

Corrupt Academic Practices: A Tragedy in Nigerian Educational System.

Memory Queen soap^{1*} and Dogitimiye Memory²

1. School of Foundation Studies, Bayelsa State College of Health Technology, P.M.B 131, Yenagoa.
2. School of Allied Medical Sciences, Bayelsa State College of Health Technology, P.M.B.131, Yenagoa.
[*mqueensoap@gmail.com](mailto:mqueensoap@gmail.com)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to x-ray corrupt academic practices which, advertently or inadvertently, has plunged Nigerian educational system into a tragic situation of endemicity of examination malpractices and other examination vices. The paper pointed out the neglect of the use of continuous assessment and total dependence on terminal examination which has been seen as the stigma to corrupt academic practices in Nigeria. This work alarmed that if nothing is done to correct the menace of academic corruption the educational system will continue to produce weak primary and secondary education, half baked grandaunts, poor tertiary education, decline of roles of universities, especially in the area of scientific research development, mass failure, examination as source of income through given cost intensive examination (e.g. UME, PUME, WAEC and NECO). The authors, therefore, suggest urgent steps to be taken which includes amendment of section 1, sub-section 9 (g) of the National Policy on Education that gives room for academic corruption with a focus to abolish terminal examinations and promotion examination and rather accommodate fully the use of well developed uniform standard of continuous assessment. It is a high time we need an adequate means to evaluate and assess our pupils/ students who are the leaders of tomorrow.

Key words: academic corruption, examination malpractice, continuous assessment, National Policy on Education (NPE), Terminal examination.

1. Introduction

The National Policy on Education (2004, p.4) defined "Education in Nigeria as an instrument for excellence for effecting National development". By this, every stakeholder, both government and Non-governmental sectors see education as a viable entity in transforming the society. Historically, we must confess that our ancestors observed informal education which did not give room for terminal examination but continuous evaluation (Assessment) of the apprentice which depended on hard work. Formal education, according to Olujuwon (2004), was introduced and under the control of Christian missionaries nearly forty years (1842-1881). They administered and formulated educational polices with almost all emphasis on terminal or final examination. Preference was no longer for hard work but acquisition of certificate through terminal examinations. This idea became the major determinants of children's academic progress and Spromotion to higher educational levels. To Paul-Cookey (2001), this emphasis on examination has caused indescribable anxiety, shock and nervousness in children and their parents. However, one cannot decry the fact that examination also plays a vital role in our educational system.

Nevertheless, students are required to pass any form of examinations they partake in, and these days, students now find various means of achieving success in these examinations and one of such ways is by cheating in examination in many different forms (Adegoke, 2010).

Cheating in examination has become prevalent in the Nigerian educational context which has plunged the system into a state of confusion and disarray. Higher institutions have been observed graduating half-baked graduates, grandaunts that can hardly write a very simple informal letter. The way one gets its certificate does not matter hence corruption in education becomes endemic in our society, if we tell our selves the truth, we will also have the courage and sense of mission to map out viable solutions to the problems. Among several problems facing the educational system in Nigeria academic corruption is one major. This type of corruption is more dangerous and more serious threat to the future of Nigeria (Yushau, n.d). Therefore we must pause, reflect, take stock and look at where we are, where we want to be and to tell the truth so that we can move forward.

2. An Overview of Examination Malpractices and Corrupt Academic Practices.

Examination malpractice as a form of academic corruption and corrupt practices has crept into the fabrics of all levels of the educational enterprise in the country. In defining examination malpractice, attempts have been made by experts to define it from various perspectives. This work defines it as a form of academic corruption.

Yushau (n.d) stated that when people talk about corruption, usually they refer to public fund siphoned or misappropriated by civil servants, contractors, politician etc. but hardly think the type of corruption that destroys the minds of our children and siphons the moral values of our society. This is academic corruption. Similarly, Odukuye (2008, p.2) asserted that "Examination malpractices can be conceptualized as a dishonest

way of trying to achieve a good result. It amounts to cheating other persons with whom we take such examinations, as well as the institution that conducts such examination”.

Odukuye further explained that examination malpractice will be noticeable when students lack adequate knowledge of the subject being examined. Consequently, such student will not be able to exert confidence during the said examination. Noticeable traces or acts of intended malpractices will start to emerge when:

- students spends time trying to copy formulas, examples or definitions on pieces of materials that he or she hopes to supply into such examination.
- Students will be trying to pre-determine where to sit during such examination.
- Students become extra careful and kind to those he or she feels can render some assistance during the examination.
- During the said examination the student will be noticeably restless. He or she will be looking sideways or behind for any kind of help.
- During and after the examination, such student will be trying to entice the invigilator, examiner or anybody related to them.

Queensoap (2006, p.13) had established examination malpractices as “a form of academic corruption which entails the act of deviation by students from formal rules that regulate their behaviors in the secondary education system”. It was very clear that most students’ minds are tuned to malpractices in one form or the other.

Queensoap (2006) used a corruption sensitivity test on a sample of students in Bayelsa State and observed that students have developed the mind set to deviate from examination rules, that is, before the examination date preparation to cheat are on top gear. Such plans will include how to corrupt the principal, some of the staff, examination-supervisor/invigilators and even WAEC syndicates. Examination malpractices do not only entail cheating during and after the examination but is an enclosure of all activities done by student which are contrary to set up standards for their training.

The university of Port Harcourt student hand book (1996,p19) explained “Examination malpractices as all forms of cheating which directly or indirectly falsify the ability of the students” the falsification of the students ability was reacted to mean cheating within an examination hall, cheating outside and an examination hall and any involvement in all illegal examination-related offences.

Olayinka (1993) reiterated that, examination malpractices is a misconduct, improper conduct or act of wrong doing by contravening the rules of acceptable practices before during and after an examination with the views of obtaining a good result.

The problem of academic corruption has become endemic in education in Nigeria and in a way becoming a usual exercise in the system. Arinze (1993) identified that examination malpractices is as old as the institution of formal system of education. The first major incidence of examination malpractices was uncovered in 1914 when the senior Cambridge local examinations leaked.

This scenario take an unprecedented surge and steady growth in 1963, 1967, 1970, 1973, 1977, 1979, 1981, 1985, 1987, 1991, 1994, 1995, 1997, 1998,1999, 2000, 2002, 2003 (Ajaja, 2010). To avert this ill growth, the Federal Government promulgated decree 27 of 1973 and miscellaneous decree 20 of 1984. The later decree prescribed 21 years jail term for offenders. Indeed, academic corruption in Nigerian education is a more or less a cancerous growth.

Most offensively, parents, examination bodies, school authorities and other examination stakeholders encourage this tragedy every year. Ajaja (2010) lamented that it is painful to observe that Nigeria has been waging an unsuccessful war against examination malpractices since colonial era. This distinctly suggests that academic corruption is as difficult as to control or put to an end economic cum political corruption in Nigeria. Thus, must our situation rest on fate?

3. Causes, Forms and Agents of Examination Malpractices/Academic Corruption.

Examination malpractices have become a common practice in Nigeria before the face of the law (Adegoke, 2010). The fact remains that examination is intended to make a change. Adegoke in her work stated that empiricism has shown that examination indicate the extent of factual knowledge acquired by students. It predicts future educational achievement and provides a means of selecting suitable candidates for certain life endeavors.

She reiterated that examination major goal is to assess how much learning has taken place and to what extent the educational objectives and goals have been ascertained. However, how far this objective is being achieved is what one cannot tell now. The issue is critical that academic corruption has become a plague to the Nigerian education system because the increase in examination malpractice and intellectual dishonesty is alarming. Moreover, pupils and students devise as a daily routine new tricks to beat genuine supervisors and examiners (Adegoke, 2010), even going to the extent of committing such examiners into spiritual litigation by sending to him/her diarrhea, sleepiness, discomfort etc. Examination malpractices have taken the shape of an octopus which is multidimensional. According to Ajaja (2010), the various forms of examination malpractices used include alteration of scores by examining Board computer operators, bringing worked answers to examination hall, mass/organized cheating involving assistance from invigilators, supervisors and outsiders, and insults/assault on supervisors/invigilators.

Several authors have identified various forms of examination malpractices for instance, Denga and Denga (1998), and Ivowi (1993). They highlighted the following:

- Collusion
- Impersonation
- Supplying of answer script
- Examination leakage
- Irregular activities inside and outside examination hall
- expo
- Contractor/ Machinery
- ECOWAS/ECOMOG
- Super print
- Net working
- Macro chips etc.

This list cannot be exhaustive because every day new discovery to beat the system is being practiced. The confusion is so great in the system that any war raised against examination malpractice becomes unsuccessful. Dina (1993) and Bunza (1996) presented the following as the perpetrators of academic corruption.

- Parents/Guardians
- Teachers/Head teachers/Principals
- Lazy students
- Government Officials/ Supervisors/ Syndicates from the examining boards.

There is no gain saying that the nation's emphasis on examination based educational system is one problem sustaining this enigma. Lack of proper social value system and the high premium attached to paper qualifications as prerequisite for admission and gainful employment (Adegoke, 2010) can also be seen as fertile platforms in which academic corruption thrive.

Similarly Yushau (n.d) reported that teachers, parents, examination supervisors, and school principals are known contributors, overtly or covertly, to these malpractices. Infact, the principals are the ones organizing PR (Public relation) for supervisors that they will see but pretend as if they did not.

Yushau added that the leaked exams are coming from the exams body. He affirmed that certificates are given to one who does not even sat for an exam.

Nobody cares on how the certification is gotten. Present your certificate and get your job and admission as the case may be is the current slogan. Universities no longer trust WAEC and JAMB. They have designed their own form of entrance examination called Post-UME. Now the question is how reliable is this Post-UME? It is clear for the number of years Post-UME has existed divergent problems have been noted. More corruption, and favoritism, money-based and other antics have flooded the issue. So far as Nigeria continues to emphasize on examination the problem will continue to be hydra headed.

3. Major Highlights of the National Policy on Education

Education in Nigeria is the shared responsibility of the Federal, state and Local governments (Onyukwu, 2011). Each unit of government takes up its level of education. That is, the Federal government involved directly in tertiary education. State takes care of secondary while local Government handle primary education. Even at

that, the Federal government supports the state and local government on counterpart funding to enhance quality standard in the Nations Educational sector.

For the Nation's desire to spell out in clear and unequivocal terms the philosophy and objective that underlie investment in education, the need for a document that will fulfill that role became eminent.

A national curriculum conference which was attended by a cross-section of Nigerians was convened in 1969 which gave birth to the National Policy in education in 1977. From time to time, the National Policy on education is being revised. Currently, the national Education control document has been revised to accommodate the world wide acceptable Universal Basic Education program. It is important to note that this policy derives its philosophy from the five main national goals which are:

- A free and democratic society
- A just and egalitarian society
- A united, strong and self-radiant society
- A great and dynamic economy
- A land of bright opportunities for all (NPE. 2004, p.6)

The National policy on education is a document that consists of 13 sections which handle critical issue about the educational sector. Nevertheless, only few areas which are relevant to the topic under study are highlighted.

Firstly section 1 sub-sec 9 outlined measures to be taken to implement the policy. The NPE (2004) notes the following:

- Education shall continue to be highly rated in the National development plans because education is the most important instrument of change; and social outlook of any society has to be preceded by an educational revolution.
- Life-long education shall be the basis of the nation's educational policy.
- Education and training facilities shall continue to be expanded in respond to social needs and progressively accessible to afford the individual a far more diversified and flexible choice.
- Educational activities shall be centered on the learner for maximum self-development and self-fulfillment
- Universal Basic Education in a variety of forms depending on needs and possibilities shall be provided for all citizens.
- Efforts shall be made to relate education to overall community needs,
- Educational assistant and evaluation shall be liberalized by their being based in whole or in part on continuous assessment of the progress of the individual etc.

Furthermore, the policy presented that Basic education shall be of 9-year duration comprising 6 years of primary education and 3 years of junior secondary education levels for the adults and out of school youths.

For advancement of pupils from one class to another the policy established a continuous assessment based evaluation, emphasizing that the primary school certificate shall be based only on continuous assessment and shall be used locally by the head teacher of the school. Up till this moment, this part has been put aside rather common entrance examinations are being conducted to sustain examination malpractices and imbibe corruption and gratification into the developing methods of the future leaders.

It is sad to note that primary education is fundamental of the educational system in Nigeria. If corrupt academic attitudes are developed what shall the future of Nigerian education hold? Simply, it will be a tragedy in the educational milieu. More so, the policy emphasized that the junior school certificate (JSC) shall be based on continuous assessment and examination conducted by state and federal examination Boards. Likewise the senior secondary certificate (SSC) shall be based on continuous assessment and a national examination. This interplay of assessing a student is the problem. Is the continuous Assessment meant to be giving of test and assignment to pupils/students? Or Nigerian schools implementing continuous assessment as whole (i.e cognitive, affective, psychomotor/psycho-productive domains). There is no doubt that this part has been followed practically. All emphasis is in the National Examination which became the nucleus of academic corruption. The National Examination Board, how transparent they are in the use of continuous assessment sent to them by the schools? What statistical measure given to ensure uniform assessment for all schools in the country?

According to Ukwuije (1996, p. 166) "One of the recommendation in the National policy on education (1981) is that assessment of the pupils be the usual end of year assessment but it should be done on continuous basis" In spite of the optimism raised by this policy it would not be out of place to ask, where have we missed are the point and what can we do to salvage the situation. Flooding of academic corruption is borne out of emphasis on terminal, entrance, promotion examinations instead of securing positive changes within the educational system. To Noah and Eckstein (1992), National Examination polices and practices are meant to direct securing changes

within schools, within other sectors of education and the broader society, or at supporting changes in the political or ideological sphere. The National policy on education (2004) is silent about the role examination will play in the system, apart from advancement of pupils and issuance of certificate. Obviously, the policy has created room for examinees to find all means to get their certificates.

Most students in our high institutions could not spell their names but they carry WAEC/NECO certificates that are loaded with Alphas and credits.

Yushau (n.d) lamented nothing good is expected from this crop of students whose mind have been diverted from what education is all about. Imagine, in the next two to four decades when this crop of students will be in very exalted position of leadership. What a mirage? If urgent care is not taken the country's education system is moving to a rapid retrogression/decay.

Today, the Nation is confused of how to screen students in the existing universities. Ajaja (2010) asserted that the obvious lapses noticed in the process of admission of candidates into Nigeria universities through the university matriculation Examination (UME) and the expected roles of universities in the society which is currently on the decline, necessitated the call for an alternative methods of auditing students into the university. Ajaja reiterated that this call resulted in granting universities the power to conduct Post-UME screening test. Does this permission make difference? According to Ajaja, the activities of most universities during the exercise tend to support financial gain as a major reason for the advocacy.

Sad to note that because the examination policies have no clear cut this herald of confusion is engulfing the system. Universities having different amount of charges, lowering of cut-offs to attract more candidates to register for the tests, invalid tests without a scheme of work and so on are problem facing the Post-UME (Jaja,2010). Where is the provision in the National policy on education? Post-UME is another instrument that sustains academic corruption in the educational system of Nigeria.

It is instructive to note that a nation does not change its ideas to suit those who refuse to conform. On the contrary, it is those who refuse to conform who must change their ways in order to meet the ideals and philosophy of the nation. Therefore, let the dictates of the National Policy on Education be observed as it emphasize continuous assessment of the primary and Junior-secondary levels. However, to abolish terminal or national examination for continuous assessment full implementation is a face lift to better and improve the already decaying educational sector due to uncontrollable factors behind academic corruption.

5. Consequences of Academic Corruption in the Educational System

The National Policy on Education (2004) has presented education as the instrument for national development. The document made provisions that the nation's educational sector will be result oriented and secure a positive change. It is at this instance the education policy aimed at eradicating illiteracy in the country.

However, the situation is rather turning to be a different thing. According to Okah (2010), Nigerian education is in tatters. Public schools are just evil classrooms where unfortunate pupils whose parents cannot afford private schools are introduced into evil. Answers are written on the black board during examination. Stakeholders of the educational system in Nigeria refused to send their children into the public schools.

It is an indication that the educational system is in a deplorable state (Okah, 2010).

It is observed that academic corruption has led the educational system to this pitiable state. In fact, Okah lamented that products of such educational system would never discover anything more than early sex, indecent dressing, Nolly-woods habits, corruption, incestuous inclinations, cultism, exam malpractices and how fast to cheat everyone.

So far as Nigeria is not void of academic corruption the following are eminent in the educational system.

- **Weak primary and secondary education:** Yushau asserted that terminal secondary schools examination are set to measure students' academic achievement but most of the results of WAEC/NECO of most of the students are not reflecting their intellectual capacity. Maxwell (2013) observed that students' WAEC grade has a negative correlation with the CGPA of the students in fact, could not predict their intellectual ability. This is to tell us that in our tertiary institution where a lot of compromise is allowed will present weak graduates.
- **HALF-BAKED GRADUATES:** Today, it is no longer news that some graduates from our universities could not write their names talk less of expressing themselves. Instead of training our children to become good citizens, the training is now redirected to bad attitudes. No developmental stride can be achieved except the country's educational system is sanitized.
- **DECLINE ROLES OF OUR UNIVERSITIES:** The influence of academic corruption has gone deep into the country's third tier of education system. Ajaja (2010) reported that the expected roles of universities in

the society are currently on the decline. Universities education in the country is to contribute to national development through high level relevant manpower training, develop and includes proper values for the survival of the individual and society etc. (NPE, 2004). Those goals are to be achieved through teaching, research and development virile staff development etc. (NPE).

But the current situation of our universities is money making venture especially during admission. Some full term lecturers are hardly seen in the classroom. Yushua stated that in a semester, not many lecturers are attending more than 50% of their classes. Quite a number attend for less than that. Furthermore, students are now used to missing these classes to the extent that they can beg you to stop while the lecturer have not exhausted the time set for the lecture (Yushua). Academic corruption has crept into everywhere including the universities which has resulted to misplacement of priority. Another consequence of academic complain in education is recruitment/training of incompetent teachers. It is sad to note that institutions that train our teachers, especially National Teachers Institute are not exempted. A teacher who got his certificate without hard work, what can such person offer? What you have is what you can give. This is a very serious issue because efforts to curb academic corruption have been observed unsuccessful. Mass failure is another problem due to academic corruption. Today Nigeria has two National Examination Boards for the issuance of the same certificate. NECO was established due to the rate of failure recorded in WAEC in 2000 precisely. NBF (2012) identified mass failure in WAEC as one of the specific problem with Nigerian educational system. To the best of my knowledge mass failure is not just due to real failure but Examining Board profit maximization. It is on record that the first year NECO conducted the SSCE examination almost all students had all papers with very good grade. Criticism flooded the educational sector and today mass failure is being recorded in NECO. Where are we going to? Until we tell the truth to our self, change is rare.

In the light of the above, Nigerian education is doomed if nothing is done quickly. Academic corruption is a fast growing disease in Nigeria.

6. Solution to Academic Corruption in Nigerian Education.

Yushau (n.d) stressed that if urgent care is not taken the future of the country is back as far as meaning full development is concerned. This is true since it is through education that we produce our leaders. All political positions played on having at least SSCE certificate. In the civil service carders like messenger, lecturers, gardeners etc. are personalized to officers' salaries, meaning these carders are no longer needed. The private sector also proved to use the best, most at times requesting first class holders or second class upper division. Education is the center piece of every national's development. Despite the fact that our nation's educational system is in a situation that seems non-repairable therefore we must look up to ways that will reduce, or if possible, rather eradicate academic corruption.

Firstly, the National Policy on Education (2004) stated that educational assessment and evaluation shall be liberalized by their being based in whole or in part on continuous assessment of the progress of the individual. This is where the problem started. The policy has created a vacuum to usher in national examination based educational system since it recommended to use "in whole" or "in part" continuous assessment. It has become a matter of choice for Nigerian examiners. When there is no document to guide the how continuous assessment will be used in part or whole alongside scores from examinations, it opens up to manipulation more than usual. Little or no continuous assessment is used in the assessment of the progress of the individual at all levels. Some schools opted to use 30% of test and assignment as continuous assessment and make use of 70% examination score. Others are using various percentage levels as it's convenient to them. Is this the uniformity the policy is crying for?

Therefore, section I, sub sec 9(g) and other sections that emphasize the use of National Examination should be amended. The amendment should aim at abolishing terminal examination, entrance examination, promotion examination etc. and accommodate fully the use of well-developed uniform standard of continuous assessment.

Some argued that school examinations serve as a useful purpose. Thus examination should not be abolished. Reasons behind this argument are not far from the following;

- Examinations make people study everything and make them better at the subject
- It creates competition
- It helps the teacher to know what material the student have mastered and need to study further
- Examination give people important practice in dealing with stress which can be of good help in the future

Nevertheless, these points in favor of examination have not being experienced in the education system rather academic corruption has flooded the system.

Examinations should be abolished for the fact that;

- It is impossible to test every aspect of a subject within the short examination terms (Maximum 3 hours). If a student is lucky and what he/she studied for is tested, he/she will score higher
- Examination gives improper assessment. One can get higher or lower marks than he/she deserves
- Test items are not reliable or valid because teachers made examination are not standardized. Even the National examination Boards do not take cognizance to differential functioning of test items.
- Some cheaters go undetected and score high marks. Even those that are detected either set free or endanger the life in prison (21 years). Where is the change?
- Examination provides unusual emotional burden, stress, psychological problems etc.

Secondly, that the system hold unto continuous assessment which emphasizes on research work, less stress, devoid of rote memory and encourage self-learning and self-development.

If Nigeria is to fight against corruption, we must put in place in our education system that will encourage from the foundation (primary) self-reliance and self-development. Because these are the crops of people that will become the chairman of council, councilors, Assembly members, commissioners, ministers, governors and presidents. A corrupt mind must lead the body to be corrupt.

Another solution to this dilemma in our education system is to monitor and evaluate the implementation of the National Policy on Education. The policy in clear terms stated that government shall put in place machinery for the monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the NPE provision (NPE, 2004, p. 54). This aspect of the provision is under cover.

Monitoring and evaluation activities are not done if not, some sections that have been abandoned for greed and gratification would have come back to life and redirect the growing pupils/students into a better educational platform.

7. Conclusion:

The success of any educational system hinges on proper planning, efficient administration, adequate finding and motivation. It is obvious that academic corruption resulting from terminal examination system is a growing problem of the present day. It has become a societal problem that involves everybody. Therefore, the continuous assessment rather than terminal examination can restore confidence in the whole system of education. Enahoro (2008) asserted that to achieve educational objectives, an evaluation strategy that increases the interest of learners to engage in the learning process must be encouraged. This statement is not only informative but is an affirmation to the adoption of continuous assessment program as the only tool of assessment and evaluation of individual advancement.

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