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STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF CAUSES AND EFFECTS OF EXAMINATION MALPRACTICE IN THE NIGERIAN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM: THE WAY FORWARD FOR QUALITY EDUCATION

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Abstract

In an attempt to study the perception of university students on the causes and effects of examination malpractices in Nigerian Educational System, two research questions were raised and analysed for possible answers using a survey research design method. Four hundred university students were randomly selected from the research area. A questionnaire consisting of twenty-five (25) items was constructed, and duly validated by the researchers for the study. The results obtained from the study indicated that a test-retest reliability index ranging from 0.77 to 0.85 were feasible. It was also indicative that societal preference for paper qualification, lack of positive self concept, lack of effective study skills, inadequate preparation and laziness are some of the causes of examination malpractice among university students. The identified effects included discouragement of candidates from studying hard, denial of admission to deserving students, underachievement in labour market and overall reduction in quality of education. Based on this, it was concluded that personal and societal factors could cause examination malpractice and the society is likely to suffer from low productivity because of this malaise, examination malpractice.

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1. Introduction

The rampant occurrence of examination malpractice has become an issue of growing importance and concern in the global educational systems. Most examinations are usually marked by complaints of various forms of malpractice. In most of these examinations, cheating is a recurrent event. According to Isangedighi (2007), in Nigeria where certificates and diplomas are the sole indices of educational growth and examinations the only means of obtaining these certificates students seem to see examinations as wars of survival and cheating as an effective means of winning the war. Although examination malpractice attracts ugly penalties such as

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rustication, it nevertheless fails to increase in strength and sophistication. The rising wave of examination malpractice amongst the youths today is posing a big challenge to our present contemporary society.

Examination, many observe, is no longer a true test of one's ability. Most of the students are no longer serious with their studies because they believe solely in indulging in examination malpractice which to them is a short cut to success. Nowadays, students refer to examination malpractice as "brain support" which implies it is an act to aid one's memory in examinations. Most students no longer believe in hard work. Obagah (1995) has described examination malpractice as a perennial problem in the whole of the educational system. Many efforts have been put forward by different governments, school authorities and individuals to eradicate this malady but this in most instances have proved abortive. Since examination is aimed at evaluating each candidate's merit and predicting subsequent performance, it therefore generates competition among candidates resulting in examination malpractice in some instances. Examination malpractice is becoming a plaque in the Nigeria educational system.

It is an illegal action in terms of acts of omission during construction, custodianship, administration, marking and releasing of examination results before, during and after an administered examination. Examination malpractice will include any of the following, impersonation, leakage, swapping of scripts, smuggling of answer scripts into examination halls, dubbing (direct copying of answers to questions and taking into examination rooms). It also includes results/certificate forgery and verbal or physical assault on examination administrators. There maybe mass cheating of students or a form of malpractice called "sorting" which involves alteration of examination grades with the use of money. Today, there is an unholy, unwholesome conspiracy to aid examination malpractice by school heads, teachers, invigilators, parents students whose motive is to make quick money rather than genuine love for the candidates to excel in their studies (Idaka, 2006).

Many causes have been linked to the prevalent cases of examination malpractice. Adekale (1993) identified poor preparation for examinations, low morality and poor school facilities as causes of examination malpractice. Other causes may include the fear of failure, craze for certificate, desire of parents to have their children in choice professions and university, pressure on students to pursue courses for which they have no aptitude, pressure on teachers who want to gain favour of student and overcrowded sitting arrangement.

Examination malpractice has serious implications for the educational system, students, teachers, parents and the school as a whole. Nigeria has been graded with reliability of half-baked graduates, low productivity and poor job performance, certificate racketeering and qualification inflation (Nwaba&Nwaba, 2005). The credibility of our certificates become questionable internationally. There is no argument to the point that examination malpractice occurring at all levels of Nigerian educational system constitutes a serious threat, a menace to the entire educational system as well as to the socio-economic development of the nation. On the bases of these, this study therefore sets out to investigate the causes and effects of examination malpractice, as perceived by University undergraduates.

Research questions

- (1) What are the perceived causes of examination malpractice
- (2) What are the perceived effects of examination malpractice on our educational system?

Methodology

The research design used for this study is survey method. A total of four hundred students from four (4) universities in Nigeria were used for the study. Purposive sampling procedure was used to obtain the sample from the population. The main instrument used for the study was the researchers designed and validated questionnaire. Part A consisted of fifteen (15) items on perceived causes of examination malpractice and Part B consisted of ten (10) items on perceived effects of examination malpractice. The respondents were requested to tick the option as applicable to them. Test re-test reliability index was established. The reliability coefficient ranged for 0.77 and 0.85 indicating that it met appropriate psychometric requirements for us in collecting the data for the study. Data generated from the instrument were used to answer the research questions using simple percentages.

Results

Research question 1

What are the perceived causes of examination malpractice?

Table 1

Students responses on perceived causes of examination malpractice						
S/N	Items	Yes	%	Position	No	%
1.	Societal preference for certificates (paper qualification)	349	87	1 st	51	13
2.	Lack of positive self concept	334	84	2 nd	67	16
3.	Lack of good study habits	305	76	3 rd	95	24
4.	Inadequate preparation for examination	300	75	4 th	100	25
5.	Laziness to work hard	300	75	4 th	100	25
6.	Lack of appropriate punishment measures for students involved in examination malpractice	297	74	6 th	103	26
7.	Uncompleted syllabus	289	72	7 th	111	18
8.	Lack of adequate learning facilities	280	70	8 th	120	30
9.	Parental influence to choose career for me	270	67	9 th	130	32
10.	Over congested classrooms for exams	253	63	10 th	147	37
11.	Incompetent teachers	250	62	11 th	150	38
12.	Wish to conform to peer pressure	228	57	12 th	72	43
13.	Poor invigilation	221	55	13 th	179	45
14.	High cost of examination fees	196	49	14 th	204	51
15.	Poor state of nation's economy	188	47	15 th	212	53

Table 1 reveals the dominant position of societal preference for paper qualification in contributing to examination malpractice. This ranks first (87%), while student-related factors like lack of positive self concept (84%), lack of effective study habits (76%) rank second and third. Inadequate preparation and laziness to work hard both rank as the fourth cause of examination malpractice.

Effect of examination malpractice

Research question 2

What are the perceived effects of examination malpractice?

The following responses were obtained from four hundred students from four Federal Universities in Nigeria and the result tabulated as follows.

Table 2**Students perceived effects of examination malpractice (N = 400)**

S/N	Items	Yes	%	Position	No	%
1.	Discourages students from studying hard	357	89	1 st	43	11
2.	Underachievement in labour market	312	78	2 nd	88	22
3.	Leads to denial of admission to deserving students	310	77	3 rd	94	23
4.	Leads to overall reduction in quality of education	306	76	4 th	90	24
5.	Reduces credibility of Nigerian certificates outside the country	298	75	5 th	240	60
6.	Reduces healthy competition among examinees	248	62	6 th	158	38
7.	It reduces the value of certificates	217	54	7 th	183	46
8.	It lowers educational standard	206	52	8 th	194	48
9.	Leads to ineffective study habit among students	200	50	9 th	200	50
10.	Poor attitude at future workplace	186	47	10 th	214	53

Discussion

Students perceived causes of examination malpractice:

This study ranks societal preference for paper qualification as the leading cause of examination malpractice. This indicates that most students are in schools not really to acquire skills but to obtain certificates which they can utilize to get employment. This consequently leads to underachievement in the labour market. The finding of this study is in line with Jega (2006) which indicates that societal-related factors such as the grave for certificate or paper qualification are responsible for examination malpractice. Most students believe that the possession of certificate by any means is a necessity since certificates serve as a gateway to successful future life in Nigeria. This work is also in consonance with Ukpokor (2005) who asserts that there is much emphasis on paper qualifications which has led to impersonation in examinations or certificate forgery. Less attention seems to be paid to matching performance with paper qualifications.

The student-related factors come next in this study as being the causes of examination malpractice. These are lack of positive self concept, lack of effective study habits, inadequate preparation and laziness to work hard. Students need positive self-concept, positive attitude to studies and effective study habits to achieve academic success. It is important to note that inability to apply good study skills will create opportunities for anxiety which in excess reduces the extent of students' effectiveness in the process of acquiring knowledge such students tend to cheat in examinations. This is in agreement with Ukpokor (2005) who reports that student with negative self concept doubts himself and such a person makes his failure certain and to pass an examination, he gets involved in examination malpractice. This study also supports Otu (2009) who found that students' attitude and study habit have a significant relationship with their malpractice behaviour in examination. Lack of good study habits leads to tension which reduces the level of students' effectiveness and performance in examinations.

Students' perceived effects of examination malpractice

The findings of this study consider the effects of examination malpractice on the society and on undergraduate students. It ranks discouragement of candidates from studying hard first, closely followed by underachievement in labour market. Coming third is the denial of admission to deserving students followed by overall reduction in quality of education. Examination malpractice discourages students from working hard but rather they spend their time to plan the strategy they intend to employ to cheat in examination. The students also indicated that examination malpractice reduces credibility of Nigerian certificates outside the country. This finding is in support of Ukpokor (2005) who specifically stated that the credibility of our Nigerian certificates outside the country is another implication of examination malpractice. Most Nigerian youths seeking further training abroad are subjected to all forms of screening to determine their credibility which is ridicule on our educational system.

The result of this study is also in consonance with that of Nwaba and Nwaba (2005) who explained that due to examination malpractice, Nigeria has been graded with reliability of half-baked graduates, low productivity and poor job performance and certificate racketeering. Cheating in examination makes the student to keep climbing academic ladder without adequate preparation for the next-level. This results in accumulation of deficiency which leads to avoidable underachievement. Such individuals become architects of bribery and corruption and continue to perpetuate most of the evils in the society. Individuals who live by cheating in examinations are not likely to attain their potentials in skills acquisition. This is because the required initial knowledge is absent which makes human capital formation an impossible task.

The way forward for quality education

Examination malpractice in Nigeria has attained a frightening proportion and it is becoming more sophisticated as years pass by. Efforts by government and stakeholders to curtail this trend have not yielded much success. If this trend is not given an urgent attention, it may utterly destroy the quality of education in Nigeria. More emphasis should be placed on continuous assessment at all levels of learning as a way of de-emphasizing examination in the process of awarding certificates. Emphasis should be placed on oral examinations and group work for the undergraduate students and less emphasis should be placed on paper qualifications.

Good moral values and instructions should be properly inculcated into our youths. Parents should be counselled not to aid their children to cheat in examinations. There is need to emphasize honesty on the part of those who handle examination matters. Teachers and counsellors should identify strategies of reducing test anxiety among students as it will help to reduce malpractice behaviour during examination. Effective counselling

services should be enhanced in schools to assist students acquire techniques of effective study habits. School counsellors should guide students on the need to develop positive self concepts and face all examination with confidence. The school guidance and counseling programmes should go beyond the students to reach the parents, guardians and the larger society. This is necessary because parents, guardians and larger society have a lot of influences on the school child. Students should be properly counselled and guided to develop good reading culture.

School authority should always organize seminars, workshop and symposium on the ills of examination malpractice in schools. Examination ethics code of conduct should be produced and distributed in institutions and appropriate authorities. This should spell out the duties, responsibilities and penalties needed for the conduct of examination in our school system. There should be full implementation of the examination malpractice decree in Nigeria which advocates for twenty-one years jail term for culprits of examination malpractice. If this is fully implemented, it will serve as a deterrent to other students.

Questions of essay type in examinations especially at the tertiary level should be the sort that examines not only cognitive intelligence but emotional intelligence as well as imaginative intelligence. Examination questions should be the type that requires creative responses not merely regurgitating of facts.

For quality education in Nigeria to be ensured, electronic examination should be encouraged. This allows the students to take examinations using the computers to provide answers to the questions according to specific time. If all the external examinations are taken through the use of computer in Nigeria, the issue of malpractice will be checked to a large extent and a better quality of Nigerian educational system will be ensured.

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