

EXAMINATION MALPRACTICE: METHODS, MOTIVATION, EFFECTS, INTERVENTIONS AND SOLUTIONS FOR EDUCATIONAL INTEGRITY, POSITIVE INDUSTRIAL AND ECONOMIC GROWTH IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper aims to explore various methods and techniques of school-related and external influencers of examination malpractices that negate students to cheat in secondary, technical school and higher-level exams. Firstly, the paper delineates the common malpractice techniques in secondary, technical schools, universities and other higher-level institutions, discussed the factors that motivate students to indulge in malpractice, The methods deployed to carry out their acts, the impact of examination misconduct on educational integrity and strategies that will mitigate the ill-fated practice. The paper concluded that the integrity of the examination process can only be restored through concerted efforts, to regenerate a fair and honest academic experience for all students. The menace if left unchecked will continue its devastating impact on the society, industry and growth of Nigerian economy. The paper recommended enhanced surveillance to include the use of technology, infrastructure improvement, the use of computer-based test and practical-based assessment to curb students' examination malpractice and restore educational integrity that will bring positive industrial and economic growth to Nigeria.

Keywords: Educational Institution, Examination Malpractice, Methods, Motivation, Effects, Intervention.

Introduction

There are different shades of examination malpractice (brain support) in existence today (Iheanacho, and Godwin, 2019), of which many people who do not really understand the meaning of examination malpractice have constantly argued not to be a form of malpractice. Therefore, for proper clarification, Onuka & Durowoju (2013) defined examination malpractice as any action taken to negate and compromise the rules of examinations to achieve a favorable result. In other words, "it is any active or passive action that goes against the rules and regulations of an examination" (Simiyu, et al., 2023; Udim, Abubakar and Essien, 2015). Onyechere, (2005) defines examination malpractice "as any act of wrongdoing that contravenes the rules of acceptable practice before, during and after an examination by anybody in anyway. The Examination Malpractice Act of 1999 explains examination malpractice as any act of omission or commission 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 certificates issued. Taiwo and Olorunmota (2024) asserted that examination malpractice has permeated the Nigerian educational system with debilitating consequences for the system and the society at large.

Periodic assessment and evaluation which are essentially in the form of examinations and tests are necessary in schools (Simiyu, et al., 2023; Udim, Abubakar, and Essien, 2015) to determine whether the objective of learning have been achieved by students.

The primary objective of schools is to equip learners with the required knowledge and skills to enable them to contribute effectively to national development. This necessitates periodic assessment and evaluation which are essentially in the form of examinations and tests. This is to ascertain the level of knowledge and competence of students. Garba and Chinyere (2024) defined examination as an instrument used for the assessment of individual skills and knowledge. Although examinations and tests are not the sole criteria for assessing and evaluating a student's knowledge, it is the predominant practical means of assessment. It is worthy to note that these categories of schools under consideration have a diverse student body, dedicated teaching staff, and varying students' academic performance levels. However, examination malpractice has become one of the greatest challenges of the education system in all parts of the world today (Ononwini, 2024; Simiyu, et al., 2024; and Yuomeyse, 2024; Ifijeh, 2022; and Rowland, 2021). Examination malpractice has become endemic issue that have surfaced repeatedly and continue to undermine the integrity of the educational system (Mohammed, et al., 2020). It appears that on a daily basis malpractice assume an alarming trend and dimension, which has been attributed to fear of failure, laziness, lack of confidence and inadequate preparation among students (Greenwood, 2024; Rowland, et. Al., 2021). While the problem of examination malpractices has been a perennial one, the efforts put in place to address it have not fully borne fruits (Simiyu, Malenya and Kandagor, 2024).

The question requiring urgent answers is what influences students into examination malpractice? For this study, influencers of examination malpractices are categorised as school-related and external influencers of examination malpractices:

1. School-related influencers

i). Corrupt educational system: It has become so prominent amongst scholars that many times it has been justified with absurd excuses such as “after all, examination is not a true test of knowledge”. Surprisingly, teachers are not left out of this as some of them encourage this act because of a meager stipend. Yuomeyse (2024); Demelash, and Chinasho, (2022) and Rowland, et al., (2021) found positive significant relationship between institution, teachers, students' factors related examination malpractice and academic success. This implies that types of examination misconduct, students, teachers and schools' involvement in examination malpractice highly affect students' academic success.

ii). Students' attitude: Students have perfected various forms of examination malpractice. Some of the methods employed under this practice include bringing external materials into the examination halls. These external materials include prepared notes and materials inscribed on palms, thighs, arms, shirt, handkerchiefs, textbooks (Oredein, 2006) or notes hidden in restrooms and nursing mothers writing on the body of infants. Other forms of malpractice include academic misconduct (plagiarism, illegally accessing exam papers through corruption or hacking into systems and selling them to other students), sitting next to a friend and communicating answers through whispers, sign language, or passing notes, exchanging either question papers or answer sheets and bribery. Anzene (2014) cited impersonation or ghostwriting (student contracting someone to write exams for him/her) as the commonest forms of examination malpractice.

iii). School Infrastructure and Resources: Inadequate resources and infrastructure can contribute to examination malpractice. Overcrowded classrooms may lead to insufficient surveillance during exams making it easier for students to cheat without being caught. Additionally, the lack of engaging teaching materials and resources can lead to a disinterest in learning, pushing students toward cheating as an easier way to pass exams.

iv). Teacher and Administrative Behavior: In some cases, teachers are under pressure from the administration to show high student success rates resulting in them turning a blind eye to cheating. Additionally, inadequate remuneration and lack of professional development opportunities for teachers can lower their morale, indirectly affecting their vigilance during exams. Teacher sharing key information to students on area of concentration, students getting assistance from a member staff who from outside the examination hall, scream aloud the correct answer option to students while they tick. etc.

2. Environmental influencers: Several environmental factors have been identified as influencers of examination malpractice (Greenwood, 2024).

i). Economic Pressure: The financial burden often means that academic performance becomes a high-stakes game, increasing the temptation of students to engage in dishonest behaviour.

ii). Peer Influence and Social Environment: The pressure to achieve high grades to secure admission into university has led some students to engage in cheating. Also, students in tertiary levels want to avoid spending more years in school than their counterparts. Spending extra year in school is often stigmatized by the society.

v). Technological Advancements: Mass cheating is another dimension that examination malpractice has assumed. Nowadays, the whole process has become more sophisticated with the advent of high-tech electronic devices (Oguche, and Emmanuel, 2023). Smartphones and Smartwatches, earphones and Bluetooth devices (this is common to ladies who take advantage of their wearing scarf and veil/hijab), high-tech calculators that can store data and notes in their memory. Some students use hidden cameras to capture question papers, sending them outside where responses are quickly researched and relayed back via micro-Bluetooth earbuds although prohibited in examination halls, are smuggled in because information in the forms of messages or live broadcast could be sent to the candidates in the hall. Mohammed, et al., (2020) noted that there are syndicates that specialise on hacking to find certificates that bear similar names as their clients who are mostly parents that purchase them for their wards.

vi). Cultural and Societal Norms: Societal norms that lays emphasis on certificate and prioritise success and status over integrity also play a significant role. In broader society, instances of corruption and dishonesty that are common among public figures can drip down to school environments, normalising malpractices.

vii). Parental Expectations and Involvement: Parents cannot be exempted from the menace of examination misconduct because they also contribute to this problem. Excessive pressure from parents, coupled with a lack of understanding of the child's actual academic capabilities, can drive students toward examination malpractice as a means to meet those expectations. Parents are often proud of their wards when they finish school early or within time frame. Parents are also reported to often follow-up on their wards, presenting gifts to teachers in favour of averting failure or soliciting for better grades for them. That is to say the least, some parents go as far as granting endowment to the school or funding small projects in order to gain recognition for their children.

Motivations behind examination malpractice

The goal behind establishing school: The educational system nowadays is no longer what it was known to be in the past. The major contributing factors to this decay being poor educational policies and the type of schools in existence. Prior to this time, school owners were individuals who were trained in education but today, school is seen as a business and as such, any individual can be a school owner. The kinds of teachers employed by these schools are of low quality due to their inability to pay for professionals; this will undoubtedly affect the performance of students in any exam. Some of these schools are even malpractice centers popularly known as "special centers".

There is no other way to pass an examination when students don't have the required knowledge to pass. Educational policy is deteriorating day by day and this has a direct impact on the students by instilling fear in them, leading many students to resort to malpractice as an escape route.

Students' Attitude: No doubt parents are also one of the major causes of examination malpractice but students are not exempted either. While many parents try as much as possible to ensure their children receive the best education, some students are lazy and all they are waiting for is a shortcut. They don't believe in adequate preparation, hard work, and total dedication to their studies (Hassan, et al., 2023). In essence, many students only attend schools these days to obtain certificate without thorough learning. In my classroom experience with 500-level students during the 2022/2023 session in a class of 151 students for 14 weeks, during which the average class attendance recorded was 81 students representing 45.33% for lecture, 124 students or 82.67% for CA, and 151 students or 100% wrote the end of semester examination. This is a very wrong attitude to possess by any student because the effect of such nonchalant attitude is always disastrous.

Pressure and competition: The intense pressure to perform well academically, often from parents or institutions drives students to resort to cheating (Anakwe, 2010). Also, unhealthy competition among students wanting to lift beyond their reach in order to equate with the high achievers.

Lack of preparation: Poor time management, scholarly attitude or genuine understanding of the subject matter. Many students prefer hustling doing what is referred to as yahoo-yahoo (crypto currency, forex trading and online sales among others) than paying attention to their learning.

Peer influence: The influence of peers and the fear of being left behind can lead students to adopt unethical practices. Students mimic behaviour that produces successful result, even if they are wrong behaviour.

Doing drugs: Students are often addicted to various kinds of drugs right from home. Many students escape from school or on their way to or from school to hang out with their peers in incomplete buildings and bushes to do drugs at the expense of their studies.

Inadequate enforcement: Weak enforcement of rules and supervision lapses during examinations. Inadequate number of invigilators especially in large classis, invigilators not paying attention to what the candidates are doing, etc. Post examination malpractices include such unwholesome activities occurring after the examination, for instance, Continuous assessment scores and even examination scores are altered by some unscrupulous teachers to give undue advantage to their cohorts; intervention by co-teachers and highly placed school officials for their wards or relative to be passed or given a specific grade at all cost is also a rampant case of post examination malpractice; candidates tracing their answer booklets to the marking centres. During SSCE examinations (WASSCE, NECO, & NABTEB), some candidates use pencil to write their telephone numbers, urging the marker (examiner) to contact them for price negotiation. Some female candidates also attach their semi-nude photographs in the answer booklets praying for a sexual promiscuous male to mark their answer booklets. Such photographs bear telephone numbers for contact. Some desiring members of the society also contract hackers who hack into the system of examination bodies and find a certificate belonging to another candidate bearing the same names with them. They need not to write any exam before doing that.

Environmental Factors: The society we find ourselves in today celebrates achievement regardless of the means; examination malpractice is celebrated and justified by students, parents and the society (Effiom, Ngwu and Akpama 2022). The environment has a way of influencing students who are quick in embracing daily norms. In our society today, illicit wealth acquisition through illegal means is glorified.

Many see failure as a disgrace and students try every means to pass an exam. No student wants to fail because of societal pressure stemming from an overemphasis on paper qualifications rather than competence in a skill area.

Undue Emphasis on Certificate: The reason why this social anomaly is on the rise is due to an overemphasis on paper qualifications rather than competence in a skill area. Student's quests for certificate instead of knowledge among others are the major factors responsible for examination malpractices (Mohammed, et al., 2020; Sammani and Emmanuel, 2023). A scenario where a skilled professional is sent to work on the field, while his peer with higher certificate and another with less skills is given administrative office and entitled to various privileges such as a house, car, driver, substantial allowances, and other perks attached to the office in addition to managing organizational funds from which they lived comfortably and made investments. Often these administrative positions are not based on professional skills or competences but rather on paper qualifications and connections. Thus, everybody wants to obtain that piece of paper either through legitimate or illegitimate means.

Impact of Examination Malpractice on Educational Integrity

The issue of examination malpractice is one that has deeply infiltrated educational systems worldwide. Ethiopian schools reported that cheating in examination has been encouraged by school communities such as educational leaders, teachers, administrative workers, and students themselves (Demelash and Chinasho, 2022; Dejene, 2021). It has become so prominent amongst scholars that many times it has been justified with absurd excuses such as “after all, examination is not a true test of knowledge” (Hassan, 2017). Essentially, evaluation must be conducted in schools to ascertain the level of knowledge and competence of students and in doing so, it is important to assess the negative impact of examination malpractice has on educational integrity.

Devaluation of Credentials: It undermines the credibility and value of academic qualifications (Onyibe, et al., 2023).

Injustice to Honest Students: It creates an unequal playing ground, demotivating students who work hard, play by the rules and end up earning lower grades when compared to their peers that cheated, especially where such malpractices go unpunished. Onuka and Durowoju (2013) stated that such is the reason why candidates would not spare any effort to ensure that they obtained whatever they needed to make a living, whether by a just or unjust means.

Compromised Professional Standards: Graduates with fraudulent credentials may lack the necessary knowledge and skills, negatively impacting professional industries as well as the economic development of the country.

Damages reputation: Good name, they say, is more valuable than money. One of the effects of examination malpractice is that it tarnishes the image of a person. It is possible that you are an Intelligent and smart student but once you're caught in the act, your reputation is ruined. Those who respected you for your intelligence are bound to withdraw that respect. It is very difficult to repair a damaged reputation. It is best to avoid it by all means especially if you're a smart and intelligent student. The fact that I never got involved in examination malpractice while in school make my course mates respect me till date. It is better to fail honorably than to damage your reputation in order to pass an examination.

It breeds laziness: One thing about examination malpractice is that once you depend on it to pass, you will automatically lose the zeal to prepare for examinations. When you constantly depend on malpractice, it becomes a part of you and laziness sets in. Once you turn out to become a lazy student who prefers a shortcut to pass examination, there is a high probability that this will become your lifestyle even as an employee. Your approach to one aspect of life has an uncanny way of spreading to others. Ultimately, having someone else do all the work for you is a very good motivation to be lazy.

It breeds irresponsibility: Getting involved in examination malpractice is an irresponsible act. Being irresponsible is not only when a person steals, smokes, gets involved in numerous vices. Flaunting examination rules and regulations is irresponsibility. By the time you decide to plagiarize which is otherwise known as copying or indulging in any other form of malpractice, you have already started failing as an individual. It is possible you will pass the examination but even if you do succeed in an exam through any form of malpractice, you have already failed in character and learning which is most likely even worse than failing an examination.

Cripples your critical thinking abilities: Reading helps one to develop a critical thinking ability. One way in which a person can easily get involved in in-depth reading is while preparing for an examination. Preparing for an examination is one-time many people seize the opportunity to read wide. If you decide to skip preparing for examinations by relying on examination malpractice, there is no way to develop your critical thinking abilities. Many times, examination malpractice turns you into a dullard. The tiniest and simplest things you ought to know by merely thinking through, you will find out you can't.

The brain is like an automobile battery, when the battery is not put to use on a regular basis, chances are that the battery will die. This is basically what happens when you don't read and put your brain into use. Your brain becomes dormant. A person with a dormant brain can never perform well in life. This is the effect of examination malpractice on your brain. This effect continues even after school. As a responsible adult, you have to possess critical thinking abilities. When you lack this, you will always have problems. When you are thinking of getting involved in examination malpractice, think of the adverse effect it will have on you once you're outside the learning environment. No employer would like to employ a mentally dull individual.

It breeds incompetence: Grades may lie but what you have in your head will never lie. There are people who prepare so hard for examinations and end up performing badly. Their performance does not rule out the fact that they may actually be more competent than some that came out with beautiful grades. When you read for exams, it helps build your level of confidence, competence, and expertise in a specialty regardless of your grade. In a society that examination malpractice is predominant, its impact is visibly seen in the type of human resources the education system has produced (Garba and Okereke, 2024). If you maneuvered your way through examinations, have you thought about the kind of diagnosis or prescriptions you would give as medical personnel, the buildings you will design as an architect, or the students that you will train and mentor?

Interventions and Solutions

1. Enhanced surveillance and infrastructure improvement: There is need for schools to invest in better surveillance during exams, such as cameras and stricter invigilation procedures. Renovating classrooms to reduce overcrowding and creating a conducive, well-resourced learning environment can also help. Ononwini (2024) found that examination malpractice had no significant impact on students of nursing and midwifery education in Benin Metropolis, but found that gender has a significant influence on examination malpractice and attributed his findings to enhanced surveillance and good infrastructure.
2. Practical-based assessment: Assessment of skill competency where feasible should be encouraged in schools. Practical-based assessment involves doing an activity from which both the process and product are assessed. This can reduce to barest minimum issues of examination malpractice.

3. Parental and community engagement programmes: The school can organize workshops and seminars for parents to help them set realistic expectations for their children and understand the detrimental effects of examination malpractice. Building a supportive community around the school can reduce undue pressure on students.
4. Establishing a strong ethical framework: Schools should enforce a strong ethical code that rewards honesty and integrity among students and teachers. This can be supplemented with regular ethical training for both students and teachers (Oguche and Emmanuel, 2023). Encouraging students to report instances of malpractice anonymously can also help in curbing the issue.
5. Incorporating technology wisely: While technology can be a part of the problem, it can also be part of the solution. Schools could employ software to detect plagiarism and deploy secure online examination systems that minimize cheating opportunities.
6. Counseling and school support services: Providing a robust counseling services to help students manage academic pressure and personal issues can mitigate the motivations behind examination malpractice. Support groups and stress management workshops can promote a healthier school climate.

Conclusion

Examination malpractice at the various school levels is a multifaceted issue influenced by a variety of environmental factors. Addressing it requires a comprehensive approach that includes improving school infrastructure, engaging with parents and the community, promoting ethical behavior, and providing ample support to students and teachers. Only through concerted efforts can the integrity of the examination process be restored, ensuring a fair and honest academic experience for all students. Unless appropriate measures are taken, the menace of examination malpractice will continue its devastating impact on the society, industry and growth of Nigerian economy.

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