Examination malpractices have become a sore spot in the minds of many educationists, and successive governments. This has led to many steps being taken by many organizations, like the West African Examinations Council (W.A.E.C.), and the National Examinations Council (N.E.C.O.), among others. Among the necessary steps to be taken, the following become imperative:

1. Proper counseling should be given to students, parents, and the general public, from time to time on the ills of examination malpractices.

2. Promulgation of further stiff penalties to the offenders, like as stated in Nigeria’s Decree No 33 which reads thus; Any person who fraudulently or with intent to cheat or secure any unfair advantage to himself, sells, and buys, or otherwise deals with any question papers intended for the examination of persons at any examination, or commits any of the offences, shall be guilty of an offence, and on conviction shall be sentenced to 21 years imprisonment.

3. Enforcement of the stiff penalty by the appropriate agency or authority.

4. Institutions that are charged with the conduct of such examinations should also consider taking the following steps, to check this trend:
   - Withholding the results of the affected students.
   - Canceling the results of the affected students.
   - Banning the affected students, and their institutions from taking the subsequent examinations for a period of time.
   - Suspending such students from the institutions of learning.
   - Surcharging such students certain amount of the cost of re-administering the examination again by the body, or the institution concerned. This is because students who fail their examination at one point or the other, often register again for such examinations.

Conclusion

The conclusion that can be drawn from the above is that the trend in examination malpractices has not diminished significantly over the last five years, in spite of the various efforts that the concerned bodies, organizations and individuals, including the Federal government have been making to stem this rather embarrassing situation. It should be stated, however, that the campaign against this ugly trend is a continuous one, and as the ‘war’ progresses, more and more people are being made to see reason, and imbibe the rational culture of sanctity of examinations. It is hoped that this situation will continue to improve, such that the credibility of the certificates that emanate from such examinations will not be in any doubt.

REFERENCES


