

Quality Assurance: A Practical Solution To Examination Malpractices In Nigerian Secondary Schools

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Abstract

This paper focuses on quality assurance as a solution to examination malpractices in Nigerian secondary schools. An examination is an instrument for decision-making on the performance and consequently the job opportunity and educational advancement for an individual. Therefore, many examinees would want to pass by all means, their abilities notwithstanding. Examination malpractice occurs every year and it seems to have defied solutions. It has negative consequences on the examinees and the education system. Using quality assurance strategy, inputs of high standard teachers, students, facilities, curriculum and education policy into the education system would be ascertained. School managers are to monitor the inputs and ensure proper processing so that relevant and adequate knowledge would be acquired. Thus, this paper recommends that there should be quality inputs and processing of all resources. It also recommends that automatic promotion should be discouraged and that there should be moderate class-size.

Introduction

In Nigeria, education has been adopted as an instrument for national development. Therefore, governments, communities, private organizations, and individuals have established educational institutions with a view to training the citizens for the development of the nation's physical and human resources. In these institutions, teaching and guidance activities are supposed to take place so that appropriate skills and knowledge can be acquired by the students. Furthermore, a machinery, through which the extent of knowledge and skill acquisition is determined at each stage of education has been set up. This is in form of examination which would be organized in order to evaluate, assess and test knowledge and skills. The outcome of the examination is used as a basis for decision-making on the examinee's ability. The examinee is consequently awarded a certificate which could qualify him for admission into a school, promotion into higher level of an institution and employment opportunities. However, many decisions, which emanate from examinations may not be valid due to involvement of examinees in malpractices. When such decisions are upheld, the certificate awarding institutions would be promoting and graduating incompetent personnel who would not be able to contribute positively national development. Malpractice occurs in both internal and external assessment of educational outcome. It is a problem which has been afflicting the education system for many years. It seems to have defied solutions, as all antidotes applied so far have been faulted by fraudsters. In fact, it constitutes the most serious problem facing Nigerian education system in general and secondary education in particular (Obe, 1998; Adesina, 2005). Therefore, there is a need to sanitize the nation's education by getting rid of examination malpractices. This is a challenge to the administrators of education within and outside the school system. In this paper, quality assurance is examined as a practical solution to examination malpractices.

Conceptual Clarification

The following terms are defined as used in this paper.

Quality: Something good, ideal, or of high standard.

Quality Assurance: Consistent provision and utilization of good and high standard resources to foster effective teaching and learning, in every stage and aspect of the educational system. Quality assurance is meaningful when application of its strategy is not deferred till the end of an educational programme.

Examination: Test, assessment, evaluation. It is “an instrument for assessing individuals’ skills and knowledge in general, and specific areas of studies, and overall academic achievements” (Adekale, 1993, p.20).

Examination Malpractice: ‘A misconduct or improper practice before, during or after any examination by the examinees or others with a view, to obtaining good results, by fraudulent means’ (Obe, 1998, p.36).

Input: Human and non-human resources provided into an organization from the beginning of a programme to the implementation stage and to the end of the programme.

Process: Activities such as teaching, learning, and counseling, in which personnel in the educational institutions engage.

Examination Malpractices

An examination, which can be in essay or objective type, oral or written, theory or practical, constitutes an integral part of the education process. It is conducted in order to determine the extent to which knowledge and skills have been acquired. Based on examination results, decision could be taken on admission into educational institutions and employment in the labour market.

As an instrument for decision-making, examination is always prone to fear and anxiety. Many examinees would want to pass the examination by all means. Also, many school authorities and parents would want to explore means of getting good grades for their students and children. Hence, they resort to different forms of malpractices before, during and after examinations. According to Adesina (2005), examination malpractices include leaking out questions to students, girraffing and smuggling of material into examination hall. Others are deliberate extension of time by supervisors and invigilators, change of scores, buying and selling of examination grades, question papers and prepared answers, and trading sex for question papers, marks and grades. Also, Magaji (2006), identified impersonation, collusion between candidates, collusion between candidates and officials, assault and intimidation, mass cheating, teacher-student affair, bribery, spying, submission of multiple scripts, use of coded or sign language, multiple entry for the same examination among others, as different forms of malpractices in Nigeria.

Malpractice in an examination has been in existence a long time ago. For example, there was a leakage of Senior Cambridge Local Examination in 1914 (Ezezobor, 1983; Adekale, 1993). After independence, there was hardly any year when no examination malpractice was not recorded. There were leakages in West African Examination Council

(WAEC) paper in 1963, 1967, 1971, 1977 and 1981. A panel of enquiry, set up by the Federal Government to investigate the 1977 examination leakage, recommended sanction on WAEC officials who were involved in the malpractice, shedding of WAEC workload and use of continuous assessment as a factor for award of certificate (Ezezobor 1983, Adesina 2005). Consequently, new examination bodies were established. These were Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) established in 1978 to conduct matriculation examinations for admission into universities, polytechnics and colleges of education; National Business and Technical Examination Board (NABTEB) established in 1992 to conduct business and technical examinations; National Board for Educational Measurement (NBEM) established in 1992 and changed to National Examination Council (NECO) in 1999 to conduct school certificate examinations (Olagboye, 2004).

Another measure was the Federal Government's promulgation of Decree 20 in 1984, which stipulated a 21-year jail term for those found guilty of examination malpractice. Also, there was decree 33 of 1999 stipulating imprisonment for a term up to five years or fine of N50,000.00 to N100,000.00 for any person convicted of examination malpractice (National Open University of Nigeria, n.d.).

In spite of these measures, the menace continued to occur in virtually all public and institutionally organized examinations. In 2006, the Federal Ministry of Education blacklisted and derecognized 324 secondary schools across the nation as centres for conducting public examinations from 2007 to 2010. The distribution of the schools which were found guilty of examination malpractices, is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Examination Malpractices in Nigerian Secondary Schools

| Zone | No of schools involved | % |
|---------------|-------------------------------|--------------|
| North-Central | 54 | 16.6 |
| North-East | 08 | 2.5 |
| North-West | 12 | 3.6 |
| South-East | 48 | 14.8 |
| South-South | 116 | 36.0 |
| South-West | 86 | 26.5 |
| Total | 324 | 100.0 |

Source: Week End Times, 17th & 18th February, 2007, p.4

Table 1 shows that examination malpractice in secondary schools is a national problem. It occurs in all geo-political zones in the country. The South-South zone has 116 schools, followed by South-West zone with 86 schools. The North-East zone has 8 schools which is the least in the six zones.

Consequences of Examination Malpractices

According to Ijaiya (2001), examination malpractice indicates a declining quality of education. This implies that, the quality of education in Nigeria is low, since involvement in it spreads across the country. This will affect national development adversely.

Moreover, those who engage in cheating at a lower level are likely to continue at higher level of education. When they graduate into the society, their previous attitudes can easily lead them into corrupt practices.

Another consequence is that, people who possess certificates through cheating could use the certificates to secure jobs which they would not be able to perform. Poor

performance would lead to poor productivity. Thus, development and sustenance of human and material resources would be at stake.

There have been occasions when students are suspended, examiners are blacklisted and schools are derecognized as centres for public examinations, as a result of one form of malpractice or the other. The steps are meant to serve as deterrent to others. However, they bring shame to perpetrators.

Quality Assurance in Input, Process and Output of the Education System

Quality assurance in education deals with proactive means of ensuring quality of inputs, teaching-learning process, academic achievement of pupils and school environment before things get out of hands (Babalola, 2004). Thus, an education of high quality should have high quality students, teachers, facilities, school curriculum and government policies as inputs. The manner in which the inputs are processed from the beginning to the final years of an educational programme and the quality of assessment of the entire teaching-learning activities, also constitute important aspects of quality assurance.

Students as Input into the Educational System

Students constitute a vital input into the education system. Without them, all other inputs can not achieve educational objectives. At the entry point of the educational system, the students are expected to be of high quality. That is, they should meet the expected standard of the level or class in which they are to be enrolled. Incidentally, students of poor ability have been admitted or promoted into higher classes in our educational institutions. This practice do occur frequently during free education programmes. Ezezobor (1983), wondered if products of such free primary and secondary education were going to be enrolled for General Certificate of Education. They were not seriously groomed for that type of examination, he concluded. Quality assurance demands that students should be of required standard before they are admitted into schools. It also demands that they should not be promoted if they are of low standard. It is probably in this regard that Ebenebe (1998), viewed admission of children with very poor academic standards into secondary schools, as a way of laying the foundation for indiscipline and cheating in examinations.

Teachers as Inputs into the Education System

The Federal Government stated that 'no education system may rise above the quality of its teachers' (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004 p.39). Incidentally, many teachers are lacking in good quality which can enhance meaningful teaching. As at 2004/2005 session, 25.65% of teachers in Nigerian secondary schools were not professionally qualified (Teachers' Registration Council of Nigeria, June, 2006). Quality of teaching to be given by this category of teachers is likely to be low, and this will have adverse effects on the learners. Conversely, teachers of high quality could impart right skill, knowledge and attitude. Teachers as inputs, therefore, constitute a major factor of quality assurance.

Curriculum as an Input into the Education System

In curriculum planning and implementation, attention is expected to be paid to the four pillars of learning which were advocated in the Delor's report to UNESCO (Adegoke, 2003). These are learning to know, learning to do, learning to be, and learning to live together. When these aspect are adequately considered in the curriculum, the educational system will be functional and its recipient will be self-reliant.

Besides students' poor skill and knowledge acquisition the four areas, there is virtually no subject on the secondary school curriculum where there are no topics which teachers find difficult to teach (Okebukola, 2005). Though, this problem may be due to poor teacher preparation or poor teaching-learning environment, the problem may be inherent in the curriculum itself.

Facilities as Inputs into the Educational System

Facilities are material resources. In the schools, they are physical and spatial enablers of teaching and learning which will increase the production of results. (Emetarom, 2004 p.110). They include building structures, equipment, water, electricity, textbooks, furniture and recreational facilities, among others. They constitute vital inputs which are capable of achieving good results when combined with other resources in adequate quality and quantity. However, poor supply and poor maintenance of facilities are regular features in many primary and secondary schools. This will not encourage a conducive environment for knowledge and skill acquisition. Thus, students who want to make up for their deficiencies, would rely on external assistance to be able to pass examinations.

Government's Policy as an Input into the Education System

A policy in terms of programme and guideline, constitutes an input into the education system. In the past, the Government evolved many education policies which were meant for execution in order to achieve national objectives. However, some of the policies were characterized by an on-the-implementation planning. That is, implementation had started before proper planning. For example, the Universal Primary Education (UPE) of 1976 was pronounced by the Federal Government in 1974 in Sokoto; and its implementation started without a prior discussion of its logistics.

Similarly, the UPE of 1979 embarked upon by State Governments in the South Western Nigeria, had no long-term planning. It started immediately the politicians assumed duties in the second republic. The on-going Universal Basic Education (UBE), embarked upon by the Federal Government as from 1999, was not different from the previous programmes in terms of planning. The UBE was launched in 2000 while an Act, backing it was signed in 2004. Meanwhile, implementation had already started in 1999.

Fafunwa (1974 p.154) quoted Fredric Harbison as saying 'schools and college buildings can be created in a matter of months; but it requires decades to develop high-level teachers and professors'. This statement is true today as it was in 1960 when Harbison was advising the Nigerian Government on manpower development. Therefore, an education policy embarked upon without adequate planning will not have good quality and sufficient teachers and other resources.

Conclusion

The discussion so far leads to the following conclusions.

Quality of inputs into education system would affect the quality of the examinees. High quality inputs is likely to enhance knowledge and skill acquisition. This will reduce the tendency to cheat in the examination. Poor teaching, learning and counseling activities in schools would have negative impact on the quality of knowledge and skills of the examinees. Finally, quality of examinees and the manner in which an examination is administered, would determine the extent of involvement in malpractices.

Recommendations

Relevant and sufficient facilities, competent teaching and administrative personnel, and moderate class-size are recommended as inputs into the education system. The inputs should be accompanied by efficient processing. It is also recommended that automatic promotion within and between schools should be discouraged. That is, students who do not merit promotion should not be given. Relevance of a curriculum to the needs of the society should be considered when it is being formulated; and necessary facilities for implementation should be put in place. In policy formulation, professional educators and educational administrators should be consulted. The government should take to professional advice. Finally, it is recommended that all personnel in education system should undergo courses in examination administration.

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