CURBING EXAMINATION MALPRACTICE IN SCHOOLS: PARTICIPATIVE ADVOCACY

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Abstract

Many people demonstrated concern in the results of public examinations. Historically, examinations were introduced for the purposes of placements in civil service. In order to avoid failure or make good grades unethical means are employed. Since the introduction of public examinations in schools the outcome has continued to face lots of doubts especially in the minds of stakeholders. Questionable means employed before, during and after examinations by either student, parents, schools or officials may affect the conduct of the examination and the results. Examination malpractice is what this paper has set out to discuss; its forms are identified, the reasons why examination malpractice exist is explained. The paper concluded by suggesting what stakeholders can do to curb the menace by drawing examples from other countries.

Keywords: Stakeholders, examination, malpractice, misconduct

Introduction

Learning outcome is determined with a view to assessing performance and attainment. Assessment of learning is done to determine what has been learned and also for decision making with respect to selection of candidates for either higher studies or job placement. It is the end product of examination results which naturally determine what will happen to candidates. When candidates who perform below a set requirement for admission for further studies or placement for job miss a chance, the next time they rewrite similar examination they tend to employ any means for scoring high. When candidates employ unconventional means during examinations or during marking and or reporting to score high grades, this is called examination malpractice.

There are several examinations- teacher- made classroom tests: this is the school examinations, while the state, the national examinations such as West African Examination Council, WAEC) Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME), National Examinations Council (NECO) National Board for Technical Examinations, NABTEB are public examinations. There are however other forms of assessment such as those used to determine special abilities or disabilities.

Public examinations

The first written public examinations were introduced over two thousand years ago, in China to select the most able citizens for positions in the civil service to reduce the effects of patronage. News of the Chinese system was brought to Europe in the 16th century and Roman Catholic missionary, Jesuits, incorporated examination into their schools. Prussia, established an examination system for selection to the civil service around the middle of the 18th century, followed by France after the revolution (1789-1799). By the middle of the 19th century, competitive examinations had been introduced in Britain and India to select the increasing number of government officials required to service an expanding empire. In 1883 competitive examinations to select personnel for government service in the United States were established by law but were abandoned when congress failed to make appropriations to continue them.
The advent of public examination in Nigeria could be traced to the colonial era when in 1889 secondary schools were certified through London Matriculation (Badmus, 2004). During this time, the examinations that were written by candidates’ resident outside Britain then were developed in Britain based on the curriculum of the British System and all the documents relating to the examination such as syllabus and other supporting documents were produced in Britain and exported to all colonies, including Nigeria. Candidates completing secondary schools had to write either the London General Certificate of Education (GCE) or Cambridge GCE in order to hold a secondary certificate. This system continued in Nigeria until 1952 when the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) was established by the colonial government with headquarters in Accra (Ghana). WAEC grew and had multiple assignments to grapple with and in 1982 WAEC workload was reduced. Teachers’ Grade Two, TC II, Examination (English Language, Principles and Education Arithmetical Processes) were ceded to the National Teachers Institute, NTI, Kaduna, the National Board for Educational Measurement, NBEM, took over the National Common Entrance Examination for JSS I of Federal Unity Colleges. Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board, JAMB, came in 1978. The latest is the National Examinations, NECO, established in 1999 after the National Board for Technical and Business Trades Examination (NABTEB) in 1992.

What makes an examination good?
Oluborode (2005) shows that a good examination system must have fitness of purpose e.g.

a) The examination papers and the marking system should produce scores that are both reliable and valid. They must be acceptable to the teachers and students that the examination is according to the syllabus. There must be adequate quality control measures resulting in very few errors.

b) There must be equity and integrity. The conduct of examination system should be deemed fair and achieve a high level of public acceptance. The examination should ensure that no particular candidate or group of candidates has an unfair advantage over others.

c) Efficiency and cost effectiveness must be the watch-word of examination bodies/ authorities. They should make the best possible use of physical, financial and human resources. Examinations should be administered according to agreed scheduled an in particular, result should be issued on time. The importance of timely knowledge of results is of great concern to many educational psychologists.

d) Transparency; the examination process should as much as possible be open to public scrutiny. Examinations should not be shrouded in mystery.

e) There must be beneficial effect of promoting good teaching and learning practices. It should include the provision of systematic feedback of information to teachers who are well taken care of to motivate them to perform at peak.

Purposes of examinations?
The purposes of examinations are for selection of candidates for educational opportunities and/or employment. The results determine the future educational, vocational and life chances of an individual. Some examinations are also used for the certification of achievement (achievement test). The University final year examination is an example. Additional functions include control of the curriculum and its delivery in schools. They are also the sources of motivation for schools, teachers and students. They are also used for monitoring educational standards and for reporting school effectiveness. Examinations are important for:

a) Individual candidates who take the examination, and their families, as a result may determine future educational, vocational, and life chances.

b) Teachers and schools as their reputation may be affected by examination performance of their students.

c) Where the number of students is far greater than the number of valued opportunities the importance of the
examination grows for all concerned.
d) Resources devoted to examination preparation (like coaching, private tuition) increase.
e) Pressures of students and teachers increase
f) Trust of external, objective modes increases
g) Mistrust of school based testing and subjective modes of assessment increases.
h) Actual and perceived levels of malpractice rise. This will make the need for more extensive and more sophisticated security measures at risk.

Examination malpractice?
Nwana (2000) defines the concept as the massive and unprecedented abuse of rules and regulations pertaining to internal and public examinations, beginning from the setting of such examinations through the taking of the examinations, their marking and grading, to the release of the results and the issuance of certificates. Another scholar, Nnawuchi (1993) defined it as seeking, obtaining or giving undue aid to any candidate before, during or after the examination. The main key points as highlighted in the above definitions is that examination malpractice is an unconventional or unlawful, ways which testers or learners use in passing their tests or examinations.

Several negative consequences for the individual and the society are associated with examination malpractice; we have heard cases where as a result of desperation of the perpetrators of the offence, several employees of examining bodies and law enforcement agencies have either been maimed or killed. Standards are lowered and consequently degenerate into a culture of mediocrity. Sometimes it leads to cancellation of result as in the case of “Miracle Centers.” “Special Examination Centers,” “Miracle Centers” exist e.g. in Anambra State (Agu, 2006), and “Special Examination Centers” equally exist they are mostly situated in private schools or study centers and are littered in all states of Nigeria. Perpetrators include a syndicate consisting of school proprietors, officials of various examination bodies, security operatives, school principals and some other agents. Fees are charged and mostly high at registration. These centers are usually located in very remote areas where it will be difficult for examination supervisor to reach them during the examination.

Forms of examination malpractice
Leakage: This means the content of the examination or part of it is disclosed prior to taking the examination. Usually it involves one or more of the following: staff member or examination authorities, printers, proof readers and messengers, personnel employed to develop the paper (setters) or to determine its suitability (moderators) and school administrators.

Impersonation: An individual who is not registered as a candidate takes the place of the one that is registered. Usually, this involves collusion between chief examiners and the examination supervisors.

External assistance
Individuals who are not examination candidates giving unauthorized assistance to candidates Usually it involves invigilators (examination room supervisors) dictating answers, writing answers on the chalk board, circulating sheets of worked out answers during the course of the examination or acting as couriers of material into an examination center. Today, handsets (phones) aid significantly.

Smuggling of foreign materials. This is perhaps the most common form of malpractice. It relates to the introduction of unauthorized materials e.g. note books, key points, crib notes, charts, and answer booklets complete with answers into the examination hall. Material is usually smuggled in pants, shoes, hems and brazier or information is written in part of the body.

Copying Reproduction of another candidates work with or without permission
Collusion Unauthorized passing information between candidates, usually by exchanging notes or scripts. Sometimes information can be passed on by unauthorized person(s) who would collude with school authority or supervisors.

Intimidation Examination officials including supervisors and markers of scripts are physically threatened usually involving people seeking support for individual candidates. Candidates have also placed weaponry in clear view of supervisor to intimidate them. In some instances charms are placed in clear view too!

Substitution of scripts: replacing answer sheets handed out during the course of the examination with one written outside the centre before, during or after the examination. Usually involves examination officials, invigilators and sometimes teachers working outside the examination room.

Improper assignment Deliberate placing of candidates in centre under the supervision of corrupt officials. This is perpetrated by officials or local educational officials.

Ghost centre Fictitious examination centers are established by corrupt officials where candidates can complete the examination with the support of a helper and without supervision. Ghost centers have no formal authority to operate.

Marker malpractice Deliberate alteration of marks designed to inflate or deflate a candidate’s original mark. This can be initiated by examination official, or by candidate (making contact with the marker) or marker (marking contact with the candidate) for a fee or some form of reward. Asinya (2012) refers to payment made to aid or abet examination as logistic.

Award of certificate Deliberate enhancement of initial award and/or certificate. In the past usually confined to examination officials but in more recent years included printers and candidates with high level of skills in technology.

The following form part of the explanation for the persistence of examination malpractices:

a) The high stakes of the examination. Success in an examination can have profound, immediate, and long term impacts on a candidate’s life in Nigeria for instance; examination successes and secondary school graduation represent the sole avenue for poor students to secure non-menial jobs. Many parents are keen to resort to various corrupt tactics to ensure that their children “pass” the public examination.

b) Teacher and school status. In many instances, teachers and schools’ reputations depend on the success of students in examinations. This is particularly true where officials or unofficial league tables are published.

c) Personality dispositions. Some students are more prone to cheating than others. That is the way they are made!

d) Quota system are always applied to determine pass rate, where students perceive that success is independent on the number of available places rather than on attaining a given level of performance they many conclude that success is due to factor beyond their control. They may feel that success cannot be guaranteed by hard work and become poorly motivated. They are poorly prepared for examination; they may see little alternative to resorting to malpractice.

e) Inadequate school facilities and teacher textbook shortages, inadequate qualified teachers, teacher absence from work, teacher lacks competence in subject, strikes and frequent school closures are common features of education. Parents and students may perceive conditions of learning to be inadequate that they have no option than to resort to unfair means to increase the likelihood that the students will pass the examination.

f) Inadequacies of the examination. Where the standard aimed at is too high or obscure, teachers and students may lose confidence in their abilities to
master the materials. In such instance students many resort to smuggling materials such as textbooks and notes in to the examination room.

g) Inadequate government; where students perceive that rewards are based on personal rather than professional criteria, where they perceive widespread corruption in national and local government, where corruption is the in thing, they are less likely to adhere to formal examination regulations that in societies where high levels of integrity does not obtain.

h) Location of examination center: Remote centers tend to receive materials in advance thus increasing the opportunity of gaining access to examination paper: they are less likely to be closely supervised. Or scripts may be exchanged while in transit because of the poor terrain in which it takes longer time to travel to the collection center.

i) Low salary level. Salary level of teachers’ examination, officials and examination supervisors are frequently below the poverty line. In such instance bribes from parents may prove irresistible.

Curbing the menace

1) Sound educational policy should be in place, politics and ethnicity should not be played with educational issues.

2) Ensure that only formally registered candidates sit for examinations

3) Submit clear photograph at the time of registration that can be checked against the candidates during examination.

4) Request thumb prints on registration forms. Use biometrics to validate thumb print at the gate of examination hall/center. JAMB has already introduced biometric system to check candidates’ authentic identity as at the point of registration. Results are embossed on students’ statement of result by some examination bodies.

5) Frequent unannounced visits to examination body officials or during examination days or stakeholders should assign members by rotation to centers.

6) Encourage the appointment of supervisors of proven integrity and who are independent of the examination center.

7) Support of the legal authority to restrain visitors from entering the environs of the examination center when examinations are on like the police.

8) Prohibit the use of electronic devices including cellular phones and pagers. Ensure that those that have phone switch off before the commencement of any paper.

9) Immediately after the examination officials should look out for:

a) presence of unauthorized materials in each candidate’s scripts.

b) presence of neatly written material unrelated to examination questions in the middle of hurriedly written material.

c) answers written on paper other than that provided by the supervisor when you detect any of the listed evidence, a written report be made on the culprit(s) script(s) for appropriate penalty

d) Well written answers with few errors alongside hurriedly written answers with many grammatical and syntactical errors.

e) Identical mistakes and peculiarities in scripts of candidates sitting close to each other

10) There should be independent remarking of examination by qualified and experienced
examiners to detect willful mark inflation or deflation

11) After results and certificates have been issued check for evidence of certificate alteration or certificates being used by persons other than the rightful owner are common.

12) Evidence of wrong doing and application of legal sanctions for examination malpractice must be publicized using media.

13) Encourage political and civic leaders to speak out in favor of creating a public examination system that is administered by adequately qualified people, according to accepted rules that are devoid of external interference

14) Examination boards national and international should have information on new threats to examination security and on procedure for counteracting malpractices.

A number of measures have been taken at some place to curb examination malpractice. It is suggested that stakeholders should consider some of these measures for application in their individual communities where there are centers in particular and in Nigeria in general.

- In 16th & 17th century China punished examination malpractice with death penalties, confiscation of property, and exile.

- The remuneration of examination officials in Uganda was made higher than other personnel in comparable levels in the Ministry of Education.

- Paper setters to set individual questions rather than complete paper in the West African Examination Council and Uganda.

- Printing of examination paper with secure printers outside of the country as in Kenya and Zimbabwe.

- In Ethiopia the typing of the entire examination is entrusted to one typist!

- In Philippines payments are withheld to printers if leakage can be attributed to that source.

- Some provide secure packaging (sealed envelopes with metal or wooden boxes) and storage for papers.

- Provision to secure storage facilities of materials in transit (like in army barrack, police station and banks)

- In Kenya and Philippines they enlist the support of other government agencies to facilitate delivery and collection of materials.

- To prevent copying, ensure that candidates sitting close to each other are presented with different versions of multiple-choice papers. JAMB is already using this method Where several subjects are taken in the some session (like the primary school examinations) candidates sitting close to each other may be given different subjects or scramble examination questions if it is objective type paper.

- In Pakistan, magisterial powers (including the right of arrest) are given to examination board officials.

- The conduction of public awareness campaign to highlight the importance of the integrity of the examination system as is done in Cambodia & Pakistan.

- Frequent and unannounced visits to centers by appointed stakeholder or by some senior officials from authorized education department.

- To lessen threats and intimidation of markers, candidates’ names are removed from scripts and replaced with identification numbers.

- To reduce human access with possibility of interference with marking and/or date entry optional scanners and computer are used.

Conclusion

Several examples of approaches to curb examination malpractice are suggested. Stakeholders must be seen to be at the front to
ensure that the right things are employed ensuring the integrity of examination in our schools. Robert H. Schuler one of the living great speakers said that you should “never let a problem (in this case examination malpractice) become an excuse” The problem must be fixed, failing which mass destruction could result.

References

