

COMBATING EXAMINATION FRAUD: TOWARDS A CULTURE OF INTEGRITY IN PUBLIC EXAMINATIONS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Examination fraud appears to be on the increase across Nigeria. Advances in electronic communications have added to the problems. This paper defined the concept of examination fraud and its varieties. The causes, rationales and consequences of examination fraud were enumerated. Problems and issues in controlling examination fraud and attempts made to deal with the misconduct in Nigeria were discussed. Conclusion on the cost of examination fraud and recommendations on how to reduce the fraud in Nigeria were offered.

Examinations have become a major and universal means to assess achievement, to select qualified individuals possessing relevant and advanced knowledge and to distribute limited opportunities for study and employment, on the grounds that they can serve as instruments for making objective and neutral judgments. However, examination fraud in Nigeria has become a matter of extreme concern, as the pressures associated with such achievement, selection, and demand for qualifications grow, and examinations increase in importance. What was once regarded as a series of individual infraction has expanded to become a veritable industry of examination fraud in examination bodies like WAEC, NECO, NTI, NABTEB and tertiary institutions. Examination fraud has become a worm in the apple of the education sector in Nigeria.

What is Examination Fraud?

Examination fraud is generally regarded as any contravention or compromise of the normal process and nature of examination. (Awanbor, 2006). Thus, a fraud is any act or behaviour that impugns the integrity, nature, process and proceeding, grading of candidates performance, the release and even the interpretation of final outcome of an examination. Examination frauds as defined by Eckstein (2003) are actions that are intended to deceive, usually for profit. These actions may represent the different degrees of seriousness and responsibility, from simple cheating at school examinations to actual crimes. Among the causes of the growth in examination fraud is the fact that participation in formal education beyond the minimum required level is increasing and that competition to gain credentials for educational, occupational and social advancement has grown in Nigeria.

The reasons for fraudulent behaviour in examinations in Nigeria are not hard to identify. Success in school and in academic life has great value. Success in examinations opens the doors to higher education and professional training. It makes available opportunities that were sincerely counted in the past, when birth and inherited wealth were the major determinants of social and economic status. Now, as the cognitive elite challenges the traditional elite of birth, the academic ladder has become a highway. Education has opened major new avenues of advancement to growing number of citizens, a process that has gathered momentum in Nigeria. These routes, while far broader and more open than in former times, are nevertheless not yet open to all, in all places. As participation has grown, so has academic competition. Thus, while selection points narrow the open track for opportunities, the result is even more intense competition for valuable prizes.

Along with such increased competitiveness, numerous and complex forms of misconduct have developed, amounting to a wide variety of examination fraud. In former times, cases of examination misconduct were limited to individual instances and to a few kinds of fraud. But nowadays, the number and range of dubious practices have extended to widespread misconduct systematically organized by individuals and institutions. The educational system in Nigeria and society in general is increasingly becoming aware of this problem and looking ways to limit it.

Advances in technology have added to the problems. Electronic means of communication have revolutionized cheating methods by examination candidates who now have access to devices

such as miniature receivers and computers as aids to cheating, replacing the old fashioned trick of writing notes on cuffs.

Examination fraud ranges from individual acts all the way to organized conspiracies committed by many different persons within the educational system. Students, teachers, administrators, as well as others outside it, such as parents, professionals and politicians. Research in this area has confirmed that teachers, students, administrators, and parents are hesitant to report school and examination-related misconduct and may even deny its existence.

Varieties of Examination Fraud

Examination fraud in academic life takes many forms in Nigeria. It occurs in schools at different levels just as in various sectors of the broader society beyond the examination system. The perpetrators as mentioned earlier include students, teachers, educational administrators and other professionals, as well as members of the public at large.

Student cheating in examinations, which is the most familiar type of misconduct, takes many forms: First and foremost, smuggling unauthorized materials into examination room. Candidates hide notes in their socks or pockets, or write them on their arms or thighs.

Importation of information in small electronic devices e.g. mobile phones and internet and even transmitting examination questions and answers within seconds to candidates in an examination room as well as to other locations within and even outside the country. The relatively cheap and small electronic devices have increased the capacity of cheat to obtain help for information in the examination room. In some cases, candidates can even purchase questions in advance or have the answer delivered electronically in the examination room. Copying from others or taking forbidden materials into examination hall. Sale of questions and answers to individual candidates wishing to beat the system. Bribery of examination personnel involved in the preparation and distribution of examination papers and grades, which is aggravated by poverty of agencies and personnel involved. Graders withhold students' marks deliberately in order to obtain their marking fees.

Bribing of supervisors, invigilators and examiners to allow and assist in cheating during examinations. Impersonators in which candidates lure replacement to take examination in their place. Looking at a neighbour's answer sheet or convert, pre-arranged signals between exam takers. Candidates having two scripts with different hand-writing. Leakage of information on examination papers from central administrative offices to local examination sites through bribery and personal or political influence are common in many places. Opening examination papers ahead of time and releasing information to teachers who may have informed their students. Disruption of examination midway following demonstration by candidates protesting the arrest of their colleagues. Allowing students to take national examination before official date, assisting students during examinations and altering papers. Questions are formulated and the papers are printed and distributed to examination centres. Bending of rules in national examination like candidates not staying apart in examination halls. Passing of answers before candidates and conveying of information from outside into the examination hall. Accepting cash payments by teachers to give extra time or other assistance to candidates.

Official and unofficial examination fraud where the first one is planned, condoned and even carried out by the authorities such as teachers, education officials, members and employees of the national examination boards and the second is carried out by students and their parents. Records and credentials like certificates are falsified.

Causes of Examination Fraud

Examination fraud, according to Greamy Kellahan (1995) is a result of subjective and objective factors. The infrastructures necessary for efficient and fair management of education may be lacking. Public expectations and attitudes fundamental to efficient and impersonal management may be lacking. Most of the circumstances is ambitious and competitive energies of candidates in

academic life. Inorance of the rules and conventions that embody what is right and what is unacceptable, dubious and even criminal. Pressures directed at individuals by society, family and other external sources, as well as society's demand for skilled and educated workers and professionals. Inconsistencies in defining proper behaviour, lack of rules to maintain and enforce it and deficiencies in the mechanisms for detecting and dealing with infractions.

Modern technology has made examination fraud easier to commit. The concern of candidates about their performance, absence of institutional or national policy on examination fraud, ill-preparedness of students. Students have not learnt the rules of honest behaviour or comprehended its longer-term value, or appreciate the negative results of dishonesty for themselves and the society they live in. Some assert that examination fraud is part of a students sub-culture; they do it for fun and because their peers do it. They do not appear to be victims of examination fraud and the consequences are usually not serious. Students believe that examination dishonesty is rarely detected or punished. Competition for limited number of places in tertiary institutions and scrambling for rewards for success in examinations. Temptation to obtain rewards illegitimately is great. Educational advancement accompanied by prospect of improved status, power and influence.

The importance of an individual's plans and life progress is determined by personal value in examination success. Pressure to move on to successive stages has grown disproportionately as a result of phenomenal increase in the number of students and schools at early stages of the educational system. Heavy reliance placed upon the results of major national examinations and one-off criterion for promotion to a higher level of schooling places great pressure on schools, teachers and students alike, driving some to find inappropriate if not illegal means to succeed at all costs. Examination fraud is like other kinds of social misconducts, a result of market forces; the temptations offered by greed and quest for profit. Parents too are drawn into bribery and personal influence in the conviction that they are acting in their children's interest.

Loss of confidence in the law-enforcement agents and judicial system. Teachers and schools resort to fraudulent behaviour in order to improve their standing in examinations. Lack of effective teaching and learning. Expansion of education to increased number of candidates, particularly at secondary school level and the geographical spread of educational opportunities around the country are two recent opportunities for examination fraud in general. Charging of high examination fees by educational managers called "cooperation fees" and albeit examination fraud. Newer examination processes often increase the difficulties of making fair and objective judgments about students' performance and leave the door open to examination fraud. Institutional policies, which make an individual's advancement automatic causes examination fraud.

Rationale for Examination Fraud

The explanations that offenders put forward for committing examination fraud are manifold and often contradictory. Adesuwa and Adewoyi (2006) enumerated some of the reasons as follows:

- a. Lack of understanding of what constitutes ethical behaviour.
- b. Levelling the playing field by using improper means to balance past and present inequities and the advantage of upper status, influence and privilege held by others.
- c. Defense by such statements that everyone cheats and takes advantage, so why shouldn't "I" and "no" one was there to stop me acting wrongly."
- d. Evidence of qualification as necessary not only for advancement but for movement from one job to another and one country to another especially for academics and professionals.

Consequences of Examination Fraud

The educational effects of excessive competition and over-reliance on examination results frequently produce negative outcomes, which are educational, psychological and financial. The consequences according to Maduka (1993) have effects on the curriculum and how it is taught when teachers and students neglect those topics that are expected to be examined. Teachers downgrade important social values and lessons such as cooperation and do little to discourage cheating. It draws educators into dubious if not fraudulent activities by loyalty to their students and powerful concern

for their success. The result of civil disorder and violence when trying to prevent students from cheating. Additional cost required to put security measures for administering national examinations. The result is destruction of morale and educational efficiency. Attitudinal consequences of decline in trust and self generating cynicism about the examination enterprise at large and about the people and procedures they follow. Groups and individuals in Nigeria distrust their educational system and its reward system. The likelihood is that problems with fraud will increase as a result of modernization, personal, social and technological advancement. Having complexity where norms are relative and authoritative guidance and controls are insufficient.

Problems and Issues in Controlling Examination Fraud in Nigeria

There are sensitive and thorny problems and issues in controlling examination fraud in Nigeria. Among them are the following:

1. If detected, examination fraud cannot be subjected to serious punishment. The lines of defense against such fraud are considerably less severe though they remain similar in principle that security rules and regulations surround important examinations, and upon discovery of infractions, punishment may be involved.
2. Modern advances in technology such as electronic means of communication have made the control of examination fraud very complicated in many areas. High tech detection devices are not available to deal with some of the problems (Odongo, 2002).
3. Professional and other public agencies should recognize that the prerequisite for control of examination fraud of all kinds is awareness of its prevalence, its different forms and of the need for vigilance.
4. The un-willingness by students and teachers alike to be “whistle blowers” on their superiors and colleagues in the system pose a serious obstacle to combating examination fraud. Denial by parents, teachers and the institutions themselves tend to inhibit action to detect and punish misconduct.
5. Additional factors include uncertainty about what constitute proper and improper behaviour, the difficulties of dealing with infractions, and the consequences of accusing someone of misconduct such as time demands and psychological pressures of procedures that may be in place to investigate an instance, and then the response from colleagues, fellow professionals and others.
6. Lax supervision is responsible for many types of examination fraud. Lack of adequate examination personnel to supervise examinations; serious problem exists in those situations where responsibilities for determining and acting on cases of examination fraud are unclear or unspecified. What constitutes a criminal or civil offence, what the punishments might be and who is responsible for curbing such behaviour are not clear.
7. Research on control and detection of examination fraud reveal classroom cheating. Controlling dishonesty in schools at lower and higher levels is never a considerable concern. Many students focus on examination fraud in tests and assignments and detecting and limiting it constitute a problem.
8. Methodology of controlling examination fraud, which is determined by the type of fraud also constitute a problem. Traditional forms of fraud such as copying, smuggling information into the examination hall and impersonation are handled through teacher vigilance and security. To identify/checks/penalties for infractions to be used, ranging from cancellation of results, repetition or exclusion from examinations and even fines and imprisonment in most serious cases. Theft and sale of examination papers attract similar punishment. Familiar measures to deter fraud connected with classroom tests are multiple versions of papers and warning announcement. The ban from examination room of all kinds of electronic device such as hand held calculators, computers, transmitters and receivers is another measure. There is no uniform punishment for offenders.
9. Stringent measures imposed to check examination malpractice in Nigeria in 1984 have not turned out to be very effective. A penalty of 21 years of imprisonment for those found guilty was believed to be severe and difficult to implement.
10. Lack of policy plan on examination fraud. Some schools that escaped with warning from

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- examination fraud will again commit more grievous offences. There is no correlation between schools sanctioned for examination fraud.
11. Lack of operational parity and cooperation among examination bodies on examination fraud.
 12. Sanctions on examination fraud are the paper tiger type. In many instances, derecognized schools for examination misconduct are only on paper as derecognized schools continue to function as examination centres.
 13. No publication is made of derecognized schools and supervisors in daily newspapers.
 14. Lack of direct control over the perpetrators of examination fraud e.g. touts, parents and supervisors in terms of investigation of examination misconduct.
 15. State refusal to implement sanctions on examination fraud.
 16. Multiplicity of names exists during registration of candidates.
 17. Lack of technology to control the conduct of examination.
 18. Funding of examination bodies to conduct examinations are inadequate.
 19. Law enforcement agencies also aid and abet examination fraud.
 20. Inadequacy of instant laws and edicts on examination fraud.
 21. Miscarriage of justice where withdrawal of certificate as a result of fraudulent activities in examination is not implemented.
 22. Wrong press release on examination fraud.
 23. Increasing risk of examination staff supervising itself.

Attempting to Deal with Examination Fraud in Nigeria

There are wide varieties of measures attempted to deal with many forms of examination fraud in Nigeria. They represent approaches that range from passing of laws, pedagogical actions to security measures and punishment of various degrees of severity. The various attempts are as follows:

1. Decree No. 77 of 1973 on the West African Examination Council (WAEC) stipulates that any candidate who had fore-knowledge of examination conducted by it would be banned from (WAEC) examinations for two years.
2. In 1984, a penalty of 21 years imprisonment for those found guilty of examination fraud was passed.
3. Passing of Decree 33 of 1999, the police were involved to maintain strict supervision.
4. Security for examination sites. Many arrests were made.
5. With-holding of results of individuals or groups and cancellation of results.
6. Strict supervision of examination during conduct.
7. Students are always subjected to sporadic searches before entering the examination room or hall.
8. Students and teachers were given various jail terms.
9. Review of remuneration of examination personnel upward to reduce the rate of inducement with money.
10. Swapping of supervisors during conduct of examinations.
11. Recently post UME examination in universities.
12. They raise awareness by publishing examples of examination fraud, dealing with them and to include professionals in discussion of the subject.

All these and many other measures do not appear to be yielding the desired results. This is because they have failed to address the psychological, economic and social root causes of the problem (Awanbor, 2006).

Conclusion

Examination fraud like other forms of misconduct derails the educational system. The whole system is rendered meaningless when the school system fails to instruct the young to fulfill societies requirement, exams fail to select the best according to stated criteria and certificates fail to record the true quality and accomplishments of students (Greuney & Kellahan 1996). Not only are standards of performance reduced but also the quality of the necessary services to maintain and improve life is diminished. The confidence of employers and the general public in the system and in the competence of their qualified professionals is eroded. The social costs in such sectors as schooling, medicine and administration are incalculatable. The financial costs are considerable too, where finances are

limited, examination security measures, investigation and adjudication of malpractice, repetition of assessments are all expensive drain on resources.

Recommendations

The following recommendations can drastically reduce the problem of examination fraud in Nigeria.

- Names/Lists of blacklisted and derecognized centres, supervisors, invigilators and staff of examination bodies should be circulated and published.
- Mass cheating by candidates should have unified sanctions.
- Sensitization of examination bodies on examination fraud.
- Sanctions on examination fraud should be extended to the principals and proprietors.
- Harmonization of rules for sanctions e.g. derecognition of centres for 4 years by Federal Ministry of Education; examination bodies should provide information/address on centres, supervisors and invigilators.
- Advocacy on examination malpractice to stakeholders.
- High remuneration for examination personnel like, supervisors and invigilators.
- Process of selecting supervisors and invigilators based on integrity should be reviewed – involving the State Ministries of Education.
- A uniform pattern for education facilities, offences and sanctions in all institutions of learning.
- Strict enforcement of examination fees. Any offender should face the music.
- Involvement of EFCC and ICT centres to gradually serve as watchdog agencies for examination fraud.
- Putting photograph on certificates.
- Electronic registration like on-line registration.
- Sensitization of all stakeholders on examination fraud.
- Using national identity card for registration of candidates.
- Maintenance and teaching of integrity supported by laws, regulations, sanctions by specialized agencies, which draw attention to different examination fraud.
- Published instructional policies announcing what constitutes proper behaviour and what are the consequences of misconduct may also be an important basis for combating fraud.
- The examination bodies and tertiary institutions should seek to study and remedy the causes of misconduct by improving communication among interested parties, publicizing the problems and finding solutions.
- Strengthening and restoring a culture of integrity in the Nigerian society.
- Success by any means to a culture of integrity requires concerted efforts to combat a number of growing threats to the quality of the society.

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