



Examination Fraud: The Bane of Educational Development in Benue State

O. Ochima Mercy^{1*}

¹*Benue State Examinations Board, Makurdi, Benue State, Nigeria.*

Author's contribution

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Case Study

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ABSTRACT

Examination, an integral part of the teaching and learning process, has been used for ages as a means of ascertaining the status of achievement of individual learners. However, for some time now, some individuals have avoided the rigours of study and instead depended on fraudulent means to pass examination by indulging in examination malpractices thereby distorting its validity and reliability. Dearth of qualified teachers, inadequate facilities, underfunding of the educational sector, undue emphasis on certificates, corruption and inadequate preparation are some factors responsible for the proliferation and sustenance of this malaise, which distorts the assessment of students' academic performance. The attendant consequences have dangerous psychological implications for the individuals and families besides posing grave socio-economic challenges to Nigeria's development. This paper recommends, among others, that the Government and stakeholders should adequately fund education to ensure provision of infrastructure, adequate staffing and reintroduction of boarding facilities in all post-primary institutions as steps towards curbing this social ill in Benue State and Nigeria.

Keywords: Education; teaching; learning; performance; examination; examination malpractice; economic; social and psychological factors; stakeholders; validity and reliability.

1. INTRODUCTION

Without doubt, education has been recognized internationally as an instrument par excellence for effecting economic, social and political development in any nation. Indeed, the National Policy on Education [1] has equally stressed the same role. This explains why education has witnessed participation by various stakeholders as well as the huge investments by both the federal and state governments. Since the essence of teaching is that learning should take place, the teaching and learning process, according to [2], is continuously monitored so as to determine the extent to which the objectives of the educational system is achieved. Hence, examination is an integral part of the teaching and learning process that has been used to assess the quality and quantity of the knowledge, skills and attitudes students have acquired within a specified period [3,4]. Thus, for ages, every education system has devised examination as a means to ascertain the level of attainment of individual learners; to sort and grade individuals according to the quality of their performance; to select, diagnose and treat learning problems; to monitor educational progress as well as to certify those who have successfully completed a certain level of training. Consequently, examinations have served as a means of assuring the public that candidates certified by institutions as having done well in their examinations possess the quality and competence indicated in their certificates. This clearly indicates that the credibility of an educational system is assessed during examinations and any wrong doing during examinations distorts their validity and reliability.

1.1 The Concept of Examination Malpractice

In order to ensure that examinations possess transparency, integrity, validity and reliability, they are guided by a code of ethics, which is translated into rules and regulations. Thus, any unethical action leading to the flouting of these rules and regulations, whether committed before, during or after an examination constitutes examination malpractice [5,6,2]. [7] views examination malpractice as any act of wrong doing, which gives a candidate undue advantage over others in obtaining success in an examination and which tends to jeopardize the credibility of the certificates issued. [8] describes examination malpractice as a hydra-headed phenomenon, which occurs when an individual abandons the rigours of studying and depends instead on fraudulent means to pass examinations, leading to a distortion in the assessment of students' academic performance. The perpetrators of this deadly virus in our educational system, according to [9,5,10,2,11] include students, even in nursery schools either single-handedly or in collaboration with other students, teachers, invigilators, supervisors, parents, whole communities, examination officials, printers and other mercenaries. Benue State Examinations Board (BSEB) like other Examination Bodies in Nigeria is not immune to examination malpractices during its yearly conduct of Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE), the Mock Senior School Certificate Examination (Mock-SSCE) and the Federal Craft Certificate Examination (FCCE).

1.2 Forms of Examination Malpractice

This malaise may take place before, during or after the examination. According to [7] and from personal experiences, malpractices are perpetrated in the following forms:

1.1.1 Before examination

- i) Misappropriation of examination fees by proprietors/principals which leads to very late or non-registration of students for the examination;
- ii) Collection of illegal fees nicknamed ECOWAS (Economic Community of Weak and Average Students) - where students communicate with themselves during examination; cooperation, "helep" or 'understanding fees' or 'comfort fund' by school authorities for bribing examination officials;
- iii) Forgery of continuous assessment scores;
- iv) Registration of more candidates than available facilities can contain;
- v) Nomination of unscrupulous and unqualified persons as supervisors/invigilators;
- vi) Registration of non-bonafide/weak students for examinations;
- vii) Creation of 'miracle centres' for migrating students;
- viii) Leakage of question papers/expo;
- ix) Sorting – making demands like sexual relations with females, cash or materials.

1.1.2 During examination

- i) Copying from each other by giraffing, (that is, stretching the neck like the giraffe to enable a candidate look at and copy from the next candidate's answer sheet); or from the chalkboard, foreign materials like textbooks, notebooks, pieces of paper or by exchange/swapping of scripts;
- ii) Dubbing in the form of tattoos, super-prints, bullets/missiles and microchips;
- iii) Using of mercenaries or contractors who may be fellow students, friends or hired impersonators;
- iv) Using of mobile phones and other electronic gadgets;
- v) Intimidation/obstruction – bringing in dangerous weapons to either harass officials or cause confusion at examination venues;
- vi) Smuggling out question papers by candidates for others to answer and smuggle back into the hall;
- vii) Mass cheating (aiding and abetting) – receiving help from candidates, non-candidates and invigilators;
- viii) Dictating of answers/coded messages for objective questions;
- ix) Under-packing of examination question papers by printers;

1.1.3 Post-examination malpractice

- i) Smuggling in of answer scripts at the examination venue/custodian points;
- ii) Changing of examination scores by staff of examination bodies or examiners;
- iii) Inducing of examiners or computer operators to award generous marks to undeserving candidates.

Relatedly, Table 1 gives a three - year comparative picture of the incidence of examination malpractice in Nigeria involving over 1.5 million candidates who registered for West African Senior Secondary Certificate Examination each year from 2009 - 2011.

In the same documents, WAEC ranked Benue State 3rd, 9th and 5th on the incidence of malpractice in Nigeria in May/June, 2009 – 2011.

Similarly, Benue State Examinations Board (BSEB) has also documented the incidence of examination malpractice in the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE). This is presented in Table 2.

As the figures in Table 2 show, there has been progressive decline in the incidence of examination malpractice during the period under review. However, several factors have been identified as being responsible for the genesis, proliferation and sustenance of examination malpractice. These have been categorized into economic, social and psychological factors [6].

Table 1. Three - year comparison of incidence of examination malpractice in Nigeria in may/june, 2009-2011

S/n	Type of malpractice	Percentage of candidates involved		
		2009	2010	2011
1	Bringing of foreign materials into the examination hall	0.72	0.75	0.50
2	Irregular activities inside and outside the halls	3.83	1.30	1.05
3	Collusion	3.89	3.37	2.07
4	Impersonation	0.11	0.14	0.13
5	Leakage	Nil	Nil	Nil
6	Mass cheating	0.05	0.19	0.86
7	Insults/Assaults on supervisors, invigilators and others	0.04	0.03	0.03
8	Miscellaneous/new cases	0.10	0.01	0.01
Total		8.74	5.79	4.65

Source: [12]

Table 2. Four-year comparison of incidence of examination malpractice in BECE in may/june, 2009–2012

S/no	Type of malpractice	Percentage of candidates involved			
		2009	2010	2011	2011
1.	Bringing in of foreign materials in the examination hall	1.02	1.40	1.0	0.91
2.	Collusion	0.8	1.34	0.33	1.37
3.	Dictating answers in the exam hall	0.60	Nil	1.07	Nil
4.	Mass cheating	10.91	3.35	1.52	1.37
5.	Copying of answers on chalk board	6.03	1.30	1.55	0.002
6.	Assault of supervisor	0.92	Nil	Nil	0.002
7.	Leakage	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
8.	Impersonation	0.001	Nil	0.20	Nil
Total		20.28	7.39	5.67	3.65

Source: [13]

1.3 Economic Factors

Dearth of academically competent, professionally sound and committed teachers who use appropriate teaching methods to promote meaningful learning has been identified as one reason for examination malpractices [14,6,15]. The National Policy on Education [1] states

clearly that no nation can rise above the quality of its teachers. This is because teachers hold the key to quality in the school system as they translate policies into action. Consequently, any effort at checking examination malpractice must start from the teacher.

Specifically, [14] found that at the secondary school level, the shortage of Biology teachers is very acute with a teacher- student ratio of 1:463. Most of these teachers are NCE holders, who are qualified to teach only up to JS 3. This is contrary to the 35-40 students per class provision, as stipulated in the National Policy on Education [1]. Besides, [16] and [17] have observed that teaching has been dominated by teacher-centred expository instruction because to be successful at examinations, students are trained to be good at memorizing information to be regurgitated during examinations. Emphasis on success in public examinations and time constraint in covering the extensive syllabi encourage this one-way form of communication where the teacher does all the talking while students remain as passive listeners, taking notes. While this method makes it easier to cover the prescribed syllabi within the scheduled time, classroom discussions and other interactive teaching activities which make learning simpler, more interesting and meaningful are neglected as they are considered as a waste of time. Thus, when students fail to learn meaningfully, they become anxious and unsure and resort to illegal means of passing examinations.

In terms of academic excellence and professional rating, the current rating of teachers is low [5]. Consequently, the best secondary school products consider other professions before teaching. Invariably, only those who are unable to make it in other areas end up in the classrooms as teachers. Worse still, those who never studied education-related courses such as engineering, animal husbandry, mass communication, etc end up in the classrooms as teachers when they do not find employment elsewhere, and the situation becomes a case of the blind leading the blind. This explains the repeated high failure rates resulting in corresponding increase in cases of examination malpractices.

Closely related to the poor rating of teaching profession is the shift of the society's emphasis from moral rectitude to wealth by whatever means. The neglect that teachers have suffered has resulted in continued deterioration in their status, poverty, low self-esteem and degradation. The first indication that a government is broke is non-payment of teachers' salaries and fringe benefits. Graduate teachers in many private schools receive as low as five thousand Naira (N5, 000.00) per month. Teachers have therefore become cheats, as most of them, in the bid to make ends meet and to meet up with the society's expectations of them get involved in examination malpractices for economic gains. The excessive drive for acquisition of wealth and property in our society has become so entrenched that no one is interested in or sees anything wrong with how these wealth and properties are acquired. This mentality makes those in examination bodies, school authorities and, examination officials to exploit students to get rich by selling question papers, aiding and abetting examination malpractices. Also, writing examinations and projects or theses for wealthy students has become big business for indigent but gifted students or mercenaries. Existing facilities like libraries, laboratories, classrooms and examination halls have been over-stretched. In many schools, some of these facilities do not even exist and yet students sit for examinations and expect to produce good results in order to qualify for admission into tertiary institutions or for employment. Similarly, parents are unable to buy the required school materials such as textbooks and exercise books. As a result, school authorities become anxious and desperate as students' failure will affect the reputation and rating of their schools.

Additionally, students and parents are equally anxious because failure would mean that students will not be able to proceed further and so will have to wait for another year to sit for qualifying examinations again. Parents too will have to produce another round of registration fees and other related expenses. They therefore, more often than not, recourse to examination malpractice by using subject teachers and bribing examination officials and supervisors to over-look unacceptable acts of misconduct in examination halls. Relatedly, over-crowded classrooms and examination halls make it easier for lazy students and those with a tendency to cheat to stretch their necks and copy from each other's work, exchange scripts or copy from other materials. Over-crowded halls also make supervision and invigilation difficult as examination officials are unable to move swiftly as they have more candidates than can be managed, especially when the candidates are wild and bent on cheating by all means.

Underfunding of the educational sector sometimes leads to strikes, long closure of schools and inability to cover the syllabi. On resumption, teachers rush to make up for time lost but are unable to cover the syllabi. As a result, students have no confidence in themselves and so indulge in all sorts of wrong-doing to pass examinations.

Since education seems to be the only surviving industry in Benue State, for economic gains, many proprietors have set up sub-standard schools thereby making the number of secondary schools to shoot up from 734 in 2009 to 1,098 in 2013. Since the only concern of some of these proprietors is the fees they collect, weak students and even those without credentials are admitted indiscriminately into such schools. Many of these schools are nicknamed "miracle centres" where students from well-established schools flock to register for MOCK-SSCE, NECO and WAEC. Since the number of students admitted in such centres is much higher than their facilities can accommodate, examination malpractice is a very normal occurrence in these locations which are often not easily accessible.

1.4 Social Factors

[18] stated that the excessive drive for affluence which has emerged over the years impedes access to, participation in and performance of students in educational activities. [19] also observed that in order to increase their wealth, Nigerians have adopted extreme negative values which have unfortunately crept into the school system. Thus, students now indulge in clandestine activities which take them away from their studies and return to their schools during examinations and "magically" pass with good grades (usually 8 credits and distinctions).

Other students, out of sheer laziness, poor time management or procrastination, pile up work until the examination time-table is released. It is at this time that they rush to copy notes, which they may not understand because of the pressure of examination, but they want to pass by hook or by crook. This is closely tied to the craze for certificates. Education is perceived as a process of obtaining a certificate or a means of gaining access to a government job, irrespective of the ways and means of obtaining such certificates. To many Nigerians, it is not the knowledge acquired that matters anymore but how best to acquire a certificate. It therefore becomes difficult to enforce Examination Malpractice Act No 33 of 1999. Hence, according to [5: 64].

While the student is told that education opens the door to success, respect and dignity, he or she learns from his/her environment that it is not the long years of study and knowledge gained, but the amount of money amassed by any means in the shortest possible time that

brings prestige and recognition. While we are told that knowledge is power and that skill is to be respected, we are also told that knowledge is not what we need but who we know that really counts. This is the fertile soil on which examination malpractice thrives.

Also, some Nigerians have a disdain for hard work. Rather than working hard and earning promotions and privileges, corruption and connection with those who matter seem to be all that you need. This attitude has regrettably been transferred to the school system as it is not insulated from the wider society. Consequently, students are not ready to study hard and yet, they want to pass examinations with good grades. Indeed, any society that does not uphold hard work enthrones mediocrity.

Another factor which predisposes students to cheating in examinations is parental expectations. Today, many parents mount pressure on their children to pass examinations. This is because they want them to belong to the bourgeois professions at all cost, no matter the level of their innate abilities. Thus, affluent parents are involved in paying huge sums of money to enable their children “excel” in examinations in magic centres, paying money for “help” and to mercenaries.

1.5 Psychological Factors

The state of teaching and learning facilities, quality and quantity of teachers, student population, the method of selection of students for admission and promotion all determine the preparedness of students for examination. Where these are not available according to the laid down criteria or aims of education, it leads to ill-preparedness, lack of confidence and low self-concept or low self-esteem in students. Consequently, with many students individually incapable of going through personal study to enable them prepare for examinations, they become anxious and for fear of failure or in quest for good grades, resort to various forms of examination malpractices.

1.6 Implications of Examination Malpractice

From the various forms and causes of examination malpractice highlighted, the following implications on the individual, the family and the nation can be summarized as follows:

1.6.1 The individual

- i) Mediocre graduates are churned out yearly who cannot defend their certificates, nor compete with their equivalents elsewhere as they lack the quality needed to meet the challenges/vicissitudes that confront them in the society;
- ii) Cancellation of results, imprisonment or expulsion of students if caught result in shame and stigma.

1.6.2 The family

- i) The enormous resources used for training the young ones are wasted;
- ii) Parents who indulge in this malaise lose their moral authority to restrain their children from this and other lawless acts.

1.6.3 The nation

- i) Youths are indoctrinated into a culture of fraud, lawlessness, violence, anxiety and anarchy. The repercussions of these on the Nigerian society manifest today in the form of cultism, religious extremism, wide-spread frauds, thuggery, rigging of elections and blatant, unproductive corruption;
- ii) The employment of people who acquire their certificates through this means results in lack of productivity. The rising spate of collapsed buildings and cases of preventable loss of lives in our hospitals etc are symptoms of this malaise;
- iii) Inability to know the extent to which the objectives of education have been achieved;
- iv) Erosion of the standard of education by producing unemployable graduates who become victims of a lifetime of servitude and wasted human capitals;
- v) The image of the country is dented abroad as our educational system and certificates have lost their credibility.
- vi) Duplication of expenditure wasted in replacing leaked examination materials;
- vii) The whole essence of schooling and education is defeated as holders of "brilliant" results are unemployable. Consequently, other up-coming young ones lose interest in education since those with certificates are jobless.

1.7 The Position of Benue State Examinations Board

Evidently, the dangerous virus called examination malpractice has posed a lot of challenges to the Board. The Board, on its part, has not rested on its oars but has adopted the following measures to curb it:

- Before each examination, principals and ad-hoc staff of the Board are properly briefed and cautioned.
- All examination materials are deposited at custodian points like police stations and banks from where they are issued out on a daily basis. This has rendered the examinations almost leakage- proof.
- Trusted school staff nominated by principals are used as supervisors to administer the examinations.
- Staff of Benue State Ministry of Education and the Examinations Board monitor and ensure that the proper things are done during the examinations.
- Erring supervisors, schools, students are punished or reported to the Ministry of Education.
- Efforts are at an advanced stage to employ ICT in the conduct of examinations as a strategy for efficiency, for the Board to release results early and reduce examination malpractice to the barest minimum.

2. RECOMMENDATION

It is suggested that the following steps be taken to further curb examination malpractice in Benue State:

- Government should muster enough will-power to adequately fund education to ensure provision of infrastructure, adequate staffing and re-introduction of boarding facilities in all post-primary institutions.
- Enhance the status and conditions of service of teachers including regular retraining in order to attract to the Profession the best human materials.

- Government should discourage opening of new schools by insisting on approving only those that meet all stipulated conditions.
- The National Orientation Agency, NOA, should intensify its campaign on value reorientation with emphasis on leadership by example.
- Government should fund the appropriate agencies like Area Education Offices and Benue State Examinations Board for effective monitoring of schools.
- All school Principals must be members of All Nigeria Conference Of Principals of Secondary Schools (ANCOPSS) for easy control and discipline.
- The Examination Malpractice Act No 33 of 1999 should be enforced to serve as deterrent to others. As a prelude, Government should organize continuous and sustained enlightenment campaigns against examination malpractice at all levels of education.
- Adequate remuneration of Examination Officers and Officials will make them not to be easily enticed with money and other materials.
- Names of individuals and schools found guilty of examination malpractice should be widely publicized, and they should be sanctioned.
- For employment, possession of the required skills should be given priority over possession of certificates.

3. CONCLUSION

Examination malpractice poses a direct challenge to Nigeria's national development. As such, it requires the collaborative efforts of all stakeholders including the government, parents, law enforcement agencies, and the mass media to combat its influence.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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