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Dimensions and Prevalence of Examination Malpractices among Students in Ogun State Owned Universities

ABSTRACT

Examination malpractices have become so endemic and persistent in Nigerian education system. The variety, techniques and the levels at which they are perpetrated seem to point to one major direction that the Nigerian educands place very high premium on paper qualifications which they see as sine qua non for their entry into the corporate world or into higher institutions of learning. Thus, in spite of the stiff penalties contained in the miscellaneous offences acts, Nigerian educands, in their quest for high scores in examination and marketable academic certificates, continue to devise various sophisticated methods to cheat during examination. Confronted and constipated with the magnitude of cheating in examinations in our institutions of learning, this research reflects on recent forms of cheating, causal factors and possible solutions. Interview guides and adapted structured questionnaires tagged PEMSPU were distributed to randomly picked students from Obasiri Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye and Tai Solarin University of Education, Ijagun, both owned by Ogun State, Nigeria. The data gathered through the six hypotheses set up were tested with chi-square and interpreted accordingly. Findings reveal that Certificate consciousness, Lecturers' poor disposition to work, Admission requirements and Students' personal factors all contribute to the persistence of examination malpractices among students in Universities. It was also discovered that examination malpractice

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has a significant influence on the quality of education received in Universities, and so, steps should be taken to control the tide.

Key words: Examination, Malpractices, Persistence, "Educand" and Certificate consciousness.

INTRODUCTION
Assessments of students' learned experiences are in two dimensions - formative and summative. While the former provides an immediate and continuous feedback on the quality of learning and assimilation, the latter takes the form of end-of-semester's examinations. Both types of assessment go into the determination of a student's general performance in the system. The importance of both types of assessment lies in the fact that they combine to determine the legibility of a candidate to ascend to higher positions in their chosen careers. The extent to which the objectives of examinations can be accurately determined depends greatly on the degree of reliability of test scores.

There are, however, reasons to doubt the reliability of scores obtained by students in Nigerian higher institutions. The desire to succeed at all cost in examinations has led to various sophisticated styles of cheating among students. This is in spite of the different forms of punishments put in place to curb such misdemeanors. The headache here is that when students cheat in examinations, whatever scores they obtain cease to reflect their true abilities, capabilities and potentialities. Consequently, any decision made about them on the basis of such scores, fails to qualify as valid and the rationale for assessment is defeated. To obtain a valid assessment of students' abilities, therefore, every effort must be made to minimize, if not eliminate, cheating in examinations. The under cited provides a synopsis of the investigations on the issue of cheating in examinations with particular reference to Nigerian institutions:

"There is a new range of foolproof tricks or sophisticated methods recently unleashed by candidates. The phenomenon which varies.

from leakages of questions before actual examination dates to outright smuggling of textbooks and answer notes into examinations halls, now includes the collaboration of lecturers. Also, students in most schools across the country contribute sums of money and buy presents to corner invigilators who turn blind eyes during examinations. The situation is indeed of concern. (Punch Newspaper cited in Akinsanya: 2008)."

Suffice it to say, however, that cheating in examinations is not peculiar to Nigerian institutions alone. Deniga (1986) asserted that cheating has been a social problem for most of recorded history. He stated the case of China where applicants for Civil Service Position were required to take examinations in different cubicles to prevent cheating. Death penalty was imposed on examiners who cheated, but it still persisted. Deniga opined that cheating in examination can be categorized under psychological, environmental, intellectual and moral factors. The psychological reasons include stress and anxiety which are often induced by pressure from parents and 'significant others'. The environmental factors include administration of examinations, invigilation procedure and absence of punishment for cheats. This is why it is believed that culture makes examination malpractice possible. This is to say that the culture of an area could either encourage or discourage examination malpractice. In this regard, one should be quick to point out that an individual's attitude to and regard for morality has something to do with the way the student behaves in examination situations. Candidates who are raised in an environment that emphasizes honesty, fairness and trust as the best policies/legacies will grow to abhor examination malpractice.

TYPES OF CHEATING
There are three dimensions on which cheating behaviour could be ordered. These are:
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1. the opportunistic-planned dimension;
2. the active-passive dimension; and
3. the social-independent dimension.

On the basis of these dimensions, four major types of cheating can be illustrated. These are:

1. Independent-opportunistic cheating which is unplanned and impulsive;
2. Independent-planned cheating which involves an element of foresight and activity preliminary to the actual test/examination situation;
3. Social cheating which involves two or more people and in which the subject actively instigates the cheating;
4. Social cheating which involves two or more people but in which the individual plays a passive role.

MODES OF CHEATING

Examination malpractice s take different forms. It could be in the form of giving students 'suggested or likely' examination questions (areas of concentration/attack) by those who have the knowledge of such questions. It could be a leakage of examination questions, that is, giving students the actual question papers. By and large, cheating in examinations can be associated with three categories of students;

1. Those who might not have been too serious in their studies but who are conscious of success.
2. Those that are really ambitious but all the same lack personal confidence.
3. Those that are naturally mischievous. It is of noteworthy to say here that there are some students who pass examinations without even sitting or putting in for them.

From the distributed questionnaires and observations, the researcher gathered that the styles/behaviours classified as cheating are multi-varied, some of which are:

i. Looking at another person's paper while writing examinations. They call this 'spying'. It is the most common, quickest and safest method.
ii. Using crib notes or chips.
iii. Sending text messages through phones on vibration/silence.
iv. Getting unearned marks (favouritism) from lectures. This involves palling with the course lecturer on the basis of 'give-and-take'/rub my back, I rub your back' 'nothing goes for nothing'. This is not only common among female students with male lecturers, it also happens among female lecturers (married or unmarried/young or old) with their 'matured' male students.
v. Impersonation
vi. Writing of answers on examination benches/desks or other strategic places. Some students go to the extent of writing on their laps, thighs, breasts, fists, even on babies (for the student-mothers).
vii. Sexual harassment of lecturers/invigilators in the examination hall. This happens when a female student, for instance, starts looking at a male lecturer suggestively or seductively. In which case, the no self-controlled lecturer might throw away all discipline and get caught in the web. We have cases of ladies who wear provocative dresses (see-me-through) to the examination hall. This leaves the lecturers who are of easy-virtues to be at the mercy of the expose.
viii. Coded languages
ix. Going out to nearby (e.g. toilets) to read up
x. Exchanging question sheets or even answer sheets, etc.

CAUSES OF EXAMINATION MALPRACTICES

Many factors have been adduced as causes of cheating in examinations. The first and the most fundamental one is the attitude of some lecturers. We have some lecturers who are found of evading classes some manage to appear in classes on two or three occasions in a semester, then, examinations would be set. Some other lecturers go to the class to tell the students stories about their
wives and children or put up comedy shows instead of focusing on subject matter. Some others have no mastery knowledge on the courses allocated to them, so, they do a lot of covering up by getting unnecessarily provoked with a slight mistake on the part of the student, and walk out of classes. One could go on mentioning some of the antics played by these breed of lecturers; but the point is that these attitudes tend to outplay the students in getting the needed knowledge in order to perform wonderfully well at examinations. The policy on education upholds that no education system could rise above the quality of its teachers (FGN in NPE, 2004); this means that if the inputs of the lecturers are not solicited, one should not expect any miracle it is brought out.

Another factor is lack of confidence in the students during examinations. The students are often characterized with the feelings of doubt and inability to succeed in their examination. This might be due to the fact that they had not adequately prepared for such examinations, or that the lecturers in charge of the particular courses had not done their own jobs meritoriously. The students, thus, resort to cheating because every candidate who writes an examination wants to succeed.

Thirdly, the part some invigilators at examinations contribute to the menace is of no small value. These invigilators who are supposed to monitor the activities of the students do sometimes turn themselves into accomplices. Some invigilators, paradoxically, act like dogs that eat the bones they are asked to keep. Similarly, some of those who mark the answer papers and those who collate the figures have formed a formidable ring dealing mainly in examination business.

Other factors that cause examinations malpractices are enumerated below;

1. Admission requirements. When students of low academic performances are admitted, whether through political lobbies or what have you, such students, upon realizing their inadequacy to fit in into the status they do not actually belong to, will naturally indulge in malpractices.
2. Too large classes with less number of teachers.

3. Teachers' inefficiency which most times result from lack of pedagogical and andragogical experiences.
4. Late or no preparation for examinations
5. Pressure to obtain better grades
6. Vicarious influences
7. Supervisors' distractions or support
8. General social/societal pressure
9. Undue pressure from parents, guardians or mentors
10. Desire to impress (lecturers, peers, etc)
11. Fear of self-devaluation in competition
12. Lack of proper instruction and coordination
13. General fear of failure
14. Undue emphasis on paper qualifications, etc.

From the foregoing, the following hypotheses were set up for the study:

1. Hi: Certificate consciousness has a significant influence on the continued occurrence of examination malpractices among students in Ogun State Universities.
2. Hi: Lecturers' poor disposition to work has a significant influence on the continued occurrence of examination malpractices among students in Ogun State Universities.
3. Hi: Admission requirements have a significant influence on the continued occurrence of examination malpractices among students in Ogun State Universities.
4. Hi: Students' personal factors have a significant influence on the continued occurrence of examination malpractices among students in Ogun State Universities.
5. Hi: Some teachers' lack of pedagogical and andragogical experiences have a significant influence on the continued occurrence of examination malpractices among students in Ogun State Universities.
6. Hi: Examination malpractice has a significant influence on the quality of education received in Universities.
METHODS

RESEARCH DESIGN

Descriptive research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study was the publicly owned universities in Ogun State, which were only two - Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye and Tai Solarin University of Education, Ijagun. The two universities thus served as the automatic sample of the study, from which one hundred and fifty respondents were chosen randomly across Faculties/colleges. An instrument tagged PEMSPU - Persistence of Examination Malpractices among Students in Public Universities was adapted to gather the needed data for the study. The test re-test method at an index of 0.85 was used to ascertain the reliability of the instrument, while face and content validity were also ensured. Chi-square was the suitable statistical tool adopted to test the hypotheses. With significance difference of 0.05 and degree of freedom as 1, the decision rule was wherever \( X^2_c > X^2_t \), the null hypothesis is accepted, while the alternate is rejected; if however, \( X^2_c < X^2_t \), the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternate accepted.

Following the above rule, the six hypotheses were analysed and the following findings generated from one hundred and fifty respondents:

FINDINGS

1. Hi: Certificate consciousness has a significant influence on the continued occurrence of examination malpractices among students in Ogun State Universities.
\[ X^2_c = 0.13 + 0.06 + 0.81 + 0.4 = 1.41 \]
This means \( X^2_c \) is less than \( X^2_t \) which is 3.481. So, we accept and confirm the alternate hypothesis.

2. Hi: Lecturers' poor disposition to work has a significant influence on the continued occurrence of examination malpractices among students in Ogun State Universities.
\[ X^2_c = 0.07 + 0.006 + 0.11 + 0.001 = 0.187 \]
This means \( X^2_c \) is less than \( X^2_t \) which is 3.481. So, we accept and confirm the hypothesis.

3. Hi: Admission requirements have a significant influence on the continued occurrence of examination malpractices among students in Ogun State Universities.
\[ X^2_c = 0.401 + 0.201 + 0.497 + 0.248 = 1.347 \]
This means \( X^2_c \) is less than \( X^2_t \) which is 3.481. So, we accept and confirm the hypothesis.

4. Hi: Students' personal factors have a significant influence on the continued occurrence of examination malpractices among students in Ogun State Universities.
\[ X^2_c = 0.25 + 0.13 + 0.19 + 0.10 = 0.67 \]
This means \( X^2_c \) is less than \( X^2_t \) which is 3.481. So, we accept and confirm the hypothesis.

5. Hi: Teachers' lack of pedagogical and andragogical experiences have a significant influence on the continued occurrence of examination malpractices among students in Ogun State Universities.
\[ X^2_c = 0.38 + 0.19 + 0.04 + 0.02 = 0.63 \]
This means \( X^2_c \) is less than \( X^2_t \) which is 3.481. So, we accept and confirm the hypothesis.

6. Hi: Examination malpractice has a significant influence on the quality of education received in Universities.
\[ X^2_c = 0.07 + 1.54 + 0.14 + 0.07 = 1.82 \]
This means \( X^2_c \) is less than \( X^2_t \) which is 3.481. So, we accept and confirm the hypothesis.

All the alternate hypotheses were thus confirmed.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

The findings revealed that Nigeria is essentially a certificate-oriented society. Certificates remain the most singular potential to higher economic and social status in this country. Hence, most students place high premium on the acquisition of certificates. This ascribed role of the certificates creates fear in students and presents a strong motivation for cheating in examinations.
The findings show that the use of "live-wire" constitutes the easiest form of cheating in examinations. "Live wire" involves gaining access to question paper(s) before examination time. This is only possible by either of these two means: directly through the lecturer or through the assistance of staff involved in the preparation of the examination questions. Access to live questions through the lecturer may be through one or two students close to the lecturer, while opportunities via the second means can be varied. During typing, "risographing" or collation of examination papers, interested supportive staff may have access to any paper for sale or favour to desperate students.

The function of examination anywhere is to ensure that the requisite knowledge has been acquired. This cannot be achieved if proper learning had not taken place. This means that effective learning through improved teaching methods can serve as a means of curbing cheating in examinations.

The findings of this study corroborates that of Titilayo (1987) who opined that credible examination is ensured when students are thoroughly supervised during examinations. This is because cheating often thrives well during examination when supervisors are inadequate for the number of students; when they are just 'doing their own thing', apparently discountenancing cheating; or when candidates sit too close to one another.

It is only when the different aspects of teaching, examination preparation, supervision and scoring are properly handled that examination results can be relied upon to reflect the true scores of students in this school.

**Solutions to Examination Malpractices**

The following methods were suggested by the respondents to eliminate or reduce cheating in examinations:

1. Improved teaching methods
2. Improved supervision strategies
3. Improved sitting arrangements
4. Stricter penalty for offenders and abettors
5. Equipping departmental/faculties' libraries with recent and relevant books. This will have to start with the ridding of the main University's library of archaic, obsolete and outdated books.

**Disciplined teaching and non-teaching staff.**

**Recommendations**

In specific terms, the following recommendations are considered profitable in curbing cheating in examinations in the investigated institutions particularly, and by extension, in other higher institutions:

i. Lecturers should be up and doing on their teaching duties

ii. Libraries (both departmental and college's) should be well-equipped with current/recent books, journals, magazines and other useful academic inputs.

iii. Sufficient number of matured invigilators should be provided at every examination to ensure effective supervision.

iv. There should be vetting of test items to ensure that objectives of the subjects are reflected in the tests given.

v. Collation and storage of examination papers, results and so on, should always be supervised by trusted members of staff.

vi. Sitting arrangements in the examination halls should be well organized to eliminate/reduce proximity-induced cheating.

vii. Surface of desks in the halls should be painted black so that legible writings cannot be made on them.

viii. Our society should downplay the motivation for paper/certificate possession.

While conceding the fact that the list of methods for curbing cheating in examinations is by no means exhaustive, it is the opinion of this researcher that if the above approaches are seriously considered, cheating in this school would be drastically reduced.

**Conclusion**

From our findings, it is concluded that as long as there remains undue emphasis on paper qualifications in this country, many students (both young and old) will always be tempted to cheat in examinations. If the primary purpose of education is acquisition of
knowledge, then it is doubtful whether the scores of students who cheat in examinations can be certified as reliable. Their academic achievements cannot be a pride to themselves, to their parents or to the nation generally. It is the responsibility of all stakeholders in the education enterprise to evolve means of eliminating cheating in our higher institutions. Students should be encouraged to see learning in the school as important for its own sake rather than for examinations. As much as possible, all aspects of examination preparations, supervision and scoring should be handled as efficiently as possible. It is only when this is done that examination scores in Nigerian Higher Institutions could be taken as representative of the true performance of students in relation to the objectives of Nigerian Education.

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