

Degradation in the Standard of Teaching and Learning of Mathematics and Science in Secondary Schools due to Examination Malpractice

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Abstract: *The crux of this paper is the menace of examination malpractice being experienced nationwide in mathematics and science among secondary school students. This evil vice termed examination malpractice has endangered the lives of students, parents, teachers and school administrators. It has corroded the educational system and almost rendering local and standardized examinations inept. This paper has identified some major causes of examination malpractice in Nigeria. There include; poor reading habits, failure of teachers to set questions out of content coverage, emphasis on paper qualification and unpreparedness of students due to laxity in studies. The paper suggested ways by which these ugly trends could be reduced. Among them are mathematics and science teachers should ensure proper coverage of their subjects and security personnel should enforce appropriate rules and regulations that govern all such examinations. The paper recommended that proprietors of schools should provide incentives and remunerate mathematics and science teachers. Government on their part should de-emphasize paper qualification in favour of productivity.*

Keywords: *examination malpractice, educational standard, productivity, penalty reading habits,*

I. Introduction

There is no country that can attain development if the educational standard is not prioritized. This is to say the level of quality education offered determine to a great extent the magnitude of development to be witnessed in a country (Okunbor, 2011,[1]). It is so obvious that the standard of education in Nigeria secondary schools is deteriorating. Consider the results released by West African Examination Council (WAEC) and the National Examination Council (NECO) in 2011, only about 30% of students who sat for the examinations obtained five credits including Mathematics and English; 70% failed woefully while a few scaled through science-oriented courses like chemistry.

Secondary school students no longer pay attention to their studies; rather prefer to engage in one in consequential activity to the other. These days, it is quite rare to see students carrying out research in order to gain in-depth knowledge and information that will aid in making them better students academically. This kind of attitude to studies has contributed to the drastic fall in education specifically in mathematics and science. In the bid to pass examinations at all cost, due to students' laxity and carefree attitude towards their studies, they engage in one form of examination malpractice or the other. Examination malpractice can be referred to as all forms of cheating which directly or indirectly falsify the ability of the students outside the examination and any involvement in all illegal examination-related offences (Examination malpractice, nd,[2]). It can be seen as an illegal act committed by a student singlehandedly or in collaboration with others like fellow classmates, parents, teachers, invigilators or supervisors before, during or after an examination in order to obtain undeserved marks or grades. Ugwu (2008),[3] defines examination malpractice as a deliberate wrong doing contrary to official examination rules designed to place a candidate at an unfair advantage or disadvantage. This evil vice was defined by Awanbor (2004) in Atabong, Okpala, Abonden and Essombe (2010),[4] as the application of unusual means to obtain a score of or set of scores that is normally beyond the mental capability or the state of preparedness of a candidate for that examination. Odongbo (2002),[5] refers to examination malpractice as an act of wrong doing carried out by a candidate or group of candidates or any other person with the intention to cheat and gain unfair advantage in an examination.

Examination malpractice has become the order of the day. These days, hardly is there any examination without irregularities and malpractice especially in mathematics and science examinations. Students have become extremely lazy academically because they believe that they do not need to read for examinations, since examination malpractice can always be their last resort.

To the society's utmost dismay, our mathematics and science teachers encourage this evil vice. Onyechere (2004),[6] points out that, teachers among other adult agents and collaborators play an active role in encouraging examination malpractice. This they do by collecting money from students and promising to come to their aid during examinations. These teachers teach their courses haphazardly leaving out topics they clearly do not have much knowledge on and those they find difficult. Afterwards they negotiate with students and leak

out their examination questions. As students discover they have captured the teachers' interest, they relax and pay little attention to their studies. P.M.News (2010),[7] asserts that government and teachers/lecturers, parents, invigilators, examination bodies are perpetrators of this evil vice. They sometimes collect money from candidates willing to enter an examination hall with foreign objects and even inside the hall; they help in this academic fraud.

Now in the era of laying emphasis on certificate to obtain white collar jobs, the only gateway to ascertaining a reliable and well paid job, the society has decided to join in encouraging examination malpractice. Parents want their children to graduate and get good jobs and relieve them of economic stress, students also on their own want to begin living a normal independent life. Mathematics and science teachers are in need of money and conspire with students and parents to facilitate, making sure students scale through examination at all cost, no matter what it takes. Considering the aforementioned, the standard of education is completely falling and losing its value. Hence, mathematics and science examination results can no longer be used to ascertain the true quality of students' knowledge and ability, since it is devoid of its true meaning.

The society has contributed immensely in bastardizing the apparent nature and essence of examination. Mathematics and science now seen as the hallway to successfully gaining admission into tertiary institutions if one passes these subjects at O'level, has suffered in the hands of examination malpractice. Examination malpractice an incessant act which has crept into the educational system both at primary and secondary school levels has caused a lot of damage and impoverished the enthusiasm of our mathematics and science students. Gathering from these views, one can judgmentally say that results students obtain from indulging in examination malpractice is an unfaithfully acquired academic achievement. Therefore, efforts should be on deck to arrest this ugly trend.

II. Causes of examination malpractice in mathematics and science

Several factors have been responsible for examination malpractice. Some of them have been identified and discussed in this paper and they include;

- 1.1 Poor reading habits on the part of students: students show some laxity when it comes to reading. After class activity a few students visit the library to get acquainted and further strengthening what was taught to them earlier in class. Mathematics and science students with poor reading habits and skills receive poor grades at school, get easily distracted and frustrated, possess behaviour problems, seem to dislike school and often fail to develop their full potentials. Rubin (2002),[8] sum it up by saying children with poor reading habits have a higher chance of anti-social behaviour and even engaging in examination malpractice. Students who do not find reading a pleasurable habit may always resort to examination malpractice.
- 1.2 Failure on part of teachers to set questions on content covered: Mathematics and science teachers sometimes set questions out of the scope of what they covered in class, with the expectation that students will be able to answer the questions. If students of these days lack the wherewithal to purposefully give time to studying what has been taught to them, they definitely will not go beyond what has not been taught. Students these days are not much of researchers; craving for deeper knowledge. They prefer to be spoon fed. Therefore, mathematics and science teachers should realize that whatever is not covered or taught to students will likely cause trouble for them in examinations. Mathematics and science teachers should not believe so much in students or have high expectations. Teachers should take time to teach them gradually and whatever is covered must be what appears in examinations. This will reduce the risk of students engaging in examination malpractice.
- 1.3 Emphasis on paper qualification: Parents desire for their children to pass at all cost and students as well try to please their parents by doing all it takes to graduate with better grades. The craze for paper qualification is the offshoot of the poor implementation of our national policy on education. Emphasis is gradually being removed from paper acquisition of demonstrable skills and academic excellence, to mere paper qualification.
- 1.4 Unpreparedness of students for examinations: Mathematics and science students fail to prepare well for their examinations and generally develop examination fever or tensions. Because of this, they are unable to retain a concepts learnt and experience difficulty retrieving it during examination. Instead of dedicating time to study, they prefer to watch television, play games, and engage in one form of social negative vices or the other. Thereby losing grip of the most important thing needed for them to be successful in examinations.

With these causes and others not mentioned, students engage in examination theft such as giraffing, exchanging of answer booklets and scribbled pieces of papers, distraction of examination officials, coercing examiners into inflating scores for them, and also threatening examiners or examination supervisors to allow them copy from one another.

Be that as it is, there are also various ways of curbing this menace and they are considered under the heading that follows.

III. Curbing examination malpractice among mathematics and science students

- a. Conducting thorough search on students prior to examination.
- b. Presence of unauthorized materials among the students' scripts should be recorded and the students penalized accordingly.
- c. Prohibition of the use of electronic devices during an examination.
- d. Security personnel should be given the entire necessary mandate to enforce the rules and regulations of examination.
- e. Examination halls should be spacious enough to avoid clustering of students who may want to copy from the other.
- f. Mathematics and science teachers should ensure that they teach within scope and syllabus content.

IV. Conclusion

Based on the issues discussed, without reasonable doubt, students appear to be the strongest agents of examination malpractice and are also at higher risk of facing the consequences when caught. But to blame them fully may not be justifiable enough because some are actually victims of poor educational environment in which they find themselves. Mathematics and science students educated in good schools with proper parental upbringing will be honest and develop that confidence needed and required to face examinations unaided in order to have inner satisfaction and pride in their achievement. It is noteworthy that if we fail to fight against the evil vices of examination malpractice in our secondary schools, this ugly trend will continue with greater proportion and in no time our education sector will be flooded with a workforce that is completely incompetent and unproductive. Thereby rendering any certificate issued by institutions of education useless and losing its recognition both nationally and internationally.

V. Recommendations

It is said that a problem diagnosed is at least 20% solved. With some of the causes of examination malpractice being identified, the following recommendations are therefore relevant.

- a. Parents and teachers should not put too much pressure on their children to attain excellent results, but rather advice and keep an eye on them making sure they give enormous time to studying.
- b. There should be de-emphasizing of certificate as a mark of academic excellence. This syndrome pushes students to do the extreme.
- c. Mathematics and science teachers should be well motivated so that they make extra effort to cover the syllabus.
- d. Students who are caught indulging in examination malpractice acts should be penalized accordingly to serve as a deterrent to others.

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