

Menace Of Examination Malpractices: Private Vs Public Secondary Schools And The Deteriorating Standard Of The Public Schools In Nigeria

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Abstract: *This paper examined the menace of examination malpractices: private VS public secondary schools and the deteriorating standard of the public secondary schools in Nigeria. The paper discussed the influence of school administrators, teachers, parents, government agents and students on examination malpractices in Nigeria. The causes and effects of examination malpractices on the academic performance of students and the society were highlighted. The paper further discussed the factors that influence examination malpractices in secondary schools. The measures to curbing examination malpractices in secondary schools were also discussed.*

Key words: Menace, Examination Malpractice, secondary schools, Deteriorating Standard

INTRODUCTION

Education is widely regarded as a fundamental pillar for the development of any society. In Nigeria, the educational system is structured into different levels; primary, secondary, and tertiary institutions. Secondary education, in particular, plays a critical role in preparing students for higher education and equipping them with essential knowledge and skills (Anyagh, Agbo-Egwu & Kalu, 2017; Ategwu and Obia, 2019). Menace is a perceived threat or danger. The menace of examination malpractice is the widespread and harmful practice of cheating, dishonesty, or unethical behavior exhibited during examinations. It undermines the integrity of educational systems and has several negative impacts like devaluation of education which erodes the credibility of academic qualifications, as students who cheat may pass exams without truly understanding the contents meant to be learnt. The menace of examination malpractice undermines meritocracy thus, distorts fairness and merit-based systems due to unqualified individuals gaining advantages over hardworking and deserving students (Olagunju, 2018). This leads to loss of integrity that fosters a culture of dishonesty, where students, teachers, and even exam officials may engage in unethical behavior, which can extend into other areas of life. Menace dampens motivation and discourages diligent students from putting in the necessary effort, knowing that others may cheat and achieve the same or better results. An educational system that produce graduates who lack the necessary skills and knowledge due to cheating, will have a workforce that may be unqualified or ill-prepared to contribute effectively to societal and economic growth (Raja, Jebadurai, Ivan, Mykola, Ruslan, & Reznik, 2024).

Examination is the measured technique used to evaluate students' academic performances and achievement made in the successful implementation and evaluation of the curriculum (Oduwaiye, 2014). However, in recent years, examination malpractices have become a significant issue that threatens the integrity of the education system in Nigeria. One of the key areas of concern is the increasing prevalence of examination malpractices in secondary schools especially in private secondary schools, which, in turn, has implications for public secondary schools and the overall standard of education in the country (Olagunju, 2018). According to Oko and Adie (2016), examination malpractice refers to any form of cheating or unethical behavior carried out by students, teachers, or school administrators to gain an unfair advantage in examinations. Examination malpractice is a deliberate act of wrong doing contrary to examination rules, designed to place students at an unfair advantages over other honest students. This problem has been pervasive in Nigeria's educational system for decades, cutting across primary, secondary, and tertiary institutions. In Nigeria, private secondary schools (schools owned by private individuals/organizations) are often seen as providing better educational facilities and learning environments than public schools (schools owned by government), which are typically underfunded and face infrastructural challenges. However, this advantage is sometimes undermined by the involvement of some private schools in examination malpractices. These schools often promise parents and students high scores, regardless of the actual academic performance of the students.

Asante-Kyei, & Nduru, (2014) argue that academic performance is not only about students' academic performance in school, but should also include all aspects of their knowledge, competence and literacy development. As a result, the pressure to meet these expectations leads to malpractices during examinations, with school authorities sometimes facilitating or condoning cheating (Kebuya & Mekongtso, 2020). While both public and private secondary schools are affected by this menace, private schools have come under greater scrutiny due to their increasing involvement in the practice. This is largely attributed to the profit-driven nature

of some private schools, which prioritize high success rates in external examinations (such as the West African Senior School Certificate Examination - WASSCE) as a marketing tool to attract more students and enhance their reputation. Wilayat in Akaranga & Onyong, (2013), opined that the value placed on certificate as the only yardstick to measure academic qualification has led some Nigerians buying certificates rather than earning it. Examination malpractices in secondary schools create a false sense of academic superiority. Students from public schools, who may be better academically but lack the financial backing to engage in malpractices, are often unfairly placed at a disadvantage. This undermines the principle of meritocracy and fairness in education. While the Nigerian government regulates both public and private schools, the enforcement of examination regulations is often weak as each examination season and type witnesses new methods of cheating (Turner, 2018). Corruption within regulatory bodies can also undermine the integrity of the examination system. As private schools boast of higher examination pass rates, many parents and students lose confidence in public schools. The perception that private schools are producing better results (even if through malpractices) leads to a decline in enrollment in public schools, further weakening the public education system. Public school students and teachers are under immense pressure to perform as well as their counterparts in private schools. This pressure can lead to frustration, low morale, and in some cases, encourage public schools to also engage in examination malpractices to stay competitive. The widespread practice of examination malpractices across both private and public schools devalues the credibility of certificates issued by Nigerian schools. Students who have not genuinely acquired the necessary knowledge and skills pass examinations through dishonest means, which lowers the overall standard of education in the country. The prevalence of examination malpractices, particularly in private secondary schools, has far-reaching implications for the standard of education in Nigeria.

The standard of education is the level of quality and effectiveness in delivering educational services, assessing student learning, and preparing individuals for future endeavors in the workforce, or personal growth. A high standard of education ensures that learners are equipped with the knowledge, skills, values, and critical thinking abilities necessary to succeed nationally and globally.

The topic “The menace of examination malpractices: private VS public schools and the deteriorating standard of the public schools in Nigeria” would be examined under the following sub-headings:

- ❖ Concept of Examination Malpractice
- ❖ Types/Forms of Examination Malpractice
- ❖ Social Media and the Menace of Examination Malpractice
- ❖ Causes and effects of Examination Malpractice
- ❖ Factors that influences examination malpractices in Secondary schools
- ❖ Effects of private schools misconducts on Public schools standards
- ❖ Measures to Curbing Examination Malpractices in Secondary Schools
- ❖ Conclusion.

Concept of Examination Malpractice

Oko and Adie (2016) defined Examination malpractice as any form of cheating or unethical behavior carried out by students, teachers, or school administrators to gain an unfair advantage in examinations. It is the misconduct carried out in the conduct of examinations with the sole purpose of obtaining excellent results through dubious means. Examination malpractices are conducts that negate the smooth procedural running of examinations that give undeserved favor to some students over others. The ill practices carried out in the conducts of examinations ranges from: getting information ahead about examination questions before the fixed date of the examination, smuggling already-made answer into the examination venues, conniving with others right in the hall, students paying money ahead of exam in other to be allowed to cheat. Malpractice acts in the conduct of examinations derails the objectives of the examination, and endangers the education standard of any nation. Abera and Tesfaye (2016) opined that examination malpractice is morally unjustified and unacceptable at any given situation.

Types/Forms of Examination Malpractice

On daily bases, examination malpractices keep taking different forms. According to Nnam & Inah (2015), forms of examination malpractices may include: impersonation, sales of examination question papers (yellow-paper), the smuggling of prohibited text materials into examination venues, teacher dictating answers to students or writing the answers on the chalkboard for students to copy, appointment of choice invigilators, using subject teachers to assist in solving questions, bribing and tipping external supervisors in order to have their ways, inflating marks while compiling terminal results. Affirming to the above attestation, Maheka (2015) in a study carried out on the nature of examination malpractices in some selected secondary schools in Zambia, said malpractices takes the form of leakage of examination question papers, giraffing, impersonation, smuggling of foreign text materials into the examination hall, and replacing the answer script given to them with already answered scripts.

Nyamoita & Otieno (2016); Yahaya, Odebode, & Akinyemi (2017) noted that examination malpractices in secondary schools often witnessed include copying from one another, illegal possessions of foreign materials, swapping of scripts, dubbing, sorting, girraffing, expo, writing on the body, use of sign language and use of cell phones as the main forms.

Social Media and the Menace of Examination Malpractice

In order for students to be successful online learners, social media helps them create online apps that link the learners with platforms and websites with different learning styles. Social media help learners to be autonomous and independent as the learner learns at his own pace based on his needs (Kalasi, 2014). However, there has been a lot of concern about social media. In recent years, social media has significantly contributed to the rise of examination malpractice. Platforms such as WhatsApp, Telegram, and Facebook are increasingly used to share leaked examination questions and answers. Some schools now use projectors to display answers during examinations, while others facilitate cheating through smartphones by sharing snapshots of questions and solutions via social media (Chief Examiner's Report, 2019). To tackle this issue and uphold the credibility of assessments and foster a culture of honesty in academic pursuits, stakeholders have called for coordinated efforts from educational institutions, government agencies, parents, and community and public involvement.

Causes and effects of Examination Malpractice

Examination malpractice is taking illegal advantage in respect of examination over other students. A lot of factors are responsible for examination malpractice. These factors ranges from: lack of self-confidence due to poor study habits by students, ineffective supervision of students during examinations, non-implementation of examination malpractices decree by government, fear of failure, societal preference for paper qualification, parents desire for their children to pass at all cost and ill-equipped school (Adegbenjo and Adebayo, 2017; Ayanniyi and Anya, 2017)). In a study carried out by Animasahun and Ogunniran (2014) on the causes of examination malpractice among secondary school students in Oyo State, it was found among others, that government non-implementation of examination malpractice decree, societal preference for paper qualification, and poor study habits are the causes of examination malpractices.

The effect of examination malpractice is alarming. Examination malpractice in Nigeria has led to increase in corruption rate; reduced credibility of our academic certificates in the global world; declining education standards; and wrong people being placed in positions of authority. Examination malpractice has made students lazy. Most students do not have interest in developing reading habit because they have the belief that miracle will happen on the exam day in the hall. Most students have excellent WASSCE (West African Senior School Certificate Examination) results but are not able to cope with their studies at the tertiary levels (Kebuya & Mekongtso, 2020). Our education system should be concerned about producing people who possess skills they can put into practice based on what they have been taught, rather than possessing certificates they cannot defend.

In time past, Nigeria had well qualified teachers who loved their works and were committed to the success of their students. This could be due to the fact that the government played their roles by making facilities for learning readily available and providing all the necessary incentives for the teachers (Ayanniyi and Anya, 2017). In today's world, the reverse is the case. The kind of schools and policies made by the government affect the standard of education. Most of these schools are run by business men that are only interested in making money and not what their school can impact on the students. Some of the teachers employed by private schools owners have low qualifications because the proprietors cannot afford to pay for qualified teachers. The Education Ministries that are supposed to check standards are compromising. These attitudes will definitely affect the performance of students in any examination, since emphasis is shifted from what one can do with skill to what certificate one possesses (Ololube, 2012). Examination malpractice has wrecked havoc in the nations' education system by introducing the youths systematically into fraudulent acts. Today, many of our youths are into yahoo, they see education as scam.

Factors that influences examination malpractices in Secondary schools

Recent studies have highlighted examination malpractice as a growing issue in secondary schools in Nigeria. The proliferation of Private Schools driven by the decline in public school standards due to poor funding, lack of infrastructure, and incessant strikes, has exacerbated examination malpractice. Many private institutions prioritize profit over education quality (Fasae, 2018). In a bid to attract more students' population, some schools ensure excellent examination results, often using unethical means. This, the administrators/proprietors achieve through teachers' involvement. Teachers in private schools often face pressure to ensure students' success by any means. This is sometimes linked to job insecurity, as their employment and job securities may depend on the students' performance in exams. Parents are not also left out on the issue of examination malpractice. Some parents encourage malpractice by paying for "special centers" where students can cheat. This reduces the motivation for students to study, undermining genuine academic achievement. On the part of the Examination boards and government monitoring agents, weak enforcement of anti-malpractice laws and inadequate funding for public schools allow the issue to persist.

Effects of private schools misconducts on Public schools standards

Private proprietors are independent owners of schools. Most private schools in the country came into existence when the government owned schools became poorly funded with no infrastructure, coupled with unending and countless strikes that kept learners out of schools for a long period of time. These private schools rather than become succors and reliefs to parents in raising the standard of education in the country, ruin it by indulging and spear-heading various forms of examination malpractices. The craving to maximize gains by the private school owners has led to lack of maintenance of standards for admissions. They make the teachers in their schools work themselves out, teaching too many subjects in addition to courses in which they are not specialist. As a result of the pressure mounted on the teachers, they connive with the proprietors and encourage fraudulent means to make their students pass their external examinations for fears of mass failure which they believe will turn out to dent the image of their schools and so reduce the number of intakes they yearn to have. In fact, students graduate from secondary schools with distinctions but can hardly make it at the university Joint Admission and Matriculation Examination (JAMB). One begins then to ask how these results were gotten by the students. This menace undermines the credibility of the education system and far-reaching effects on societal development. A multi-stakeholder approach involving schools, parents, and the government is essential to curb this issue.

Measures to Curbing Examination Malpractices in Secondary Schools

Counselors should be made available in secondary schools to enlighten candidates on the need to cultivate good study habits. Exam bodies and schools need stringent supervision to curb unethical practices. They should work hand-in-hand in putting up policies that would help to checkmate any form of examination malpractices (Abera and Tesfaye, 2016; Yahaya, Odebo, and Akinyemi, 2017). Schools and ministries should carry out intensive sensitization campaigns, and intensify monitoring on both teachers and students Maheka (2015) in quality lessons delivery to build up strong confidence in learners.

According to Nyamoita and Otieno (2016), malpractice audit should be put in place to monitor school principals and their teachers to track malpractices during assessments. He emphasized that perpetrators should be prosecuted to serve as deterrent to others, and to create confidence in all stakeholders committed to implementing policies, and that academic performance should not be the only yardstick for promotion and in ranking of schools by the ministry of education.

Parents should play their roles in training their children ethically and in policies of hard work in entering into schools and exam halls with strong beliefs about making sound ethical decisions and good performances. Emphasis should not be laid so much on certificates as this encourages people to acquire certificates at all costs. Rather, emphasis should be laid on what the learner can do with the knowledge acquired so as to encourage hard work in learners.

Conclusion

Education is a fundamental pillar for the development of any society. Examination malpractice is indeed a menace set to hamper development. For this not to continue, urgent actions needed to be taken against the menace of examination malpractices. All hands must be on deck to wage war against the monster. It is strongly believed that the above remedial measures to curbing examination malpractices will bring about attitudinal re-orientation of students and all sundries towards examination malpractices in schools.

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