

Cheating in Examinations: An Anomie that Characterizes the Nigerian Education System

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Abstract: Cheating in examination or malpractices ranks as one of the most dangerous social ills in any society making nonsense of the educational system and undermining the very purpose of education. The objective is to describe the extent to which cheating in examination has eaten deep into the fabric of Nigeria's educational system and to suggest possible methods of curbing the social menace. This paper is a descriptive survey design which used one hundred male and female final year sandwich students of Ekiti State University, Emmanuel Alayande College of Education Centre Oyo. The paper identified six different causes of cheating in examination and six possible methods of curbing these social ills in the Nigerian educational system. The results of the study showed that less emphasis should be placed on paper qualifications and certificates rather emphasis should be more placed on the acquisition of knowledge and skills among others.

Keywords: Cheating, Examination and Anomie

INTRODUCTION

Examination in the school system is the most valuable option of assessing the process of teaching and learning outcomes. Examination is the test of knowledge, attitude, ability, capability and qualification. At the end of interaction between the teacher and the learners, there is usual process of evaluating the learners to ascertain the level of assimilation and mastery of skills being imparted. Examination can be in form of quiz, oral questioning, class mid semester test and end of semester examinations.

In history, a variety of purposes can be found for examination. To this effect Ojerinde D [1] opined that examinations are designed to aid selection of candidates for admission into some programmes for further studies including promotion to a new class or appointment into a job. Also, examination is to make students become more effective in their learning; and accreditation of knowledge [2].

In pursuance of these purposes of examination two forms of assessment are put in place in Nigerian universities – formative and summative assessment [3]. Formative assessment which provides students feedback on their quality of learning takes the form of continuous assessment (C.A); while summative assessment takes the form end-of-semester examination. The two types of assessment are used to determine

students' performance in the system with the C.A weighted 30% and 70% at the undergraduate level.

The extent to which these purposes of examination can be accurately determined depends on the degree of reliability of scores obtained by students in Nigerian universities. However students' desire to succeed at all cost in examinations has prompted them to device various forms of sophisticated methods of cheating. Cheating culture has eaten deep into the student's life to the extent that cancellation of their results as well as expulsion from school or exam hall has had no effect on the culprits.

One of the ills ravaging Nigerian society is examination malpractices. It is an age-long menace that has continued to thrive despite its incongruence with societal norms. The goals of national education systems and indeed national development become like mirage if examination ethics is not encouraged and instituted [4]. Examination still remains the best tool for an objective assessment and evaluation of what learners have achieved after a period of schooling [5]. Any action that therefore undermines examinations poses a great threat to the validity and reliability of examination results and certification.

Cheating in examination may be described as illegal means employed by students to succeed in examinations. It is used synonymously with

examination malpractices. It can also be referred to as the illegal means adopted by students in passing an examination either within or outside the examination hall. Cheating in examination has always occurred during examination since some students are always caught either copying each other's work or taking cribs or notes into examination hall or whispering. Omotosho HM [6] referred to cheating in examination as a situation where candidates request for written or verbal assistance either to one another or to their accomplices in the hall. Examination leakages, impersonation, certificate forgery, smuggling answer scripts can be classified as examination malpractices. If cheating in examination is such a long standing global phenomenon, efforts of academia or educators must then be directed towards controlling cheating and also finding possible solution to it. For instance, academia must proffer strategies to curb cheating behavior in our institutions of learning. The perpetrators can be described as dishonest and hence the dignity of labour is not inculcated in them. The resultant effect is that Nigerians' hopes and aspirations of building a virile, prosperous, just and stable nation may not be realized [7].

When students cheat in examinations whatever scores they obtain ease to reflect their true abilities. Hence, any decisions made about them, on the basis of such scores, fail to qualify as valid and whole purpose of assessment becomes defeated [3]. Therefore, to obtain any valid assessment of students' abilities every effort must be made to minimize, if not totally eradicate cheating in examinations. To this end, it is expedient to identify the main causes of cheating in examination among sandwich undergraduate that are sampled in this study.

The phenomenon of examination malpractices is influenced by many factors. According to Iwovi UMO [8], lack of confidence as a result of inadequate preparation, peer influence, societal influence, parental support and poor facilities in schools are some of the factors responsible for examination malpractices. Also, Ipaye JB [9] identified long-term vocational goals and motivation to avoid failure as two major factors for cheating in examinations. In the same veins Badmus GA [10], Awanbor D [11], Okafor FC [12], Ayua IA [13] and Aminu J [14] identified school programmes, teaching learning environment, lack of proper supervision, leakages through the lecturer, and the students over value of certificate decadence in the Nigerian society and sitting arrangement in examination as some factors responsible for cheating in the Nigerian education system. Similarly, Adeyinka AA [15] emphasized lack of seriousness on the part of students as the major cause of cheating in examinations.

Cheating in examination in Nigerian schools, is further strengthened and sustained through societal

apathy, which is summed up in the term "anomie". Anomie according to Jimoh BO [5] is conceived as a breakdown in the cultural structure due to disjunction between the cultural norms, goals and the socially structured capacities of members of the group to act in accord with them. In this conception, cultural values may help to produce behavior that is at odds with the mandates of the values themselves. Anomie gives birth to aberrant behavior and non-conformity, which is a symptom of dissociation between culturally prescribed goals and socially prescribed means for realizing these goals. A society that places exceptionally strong emphasis on goal achievement without a corresponding emphasis on institutionalized means of achieving these goals is bound to exert pressures on some members of the society that may eventually resort to the use of any technically expedient means in achieving these goals irrespective of whether the means employed is legitimate or not. The process whereby exaltation of the end generates a de-institutionalization of the means to the end occurs in many societies where the two components of the social structure are not highly integrated.

Contemporary Nigerian society places great emphasis on success goals without equivalent emphasis on institutional means of attaining these goals. The society is characterized by a heavy emphasis on success and wealth without a corresponding emphasis on legitimate means and avenues to be used in achieving success. Everything in Nigeria these days is driven by the desire for success irrespective of the means used in achieving success. The country has become a commercial venture and no longer a place for selfless service. Everyone is out to make quick money and patriotism is endangered. There is a disjunction between the culturally acclaimed goals and the institutional procedures for achieving these goals. The attenuation of this over time is the anomie that now characterizes the Nigerian society. The society, as it is constituted today, is founded on faulty/fragile education, political, economic, physical and social environment that cannot produce a better tomorrow [16]. The country is bedeviled with social and economic ills such as cultism, moral decadence, embezzlement, social injustice, corruption, and so on. It has become a society where the custom is to decorate miscreants, knaves, scam artist and violators of national trust with national honours and appoint them to exalted public offices [5].

The social vices bedeviling the society have permeated the entire segments of the education sector. The manifestations are moral decadence, loss of family values and examination malpractice that has become endemic in the education system of the country. The societal emphasis on success-goals, irrespective of the means employed in achieving these goals, has pressurized some participants in the education industry to strain toward anomie. Such participants have resorted

to the use of illegitimate procedures in achieving success in examinations. The disjunction between culturally acclaimed goals and the institutionalized means of achieving these goals coupled with the cultural context of great emphasis on success-goals without equivalent emphasis upon institutional means of attaining these goals have created an environment that predisposes some students, teachers, parents and others to examination malpractice. Students are involved because they want to achieve success; parents are involved because they want good grades for their wards; teachers and others are involved because of the financial, material and other intangible gains derivable from involvement in examination malpractice.

Furthermore, there is the issue of over- value of certificates. This could be traced to the colonial past when the colonial masters issued certificates as testimonial to the natives who had undergone some form of instruction in administration. Such administrative certificates instantly catapulted the holders from life ordinary and transformed them into local economic and social superiors. Certificates or similar credentials became instant means of considerable social and economic leverage and opportunities for future political power. Ever since, the value system had placed emphasis on certificates because of their assumed transformational power [5]. This inherited notion has dominated and suffused the Nigerian school system so much that the product of the system preferred to flaunt certificates and credentials rather than knowledge, skill and competence. Consequently, students engage in short-cut means of acquiring these certificates during examinations. In the same vein, parental indiscipline and abuse of wealth sustain the phenomenon of examination malpractice. Many parents believe that with their wealth they can catapult their children to any heights in the society even if it involves buying question papers and bribing teachers and invigilators to ensure that their children pass examinations.

Examination malpractice, a variety of corruption is sustained by whatever sustains corruption in the country. Capitalism has eroded the moral values of the Nigerian society. Social, economic, political, religious and educational vices are celebrated and rewarded in the country while virtue is punished. How can students, teachers and others shun examination malpractice when they “see criminals being set free through legalisms and court room gymnastics or worse, through wretched and criminal influence peddling?” [14].

Confronted with the extent of these social ills in Nigerian institutions, various educationists had examined the possible methods of curbing cheating in examinations. For instance, Ugwuegbu DCE [17] advocated attitudinal change while Hassan T [18] emphasized eradication of these social ills within the society and less emphasis on paper qualification as important in curbing cheating in examinations. Also, credible examination is further ensured when students are critically supervised during examination period. This is because cheating often thrives well during examination either when supervisors are inadequate for the number of candidates or are busy doing their own thing or when candidates are seated too close to one another [18]. In his own submission, Adeyinka AA [15] called for a total cancellation of end-of-course written examination and instead called for assessment based on class discussion, dramatization (where appropriate) and aggregate of students’ performance in their C.A test over a specified number of sessions. This study was therefore designed to find out the causes of cheating and possible methods of curbing cheating in examination. Against this background, two research questions were raised for this study as follows:

1. What are the causes of cheating in examination in Nigerian schools?
2. What are the possible roles of academia in curbing cheating in examination in Nigerian schools?

METHODOLOGY

The study was a descriptive survey in which causes and role of academia or possible measures to curb cheating in examination was empirically derived. A total of 100 male and female final year sandwich students were randomly selected from five departments of Ekiti State University, Emmanuel Alayande College of Education Centre, Oyo, Oyo State. A self developed 12 item questionnaire titled “Cheating in Examination: an Anomie that Characterizes the Nigerian Educational System” comprising two sections on general information on cheating in examinations and possible roles of academia in curbing cheating in Nigerians schools was developed. The instrument was subjected to face and content validity by the social studies experts of the college in use. The researcher personally administered the questionnaires to avoid being lost and collected it back same day. Data collected were analyzed using mean score and Standard Deviation Statistical Methods.

RESULTS

Research Question 1: What are the causes of cheating in examination in Nigerian schools?

Table 1: Causes of Cheating in Examination

Sl. No.	Items	No	Positive Response	Negative Response	X	SD
1	Inadequate preparation for examination and fear of failure	100	100	00	1.00	.00
2	Too much emphasis on certificate and paper qualifications	100	100	00	1.00	.00
3	The desire to meet societal expectations	100	75	25	1.25	.44
4	Leakages through lecturers	100	75	25	1.25	.44
5	Too close sitting arrangement during examination	100	75	25	1.25	.44
6	Lack of proper supervision during examination	100	70	30	1.30	.46

Table one above shows that all the variables under consideration are statistically significant with cheating in examination in Nigerian schools. A low factor of deviation in these variables depict that the items above cause cheating in examination. Since

Standard Deviation (SD) is less than 0.5 in all cases we accept all items above as causes of cheating in examination. However the fear of failure and too much emphasis on certificate and paper qualification explains the major causes of cheating in Nigerian schools.

Research Question 2: What are the Possible Roles of Academia in Curbing Cheating in Examination in Nigerian Schools

Table 2: Role of Academia

Sl. No.	Items	No	Positive Response	Negative Response	X	SD
1	Campaigns, orientation, seminar and workshop should be given periodically	100	70	30	1.30	.46
2	Novel sitting arrangement in the examination to prevent proximity induced cheating	100	80	20	1.20	.42
3	Improved funding of education sector, learning environment	100	70	30	1.30	.46
4	Thorough and improved supervision during examination	10	80	20	1.20	.40
5	Less emphasis of certificate and paper qualification	100	90	10	1.10	.30
6	Strict penalties for offenders and abettors	100	70	30	1.30	.46

Table 2 above shows that all possible roles of academia suggested here are acceptable as the solution to cheating in Nigerian schools. However, placing less emphasis on certificate and paper qualifications is however significant in solving the problem of cheating in Nigerian schools.

DISCUSSIONS

This study investigated into causes and possible roles of academia in curbing cheating in examinations in Nigerian schools. The results of the

data analysis revealed that many students still cheat in examination basically because of lack of proper preparation, fear of failure and too much emphasis on certificate and paper qualifications. These findings are in line with the study of Hasssan T [18] and Ugwuegbu DCE [17] who agreed that the ascribed role of the certificate and fear of failure creates fear in students and presented strong motivation for cheating in examinations. It is important to note that Nigeria is a certificate oriented society. Even these days when there are no longer open doors to lucrative jobs, certificates

still remain the singular potential to higher socio-economic status in Nigeria. Also, the finding is in line with Jimoh BO [5] who maintains that the problem of over-value of certificate could be traced to colonial past that used certificates to catapult the colonial masters from life ordinary to local economic and social superiors. These inherited notions has dominated and suffused the Nigerian school system.

The result of the study further showed that leakages of examination questions usually occur through lecturers and that lack of proper supervision always lead to cheating in examination. The finding is in consonance with that of Badmus GA [10] whose finding revealed that teaching, learning environment, lack of proper supervision, leakages of examination questions to students through lecturers, and a lots of other factors are responsible for examination malpractices in Nigerian schools.

The finding of the study also revealed that through an improved supervision during examination and novel sitting arrangement to prevent cheating in examination are some of the roles of academia or possible methods of curbing cheating in examination in the Nigerian schools. The finding supports that of Hassan T [18] who reported in his study that credible examination is further ensured when students are thoroughly supervised during examination period. This is because cheating often thrives well during examination either when supervisors are inadequate for the number of candidates; or supervisors are busy doing their own thing or candidates are seated too close to one another.

Role of Academia/Possible Methods of Curbing Cheating in Examinations in Nigerian Schools

Cheating in examination, a social ill which started in Nigeria as a minor misdemeanor has not only assumed a frightening dimension, it seems to have become a permanent feature of Nigerian educational system. There is the need for team efforts of academia to stem the social malaise that has become inimical to educational development in the country, the following strategies or methods could be used for curbing the ills:

- Periodic campaigns, orientations and seminar on the dangers of cheating in examination should be carried out from the grassroots by all stakeholders in the education sector. This will help to sensitize and conscientize the people. These campaign and seminars may help to restore the lost cherished moral values of honesty, hard work, dedication and uprightness that characterize the Nigerian traditional society.
- Sitting arrangement in the examination hall should be re-organized to eliminate proximity-induced cheating. For instance, students

writing different examinations could be seated at alternative rows. Not more than three students should be seated on a bench and adequate gap should be created between the benches in the examination rooms or halls.

- Sufficient numbers of invigilators should be provided to ensure effective supervision while strict penalties should be meted out to invigilators failing to supervise efficiently.
- Emphasis should be placed on acquisition of knowledge, skills and competence. Many school leavers and drop out have certificates without skills and knowledge. If the trends of overvalued certificates continue in Nigeria, the country will end up with doctors who cannot differentiate between veins and arteries, teachers who may not be able to spell the names of their schools correctly [5]. It is high time Nigerians placed less emphasis on certificates as passports to jobs and entrance to higher institutions. Emphasis should rather be placed on competence and skills acquisition.

CONCLUSION

Based on the result of this study and compared to those of Jimoh BO [5], Hassan T [18], Badmus GA [10], Okafor FC [12] and Ugwuegbu DCE [17] it can be concluded that as long as there remains undue emphasis on paper qualification and certificate in this nation, many students will be tempted to cheat in examinations. Hence, any efforts aimed at resolving this problem must be collaborative, that is involving all stakeholders in the educational sector for a good and reliable result.

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