

CURBING EXAMINATION MALPRACTICE IN THE UNIVERSITY SYSTEM: A MANAGEMENT PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

Examination malpractice is as old as examination itself. However, the rate at which examination malpractices occur in the Nigerian educational system is highly disturbing. It therefore needs prompt attention by all stakeholders. The phenomenon has both moral and legal dimensions. It is considered as a hydra-headed problem that has pervaded the entire educational system in Nigeria. Its resultant effect is a gradual loss of confidence in the products of the system and gradual de-recognition of certificates issued by Nigerian schools. This paper discusses the concept of examination malpractice and highlights a number of offences that are regarded as forms of examination malpractice at the pre-examination, examination and post-examination stages in the university system.

It also highlights causes and manifestations of examination malpractice among university staff and students. It then proposes strategic management policies that could curb this menace.

Introduction

Examination is an important aspect of the education process. This is the stage at which the learner's knowledge, skills, ability and competencies are assessed, and judgement made about such performance. The outcome of such judgement is used for diagnosing as well as placement of students. Beating the due process of examinations leads to malpractices. Hence, examination malpractice is as old as examination itself. However, the rate at which examination malpractices occur in the Nigerian educational system is highly disturbing and, therefore, needs prompt attention by all stakeholders. In fact, the phenomenon has both moral and legal implications.

Examination malpractice was described as a cankerworm (Yakubu, 1998; Edokpa, 1998). This prompted the Federal Military Government to promulgate "Examination Malpractices Decree 20" in 1984. The decree prescribes heavy punishment for offenders. In spite of stiff penalties, examination malpractice is growing in leaps and bounds at all levels of the Nigerian educational

system. Pupils/students, teachers, school administrators, parents, examination invigilators and supervisors, custodians of examination materials, officials of examination bodies and law enforcement agents are involved. Hence, Decree 20 was amended copiously by “Examination Malpractices Decree 33 of 1999”, which lists twelve various offences as examination malpractices.

Examination malpractice, as an antisocial behaviour, has in recent times attracted the attention of stakeholders in the education industry (Ojikutu, 1987; Olumero, 1992; WAEC, 1994; Adamolekun, 1998). The phenomenon has been defined in various ways by teachers, sociologists, philosophers, psychologists and educational administrators. In summary, the University of Port Harcourt Academic Policies (2001) defines examination malpractice as all forms of cheating which directly or indirectly falsify the ability of the students. Offences regarded as forms of examination malpractice during examinations include:

- i. using another person to sit for an examination on behalf of a candidate;
- ii. bringing in prepared answers/copying from textbooks, notebooks, laboratory specimens or any other instructional aids smuggled into the examination hall;
- iii. collaborating with an invigilator to cheat in the examination hall;
- iv. communicating or attempting to communicate between/among examinees;
- v. copying or attempting to copy other student’s work/answers in examinations;
- vi. submitting or attempting to submit a new prepared answer script as a substitute for the original script after an examination;
- vii. non-submission of answer script at the end of an examination;
- viii. illegal removal of answer scripts from the examination hall.

Forms of examination malpractice before or after examinations include:

- i. using another person’s work without appropriate acknowledgement both in the text or in the references list;
- ii. copying laboratory and fieldwork reports and/or term papers of others;
- iii. obtaining set questions or answers beforehand;
- iv. modifying student’s score cards, answer scripts and/or mark sheets;
- v. submitting project, laboratory and/or field report not prepared or written by the students themselves
- vi. breaking into staff or departmental offices in order to obtain question papers, answer scripts or mark sheets, or substituting a fresh answer script for the original scripts; and
- vii. soliciting for examiner’s help in order to pass examination.

(University of Port Harcourt Academic Policies, 2001; University of Ilorin Academic Programmes, 1997-2002; Ojikutu, 1987).

Cause of Examination Malpractice.

A number of factors responsible for examination malpractices in the Nigerian school system have been identified by such scholars as Olasehinde (1993); Oladunni (1995); and Adeghoye (1998).

These factors could be regarded as immediate and remote causes of examination malpractices, taking source from the society, the home and the school. Among others, these causes are:

- i. moral decadence;
- ii. undue emphasis on examination results and certificates;
- iii. quest for material wealth;
- iv. poor teaching/learning habits;
- v. poor conditions under which examinations are conducted;
- vi. maladministration of school heads and examiners;
- vii. poor logistics for examinations;
- viii. the desire to satisfy parents' ambition;
- ix. unpreparedness of students for examinations;
- x. students' lack of self confidence;
- xi. peer/group influence;
- xii. benefits derived by vendors of examination papers;
- xiii. injustice in the punishment of culprit/insincerity in tackling the problem;
- xiv. incessant staff strikes that often interrupt the school programme; and
- xv. teacher's threat to fail students.

Curbing Examination Malpractice in the University System

Examination malpractice occurs both within and outside the examination halls. It is perpetrated by students, staff and other external agents before, during and even after examinations. Many strategies applied to curb examination malpractices within the university system tend to be ineffective. In fact, new devices for perpetrating examination malpractices grow by leaps and bounds on campuses, making such strategies look as if they are addressing the symptoms rather than the root causes. This situation might not be unconnected with the fact that student culprits are usually targeted by these strategies, brushing aside the contributory roles of other university members in the ultimate act.

The timeliness and effectiveness of the disciplinary measures meted out to culprits have also been faulted (Olaseinde-Williams, 2004). This paper is, therefore, in support of the general overhauling (ethical re-orientation) of the entire university education, through the use of strategic management policies.

The aim is to eradicate academic dishonesty in general, and examination malpractice in particular. This “Strategic Management”, according to Cole (1996), is viewed as the process directed by job management, to determine the fundamental aims and goals of the organization, and ensure the range of decisions which will allow for the achievement of those aims and goals in the long—term, whilst providing for adaptive responses in the shorter term (v. 123).

Strategic management in this paper refers to the setting of goals and actions towards academic honesty coupled with provision of an enabling environment by university administration and compliance with expected behaviours by university staff and students. In this way every member of the university community would therefore have a common vision and would be governed by such written documents as mission and policy statement and standard organisational behaviours to achieve the mission. For instance, the vision of University of Ilorin’s Strategic Plan is to be an international centre of excellence in learning, research, probity and service to humanity” (p. 31).

Likewise the mission is “to provide world—class environment for learning, research and community service (p.3).

The achievement of this vision would definitely require abolition of all acts of academic dishonesty, examination malpractice inclusive. In addition, dedication would be expected of the university administration, staff and students in the performance of their obligations and functions. Specifically, university administration would have to set achievable goals and objectives and provide the necessary enabling environment for achieving them. The different categories of staff and students would equally have to effectively and efficiently perform their expected roles and functions. It is under the resultant academic integrity climate, which according to Olaseinde- Williams (2004), is a behavioural issue having to do with transparency and self-discipline in all academic transactions including examination matters in the university system, that effective teaching and learning would take place and all acts of academic dishonesty abolished.

Expectations and Obligation in Strategic Management Policy Under the strategic management policy, all categories of people within the university community must have specific obligations to perform towards goal achievement. Expected obligations of university administration, different categories of staff and students must be made clear to each of these parties in the school

commodity University Administration: The basic obligation of the university administration is the provision of a conducive working and learning environment for staff and students.

This obligation involves, among others:

- i. formulation of concrete and achievable goals,
- ii. provision of necessary human (lectures and support staff); material (lectuie moths, seats and instructional materials) and fiscal resources to Work with,
- iii. setting up monitoring devices for detecting non-compliance with goal attainment activities, and,
- iv provision and application of a fair and free policy framework for dealing with non-compliance to set standards.

Academic Staff: Academic staff in universities are expected to teach and engage in research and community service (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1998). The most basic among these functions is teaching. In fact, the other two functions (research and community service) are expected to assist teaching. Effective teaching is therefore necessary to ensure malpractice-free examinations. For teaching to be effective, the teachers must be proficient in the principles and practice of education. There is thus the need for university lecturers to have teaching qualifications such as Post-Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE). Such training, according to Modupe and Arigbede (2000), would enable proper questions to be set, thereby eliminating some of the aspects of examination malpractices occasioned by difficulty of questions.

In relation to effective teaching, academic staff would be expected to:

- i. attend lectures punctually and be well prepared;
- ii. be accessible to students;
- iii. give and grade tests and assignments objectively and provide prompt feedback to students on their performances;
- iv avoid taking undue advantage of students; and
- v. relate well to other members of the university community.

Different categories of academic and non-academic staff are involved in examination matters. These officers, including the Heads of Department (Chief Examiners). Course Lecturers, Examination Coordinators/Officers. Typists, Chief Invigilators and Invigilators must be acquainted with their duties as stipulated in Academic Programmes. and must carry them out. University Students: University students are obliged to respect and obey

constituted authority. In this regard, students should be acquainted with the Information Handbook and or Code of Conduct Manual relating to dos and don'ts on campuses. Students should be provided with information on issues such as:

- i. general behaviours on campus,
- ii. lecture attendance and eligibility for examinations.
- iii. procedures for continuous assessment of courses and,
- iv. use of such university facilities as library, counselling centre and recreational facilities.

Under the expected open environment where each group knows the obligations of the other groups, accountability is enshrined in the system and students become so self-disciplined that they abhor acts of dishonesty and report violators (co-students and even staff).

Conclusion

Examination malpractice has become a hydra-headed problem that pervades the entire educational system in Nigeria. It is perpetrated by students and staff alike both within and outside the examination rooms using different techniques that grow by the day. The resultant effect is gradual loss of confidence in Nigerian certificates. Strategic management policy, in which specific obligations of university administration, staff and students are clearly stated, is advocated. Though strategic management make for long term achievement of goals is targeted, it also stresses the provision of adaptive measures in the short term. Therefore, the following recommendations are made to curb examination malpractices pending the time that the policy would inculcate permanent ethical reorientation in university members.

Recommendations

1. Moral/religious counselling should be used as a strategy to reduce involvement of students and staff in examination malpractice (Eweniyi, 2002). Such counselling could be given during orientation programmes for new students and staff during registration for courses by level advisers, during lectures and workshops and seminars. At such for a, the consequence of examination malpractice should be explained to both students and staff Staff members are also counselled on the moral implications of using intimidation and threats to extort sex, money and other favours from students in exchange for grades.

2. Pending the provision of adequate hall and seats for examinations, adequate number of invigilators should be assigned to examination room (the policy of a chief invigilator and at least one invigilator to every 40 students should be adhered to).
 3. All activities relating to examinations such as question paper production, invigilation, marking and result collation as well as computation should be handled with a high sense of responsibility by those concerned
 4. Concerted efforts should be made to properly acquaint staff and students with regulations governing examination conduct in the university. Towards this end, workshops and orientation programmes should be carried out periodically to acquaint staff with their duties as examiners and invigilators and students of their expected preparation for, and conduct at examinations.
 5. For the many examination offenders now and the few that would still violate even after self-discipline has been enshrined in the long run, appropriate sanctions should be applied. Provision of the Act 33 of 1999 and/or University sanctions should be used for this purpose. However, the sanctions should be effectively applied after proper investigation.
- Sanctions should be reformatory and timely. A situation where student culprits spend two or more semesters before being sanctioned is inappropriate. All hands must be seen to be on deck towards eradicating academic dishonesty, including the menace of examination malpractices in the university.

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