

Full Length Research Paper

Examination malpractices among secondary school students in Ondo State, Nigeria: Perceived causes and possible solutions

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This paper investigated teachers' perception of examination malpractices among secondary school students in Ondo State, Nigeria. As a descriptive research, the study population comprised the 481 secondary schools in Ondo State, Nigeria. This was made up of 281 public and 200 private schools as well as 210 urban and 272 rural schools. The sample consisted of 245 schools made up of 142 public and 103 private schools. Out of the 142 public schools, 62 were urban while 80 were rural schools. Out of the 103 private schools, 47 were urban while 56 were rural schools. Out of the 4250 teachers in the schools, 960 teachers were selected. The methods of selection were also by multi-stage and stratified random sampling techniques. The instrument used to collect data was a questionnaire while the data collected were analyzed using percentages, Person r product moment correlation and the t-test. The findings revealed that one major cause of examination malpractices in the schools was indiscipline among students that made many of them to be involved in examination malpractices. Other important causes include the non-implementation of the examination malpractices decree and the lack of effective supervision of students during examinations. It was recommended that concerted efforts should be made at improving the level of discipline among students through counseling services in the schools. There should be the full implementation of the examination malpractices decree. There should be increased efforts at effective supervision of students during examinations. The termination of appointment of examination officials and teachers involved in perpetrating examination malpractices should be in force to serve as a deterrent to others.

Key words: Examination, malpractices, schools, perceived, causes, solutions

INTRODUCTION

Examinations in Nigerian schools dated back to the advent of formal education in the country in the 1800s and it was patterned after the British system. As such, the 1987 Ordinance made provision for examinations in schools that have attained the requisite percentage of proficiency (Adesina, 1990; Bandele, 2005). Towards this end, all secondary schools in the country are expected to teach their subjects to meet the requirements of examination bodies for the senior secondary school certificate organized by the West African Examinations Council and the National Examinations Commission (FGN, 2004).

In Ondo State, Nigeria, examinations are either internal

or public. Internal examinations are the examinations set by teachers in the form of class tests and end of term examinations. Public examinations on the other hand, are examinations that are conducted in the public interest by recognized examining bodies that were not involved in organizing instruction or preparing students for the examinations (Addison, 1990; Salami, 1992; Adeyemi, 1998). Notwithstanding the importance of examinations in the educational system of the State, the instances of malpractices during examinations have been identified (Cromwell, 2000; Adeyegbe, 2002). These malpractices include misrepresentation of identity or impersonation, cheating, theft of other students' work, tampering with the

works of others, bringing prepared answers to examination halls, unethical use of academic resources, fabrication of results and showing disregard to academic regulations (Gross, 2003; Owuamanam, 2005). These vices have been regarded as academic misbehaviour capable of truncating an educational system (Glasner, 2002; Ogunwuyi, 2005). They have also been regarded by researchers (Omotosho, 1992; Hurwitz and Hurwitz, 2004) as dishonesty in examinations perpetrated by a person or a group of persons.

Common observations in the State show that examination malpractices occur in both public and private secondary schools. Although some researchers argued that examination malpractices occur at a high rate in public schools (Baiyelo, 2004; Daniel, 2005), other researchers (Ijaiya, 2000; Igwe, 2004) were of the view that examination malpractices occur at a high rate in private schools. None of this researcher has been able to identify whether or not examination malpractices was at a higher rate in public schools than in private schools. The argument therefore is, are public secondary schools more involved in examination malpractices than private schools in the State? In the past two decades, common observation in the school system showed that public schools were engaged in examination malpractices at a high rate while private schools were model schools (Aghenta, 2000; Adeyegbe, 2002). These days, it is common to find students who failed the senior secondary certificate examination in public schools going to retake the examination in private schools and at the same time passing the examination with credits and distinctions in such schools. It seems that the need to have good results in public examinations and advertise their schools to prospective students in the wake of money making appears to have led many private schools to be involved in examination malpractices.

Divergent views have also been made about the rate of examination malpractices in urban and rural secondary schools in the country. Some researchers (Uyo, 2004; Akpan et al., 2005) were of the opinion that examination malpractices were high in urban schools, other researchers (Lathrop and Foss, 2000; Onipede, 2003) had the viewpoint that examination malpractices were a common feature of rural schools. They argued that it is common to find students who failed the senior secondary certificate examinations in an urban school going to a remote rural school to retake the examinations. At the end, such candidates tend to obtain good results with credits and distinctions in the rural schools. Some of the reasons given for this include the lack of effective supervision and monitoring of public examinations in rural schools (Al-Methen and Wilkinson, 1992; Tairab, 1992; Oderinde, 2003). Hence, students seem to be left to massive cheating in such examinations.

On the national setting, Olugbile (2004) conducted a study on examination malpractices in secondary schools

in Nigeria and found that malpractices in senior secondary certificate examinations were at a high. He reported that Ondo State took the 15th position among all the 36 States in Nigeria in examination malpractices as determined by the examination malpractice index (EMI). He further found that out of the 909,888 pupils who sat for the senior secondary certificate examinations in year 2002, 95,519 of them were involved in examination fraud. While out of the 929,294 pupils who sat for the examinations in year 2003, 111,969 of them were involved in examination malpractices. Supporting these findings, Onyechere (2004) reported that the National Examination Malpractices Index for Nigeria increased from 10.5 in 2002 to 12.1 in 2003 indicating that of every 100 pupils who wrote WAEC senior secondary certificate examinations in 2003, 12 were involved in examination scandal.

In another study on 4,500 high school students from 25 US high schools, Schulte (2002) reported that 72% of the students admitted to seriously cheating in examinations. This finding tends to support the findings of other researchers (Educational Communications, 1998; Josephson, 1998). Educational Communications (1998) for instance found in a survey of top scholastic high school achievers in the USA that four out of every five students admitted to cheating in examinations. Josephson (1998) found in another study involving 20,829 middle and high school students that 70% of the students claimed that they cheated in examinations.

In view of the foregoing instances of examination malpractices, the purpose of this study was to examine the perceived causes of examination malpractices among students in secondary schools in Ondo State, Nigeria and proffer useful suggestions on the way out of the problem.

Statement of the problem

The persistent occurrence of examination malpractices has been a major concern to educationists (Aghenta, 2000; Ige, 2002). Despite the high premium placed on examinations by the National Policy on Education (FGN, 2004), it seems that examination malpractices have not been properly addressed in Ondo State, Nigeria. Common observations have shown that there is mass cheating in public examinations in the State. Nothing concrete has been done to reduce the problem except the cancellation of results for a particular centre or the withholding of results in certain subjects. The problem of the study was that finding a lasting solution to the issue of examinations malpractices among secondary school students in Ondo State, Nigeria. In addressing this problem, the following research questions were raised:

1. What are the perceived causes of examination malpractices in public examinations in secondary schools

in Ondo State, Nigeria?

2. What are the identified devices used in examination malpractices in secondary schools in the State?
3. Is there any significant difference in teachers' perception of examination malpractices in public and private secondary schools in Ondo State, Nigeria?
4. Is there any significant difference in teachers' perception of examination malpractices in urban and rural secondary schools in the State?
5. What measures are currently taken to discourage, prevent, or otherwise address cheating in public examinations in secondary schools in the State?
6. What measures should be taken to discourage, prevent, or otherwise address cheating in public examinations to the schools?

METHODS

This study adopted a descriptive research design of the survey type. Thus involves the collection of information from a large population for the purpose of analyzing the relationships between variables (Oppenheim, 1992). The study population comprised all the 482 secondary schools in Ondo State, Nigeria. This was made up of 281 public and 201 private schools as well as 210 urban and 272 rural schools. The sample for the study consisted of 245 schools made up of 142 public and 103 private schools. Out of the 142 public schools, 62 were urban schools while 80 were rural schools. Out of the 103 private schools, 47 were urban schools while 56 were rural schools. The methods of selection were by multi-stage and stratified random sampling techniques. Out of the 4250 teachers in the schools, 960 teachers were selected (540 from public and 420 from private schools). Out of the 540 teachers selected from public schools, 230 were from urban schools while 310 were from rural schools. Out of the 420 teachers selected from private schools, 212 teachers were from urban schools while 208 were from rural schools. The methods of selection were also by multi-stage and stratified random sampling techniques. The data collected were from the perspective of the teachers as they were the respondents in the study.

The instrument used to collect data for this study was a questionnaire titled "secondary schools' examination malpractices questionnaire". It consisted of two parts A and B. Part A sought information on the name of the school, its ownership whether public or private and its location whether urban or rural. Part B consisted of six sections. Section A elicited information on the perceived causes of examination malpractices in public examinations in the schools. Section B sought information on the identified devices usually employed in examination malpractices in the schools. Section C elicited information on whether or not there were differences in the occurrence of examination malpractices in public and private schools. Section D sought information on whether or not there were differences in the occurrence of examination malpractices in urban and rural schools. Section E requested information on what measures are currently taken to discourage, prevent, or otherwise address cheating in public examinations in the schools while section F required information on what other measures should be taken to discourage, prevent, or otherwise address cheating in public examinations in the schools.

The content validity of the instrument was determined by experts in Test and Measurement who matched all the items of the questionnaire with the research questions to ascertain whether or not the instrument actually measured what it was supposed to

measure. Their comments serve as a guide in making necessary corrections on the instruments. The reliability of the instrument was determined using the test-retest reliability technique (Gay, 1996). In doing this, the instruments were administered to 30 respondents drawn from 10 schools outside the study area. After a period of two weeks, the instruments were re-administered to the same respondents. The data collected on the two tests were correlated using the Pearson product moment correlation analysis. A correlation coefficient of 0.81 was obtained indicating that the instrument was reliable for the study.

In administering the instrument, research assistants were used. Returns were received from 962 respondents. Out of this figure, returns from 42 respondents were badly filled and were discarded. Returns from the remaining 920 respondents that were duly completed were used for the study. These were made up of 518 teachers from public schools and 402 from private schools. Out of these, 412 teachers were from urban schools while 508 were from rural schools. The data collected were analyzed using percentages, Pearson product moment correlation and the t-test while the hypotheses were tested for significance at 0.05 alpha level.

Data analysis

Question 1. What are the perceived causes of examination malpractices in public examinations in secondary schools in Ondo State, Nigeria?

In addressing this question, data on the causes of examination malpractices in secondary schools in Ondo State, Nigeria as perceived by the teachers were collected from the responses to the questionnaire and analyzed using percentages. The findings are shown in Table 1.

In Table 1, the opinion of the respondents varied on the causes of examination malpractices in secondary schools in the State. One major cause of examination malpractices given by 895 of the respondents (97.3%) was the general indiscipline among students in the schools. Another important response given by 884 of the respondents (96.1%) was the non-implementation of the examination malpractices decree which provides for the imprisonment of culprits to 21 years jail term. Other responses include the lack of effective supervision during public examinations (94.7%), Insufficient preparation for the examinations among many students (89.5%) and the desire among many students to pass the examinations at all cost (82.4%). Others include the leakages of question papers by examination officials (63.7%) and leakages by the school authorities (55.4%). On the average, 762 of the respondents (82.8%) claimed that all the items listed in Table 1 were causes of examination malpractices in secondary schools in the State.

Question 2: What are the identified devices used in examination malpractices in secondary schools in the State?

Responding to this question, data on teachers' perception of the devices employed in accomplishing examination malpractices in the schools were collected from the responses to the questionnaire. The data were analyzed using percentages. Table 2 shows the findings.

Table 2 shows the divergent views of the respondents on the devices used in examination malpractices in secondary schools in the State. 867 of the respondents (94.2%) claimed that examination malpractices are perpetrated by students through bringing prepared answers to examination halls. Other devices given by the respondents include copying other students' work during

Table 1. Causes of examination malpractices in secondary schools in Ondo State, Nigeria.

Responses	N	Agree	%	Disagree	%
General indiscipline among students in the schools	920	895	97.3	25	2.7
Non-implementation of the examination malpractices decree which provides for the imprisonment of culprits to 21 years jail term.	920	884	96.1	36	3.9
Lack of effective supervision of students during examinations	920	871	94.7	49	5.3
Insufficient preparation for the examinations among many students	920	823	89.5	97	10.5
Desire among many students to pass the examinations at all cost	920	758	82.4	162	17.6
Leakages of question papers by examination officials	920	595	64.7	325	35.3
Leakages by the school authorities	920	510	55.4	410	44.6
Average total	920	762	82.8	158	17.2

Table 2. Devices employed in accomplishing examination malpractices in the schools.

Responses	N	Agree	%	Disagree	%
Bringing prepared answers to examination halls	920	867	94.2	53	5.8
Copying other students' work during examinations	920	834	90.7	86	9.3
School authorities colluding with examination officials and invigilators to assist students	920	783	85.1	137	14.9
Invigilators conniving with students to cheat in examination halls	920	751	81.6	169	18.4
Sending of prepared answers by teachers to students during examinations	920	730	79.3	190	20.7
Copying answers directly from modules or textbooks during examinations	920	725	78.8	195	21.2
Hiring other people to write the examinations through impersonation	920	717	77.9	203	22.1
Writing the examinations in special centres noted for examination malpractices	920	682	74.1	238	25.9
Average total	920	761	82.7	159	17.3

examinations (90.7%), school authorities colluding with examination officials and invigilators to assist students (85.1%), invigilators conniving with students to cheat in examination halls (81.6%) and sending of prepared answers by teachers to students during examinations (79.3%). Others are copying answers directly from modules or textbooks during examinations (78.8%), hiring other people to write the examinations through impersonation (77.9%) and writing the examinations in special centres noted for examination malpractices (74.1%). On the average, 761 of the respondents (82.7%) claimed that all the devices were employed in perpetrating examination malpractices in the schools.

Question 3: Is there any significant difference in teachers' perception of examination malpractices in public and private secondary schools in Ondo State, Nigeria?

In addressing this problem, the question was transformed into the following hypotheses:

Ho: There is no significant difference in teachers' perception of examination malpractices in public and private secondary schools in Ondo State, Nigeria.

In testing the hypothesis, data on teachers' perception of examination malpractices in public and private secondary schools in the State were collected through the responses to the questionnaire. The data were analyzed using the t-test statistic, Table 3 shows the findings.

In Table 3, the t calculated (5.34) was greater than the t table (1.96) at 0.05 level of significance. Hence, the null hypothesis was rejected. This shows that there was a significant difference in teachers' perception of examination malpractices in public and private secondary schools in the State. The teachers were of the perception that examination malpractices were more prevalent in private schools than in public schools. This could be seen in the higher mean value (68.1) for private schools as against the lower mean value (21.3) in for public schools. The findings suggest that private schools are more vulnerable to examination malpractices than public schools.

Question 4: Is there any significant difference in teachers' perception of examination malpractices in urban and rural secondary schools in the State?

In examining this problem, the question was transformed to the following hypotheses.

Ho: There is no significant difference in teachers' perception of examination malpractices in urban and rural secondary schools in the State.

Testing the hypothesis, data on teachers' perception of examination malpractices in urban and rural secondary schools in the State were collected through the responses to the questionnaire. The data were analyzed using the t-test statistic, Table 4 shows the findings.

Table 3. Teachers' perception of examination malpractices in public and private schools.

Variables	N	Mean	SD	df	t calculated	t table
Public secondary schools	518	37.5	21.3	158	5.34	1.96
Private secondary schools	402	68.1	34.1			

$p < 0.05$.

Table 4. Teachers' perception of examination malpractices in urban and rural schools.

Variables	N	Mean	SD	df	t calculated	t table
Urban secondary schools	412	24.7	12.2	158	4.21	1.96
Rural secondary schools	508	56.1	18.5			

$p < 0.05$.

Table 5. Measures currently taken to discourage or prevent cheating in examinations.

Responses	N	Agree	%	Disagree	%
Hand-checking of students' pockets to prevent students from bringing prepared answers to the examination halls	920	871	94.7	49	5.3
Cancellation of affected students' results	920	852	92.6	68	7.4
Cancellation of the affected school's results	920	784	85.2	136	14.8
Blacklisting of the affected examination centres.	920	736	80.0	184	20.0
Average total	920	811	88.2	109	11.8

In Table 4, the t- calculated (4.21) was greater than the t-Table (1.96) at 0.05 level of significance. Hence, the hypothesis was rejected. This shows that there was a significant difference in the perception of teachers of examination malpractices in urban and rural secondary schools in the State. Rural schools had a higher mean value (56.1) than urban schools (24.7). This indicates that examination malpractices were in a greater dimension in rural schools than in urban schools in the State.

Question 5: What measures are currently taken to discourage, prevent, or otherwise address cheating in public examinations in secondary schools in the State?

Answering this question, data on the measures currently taken to prevent cheating among students of secondary schools in public examinations in the State were collected from the responses to the questionnaire. The data collected were analyzed using percentages. Table 5 shows the findings.

In Table 5, the respondents' views varied on the measures currently taken to discourage or prevent cheating in examinations. 871 of the respondents (94.7%) claimed that hand checking of students' pockets is done to prevent students from bringing prepared answers to the examination halls. 852 of the respondents (92.6%) reported that the cancellation of affected students results is done to discourage or prevent examination malpractices in the schools. However, 784 of the respondents (85.2%) claimed that the cancellation of the affected school's results is done to discourage or prevent cheating in examination while 736 of the respondents (80.0%) reported that the blacklisting the affected examination centres is done to discourage cheating in examinations. On the

average, 811 of the respondents (88.2%) were of the opinion that the listed items in Table 5 are measures currently taken to discourage or prevent cheating in examinations in the schools.

Question 6: What measures should be taken to discourage, prevent, or otherwise address cheating in public examinations to the schools?

In response to this question, data on other measures that could be taken to discourage, prevent or otherwise address cheating among students of secondary schools in public examinations in the State were collected from the responses to the questionnaire. The data collected were analyzed using percentages. The findings are presented in Table 6.

Table 6 shows other measures given by the respondents that could discourage or prevent cheating in examinations in secondary schools in the State. Among the measures, the need to make concerted efforts in enhancing discipline among students through counselling services in the schools in other to prevent them from acts of indiscipline during examinations had the largest number of respondents (94.8%). This was followed by the respondents' suggestion of the full implementation of the examination malpractices decree which provides for the imprisonment of culprits to 21 years jail term had (92.7%) and the use of electronic devices to check students' pockets before entering the examination halls (91.4%). Other measures include intensifying efforts in effective supervision of students during examinations (90.0%), increased emphasis on the use of continuous assessment by schools and examination boards in determining students' success or failure in public examinations (87.5%) and the termination of appointment of

Table 6. Measures that should be taken to discourage or prevent cheating in examinations.

Responses	N	Agree	%	Disagree	%
Making concerted efforts in enhancing discipline among students through counselling services in the schools in other to prevent them from acts of indiscipline during examinations.	920	872	94.8	48	5.2
Full implementation of the examination malpractices decree which provides for the imprisonment of culprits to 21 years jail term.	920	853	92.7	67	7.3
Using electronic devices to check candidates 'pockets before allowing them into examination halls	920	841	91.4	79	8.6
Intensifying efforts in effective supervision of students during examinations	920	828	90.0	92	10.0
Increased emphasis on the use of continuous assessment by schools and examination boards in determining students' success or failure in public examinations	920	805	87.5	115	12.5
Termination of appointment of officials of examination boards and teachers involved in perpetrating examination malpractices in schools.	920	786	85.4	134	14.6
Average total	920	831	90.3	89	9.7

teachers who aid examination malpractices in the schools (85.4%).

On the average, 831 of the respondents (90.3%) claimed that the measures suggested in Table 6 should be taken to discourage, prevent or otherwise address cheating in examinations in the schools.

DISCUSSION

The foregoing shows the analysis of data collected for this study. As indicated in the findings, one important cause of examination malpractices in secondary schools in the State was the non- implementation of the examination malpractices Act by government. This shows that since there had been no penalty imposed on culprits in the past with the non-implementation of the examination malpractices act, many students continued to get involved in examination malpractices. It implies that since there is no punishment given to offenders to serve as a deterrent to others, examination malpractices among students in the schools remained uncurbed. This finding negated the findings of previous researchers (Cromwell, 2000; Daniel, 2005).

Another cause as perceived by the teachers was the desire among the students to pass the examination at all cost. This implies that the attitude towards achieving paper qualification at all cost has assumed a great dimension in the State's educational system at the expense of commitment to serious academic work. This finding was in agreement with the findings of previous researchers (Omosho, 1992; Oyekan, 1999; Oderinde, 2003). The finding indicating that there was the insufficient preparation for the examinations among many students implies that many students might not have been

well groomed for the examinations and they would want to pass by all means. This finding agreed with the findings made in previous studies (Layton, 2000; Owuamanam, 2005). The act of sending prepared answers by teachers to students during examinations as found in this study was in consonance with the findings made by Igwe's (2004) that there could be no examination malpractice without the connivance of teachers and students. This finding agreed with the findings of other researchers (Creech and Johnson, 1999; Ige, 2002; Bandele, 2005). The finding which highlighted indiscipline as a root cause of examination malpractices agreed with the findings made in other studies (Akpan et al., 2005; Ogunwuyi, 2005). The finding suggests that examination malpractice is a function of indiscipline in the school system.

The perception of teachers indicating that examination malpractices were more prevalent in private schools than in public schools tends to buttress the finding that there was a significant difference in teachers' perception of examination malpractices in public and private secondary schools in the State. This finding was consistent with the findings of previous researchers (Ijaiya, 2000; Athanasou and Olasehinde, 2002; Shaw, 2003). Likewise, the finding on teachers' perception indicating a higher rate of examination malpractices in rural schools than in urban schools was contrary to those of some researchers (Clayton, 1997; Josephson, 1998; Onipde, 2003; Baiyelo, 2004). The finding was however consistent with the findings made in other studies (Tairab, 1992; Glasner, 2002). Nonetheless, the fact that examination malpractices were perceived to be higher in rural schools than in urban schools is an indication that over-emphasis has

been placed by the Nigerian government on paper qualifications through the issuance of certificates which have perhaps made many students to be involved in examination malpractices. This suggests that examination malpractice in Nigerian schools is a function of academic dishonesty.

Conclusion

Considering the findings of this study, it was concluded that indiscipline among students is critical variable in students' involvement in examination malpractices in the schools. This was evident in the findings which singled out indiscipline as a root cause of examination malpractices among students of secondary schools in the State. The findings have led the researcher to conclude that private secondary schools are more prone to examination malpractices than public schools while rural schools are more vulnerable to examination malpractices than urban schools. The findings have also led the researcher to conclude that effective supervision of students during examinations is lacking in many secondary schools while the measures currently taken to discourage, prevent or otherwise address examination malpractices among the students are insufficient as additional measures need to be taken.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, it was recommended that there should be the full implementation of the examination malpractices decree which provides for imprisonment of culprits to 21 years jail term. Hence, the arrest and prosecution of students caught in examination malpractices should always be done to serve as a lesson to others. Concerted efforts should be made in enhancing discipline among students through the counselling services in schools in order to prevent them from acts of indiscipline during examinations. Electronic devices should be used to check students' pockets before entering examination halls. There should be increased efforts by principals of schools and examination boards in enhancing the effective supervision of students during examinations. There should be increased emphasis on the use of continuous assessment by schools and examination boards in determining students' success or failure in public examinations. The termination of appointment of officials of examination boards and teachers involved in perpetrating examination malpractices should be in force to serve as a deterrent to others.

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