

Secondary Schools Student's Perception of Examination Malpractices and Examination Ethics

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ABSTRACT Secondary school students' perceptions of examination malpractices and examination ethics were assessed. The participants were drawn from Secondary Schools in the Benin Metropolis of Nigeria. The study revealed that majority of the students believed that their indulgence in examination malpractice was a common occurrence, which will be difficult to eradicate. Parents, teachers and school principals were found to encourage cheating in examinations. The study also revealed that majority of the students had a very wrong notion about examination ethics; believing that examination ethics entail among others sitting next to someone in order to copy from his/her paper in the examination hall. In all, counselling intervention strategies such as, school counsellors partnering with the school authorities and students to set up examination ethics clubs that will teach the virtues of hardwork; school counsellors partnering with parents/ teachers association and other significant others on strategies that would help to inculcate in them the virtues of "responsibility" were advocated.

INTRODUCTION

Evidence abound of increasing incidents of examination malpractices by students at schools and colleges; which conflict with the core purpose of education—the training of the mind and character for the acquisition of practical and theoretical skills, knowledge and functional ideas for development; and the search for truth and knowledge and the creation and communication of ideas (Nanna, 1997; Peterson, 1988, as cited in Aaron, 1992).

In Nigeria, the first publicly reported case of examination malpractice occurred in 1914 when there was a leakage of question papers in the senior Cambridge local Examination. Ever since, there have been cases of irregularities reported on a yearly basis. But, the outstanding years were 1963, 1967, 1970, 1973, 1977, 1979, 1981, 1985, 1987, 1991, 1994, 1995, 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003 (West African Examination Council, 2004). The major forms of examination malpractice reported are: Impersonation; bringing in foreign materials (books, calculator); substituting worked scripts, stealing, converting, misappropriating scripts; collusion in the examination hall (copying); mass/organized cheating involving assistance from teachers and

outsiders; and insult/assault on supervisors/ invigilators (Oluyeba and Daramola, 1992). This trend in examination malpractices is inimical to academic development and advancement and needs to be drastically addressed.

Examination malpractice is an illegal or unethical behaviour by somebody in the process of testing an examinee's ability or knowledge by means of question (Ikupa, 1997). Oluyeba and Daramola (1992) remarked that examination malpractice include the following: examination malpractice is any irregular behavior exhibited by a candidate or anybody charged with the conduct of examination before, during or after the examination which contravenes the rules and regulations governing the conduct of such examination. Such examination malpractice will include any of the following: examination leakage, impersonation, cheating, collusion, swapping of scripts, smuggling of answer scripts in examination halls, result/certificate forgery, verbal/physical assault on examination administrators. Similarly, Kibler (1988, as cited in Kibler, 1993) defined examination mal-practices as forms of cheating and plagiarism that involve students giving or receiving unauthorized assistance in an academic exercise or receiving credit for work that is not their own.

Ethics therefore can simply be defined as laid down guidelines, rules and regulations, code or

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conduct or principles of behaviour based upon the ideals of morality to which a group or an organization agrees to regulate their behaviour. For the purpose of this paper, we are viewing ethics in terms of expected behavior during examination. According to Omotune (1992, as cited in Alutu and Alutu, 2003), institutional arrangements require certain norms known as the code of conduct of examinations designed by authorities concerned with examining the candidates for the specific examination to ensure absolute integrity of the results. In occasions where these rules are boycotted either by the teachers or learners, they lead to examination irregularities and malpractice. This pollutes the results of the students in examination and poses a great threat to the validity and reliability of examination results and certification. In Nigeria the last two decades have witnessed an alarming rate of crisis of examination misconduct especially in the Secondary and tertiary institutions.

It has been widely reported that parents aid and abet examination malpractices directly or indirectly because they even go to the extent of bribing their way through to ensure that their wards get unearned grades. The teachers on their part encourage examination malpractices because they lack the zeal to work and at the end would want to be praised for a job, which was never done thus graduating students who do not actually possess the abilities for which they were examined (Nanna, 1997).

Examination malpractice is not a recent phenomenon or is it peculiar to Nigeria or Africa; but it is a global issue (Ikupa, 1997). However, the alarming rate of its increase in Nigeria calls for novel ways to redress the situation. Examination misconduct has some social and psychological dimensions, which the counsellor should address with holistic intervention. Good grades in any examination are gateways to further education and entry into the world of work. But if the value systems of our youths are well constructed, the examination ethics should be adhered to. According to Omoluabi (1993) and Uzoka (1993), our value system has broken down completely and so adults and youths alike act without moral scruples. The general emphasis in our society today is on materialism, bribery, corruption, cultism, sexual promiscuity, fraud, violence, certificate racketeering and a host of other social vices.

Aina (1996) succinctly stated that ethics and

integrity are the solution to all the examination ills. Hence, the social, political and economic structure of this nation is dependent on the promotion of examination ethics; and that hard work is a virtue which once cultivated takes one through life and forms the foundation for an enduring success. Alutu (2002) in a seminar to Secondary School students in Benin City on academic excellence drew students' attention to the 3p's—praying, planning and persistent hard work—to academic excellence. The students who were mainly from a Christian community were made to know that praying to God for success without matching it with good study plans and use of time and persistent hard work will not lead them to achieve the goal of academic excellence.

In view of the ever increasing incidences of examination malpractices and the problems associated with the conduct of examination in Nigeria, this study was undertaken to assess the perception of students towards examination malpractice and ethics. In addition, from the results of this study, counselling interventions would be designed that school counsellors are expected to apply in the maintenance of ethics with a view to reducing the incidence of malpractice through inculcating healthy and positive attitude in the young school child. This will not doubt, facilitate the modification of students' attitudes and behaviors that may be socially undesirable and inimical to academic prowess. Specifically, this study addressed the following questions: What is the general perception of students towards examination malpractice? And what is the general perception of students towards examination ethics?

METHOD OF STUDY

Participants: A sample of two hundred students was drawn from two public secondary schools randomly selected from Benin Metropolis. Students of junior secondary within the age range 12-15 years were the targets of this study. The first instrument, "Examination Malpractice Questionnaire" was administered to 200 students (100 males and 100 females). The second instrument for this study was "Examination Ethics Questionnaire (EEQ)" that was administered on a sample of 45 students who attended a seminar on study techniques and examination preparation. The EEQ was

administered before the lecture commenced. The sample therefore was small due to the number on ground at the onset of the seminar.

Measures: The first questionnaire "Examination Malpractice Questionnaire" was a 24- item questionnaire, which elicited responses on students' personal perception and their opinion on the perception of significant others about examination malpractices. The Second instrument "Examination Ethics Questionnaire" was made up of 14 items, which was geared towards eliciting response from students on their personal perception as well as their opinion of the significant others towards examination ethics.

RESULTS

The results of the study are presented below grouped according to the two research questions earlier stated.

Question One

What is the general perception of students towards examination malpractices? The answers to this question are presented in Table 1

The following inferences can be drawn from the responses of the participants in table 1. The majority of the students believe that cheating in Nigeria has become a common occurrence at

Table 1: Students' perception of examination malpractice

No.	Students' Perception	Response Categories			
		Agree		Disagree	
		f	%	f	%
1.	I am only interested in cheating if it is a difficult examination	62	30.87	103	69.13
2.	If I am opportune to see the question paper before the examination I will surely pass.	83	41.5	117	58.5
3.	If I am told to buy the examination question paper before the examination I will surely be interested.	54	27.0	146	73.0
4.	I cheat in examination due to lack of confidence in myself	69	34.5	131	65.5
5.	I don't have enough time to read for examination hence the interest in cheating	29	14.5	171	85.5
6.	Cheating in examination makes me feel guilty.	155	77.5	45	22.5
7.	I will not feel guilty to cheat in the examination if the teacher fails to teach well.	133	66.5	67	33.5
8.	Cheating is not necessary if one has read well before the examination	166	83.0	34	17.0
9.	No matter how hard you read, if you don 't cheat you will fail.	29	14.5	171	85.5
10.	Some teachers encourage cheating during the examination.	126	63.0	74	37.0
11.	I cheat because my friends cheat in examination.	33	16.5	167	83.5
12.	Cheating is encouraging since many people who cheat often escape punishment.	51	25.5	149	74.5
13.	I will cheat in examination if my parents give their support.	29	14.5	171	85.5
14.	Cheating pays in competitive examination in order to please parents and friends.	82	41.0	118	59.0
15.	Most parents encourage their children to cheat	102	51.0	98	49.0
16.	Only people that cheat have high scores in internal and external examinations	56	28.0	144	72.0
17.	You cannot pass examination these days in Nigeria without a little cheating.	81	40.5	119	59.5
18.	The Nigerian society encourages cheating in the examination	79	39.5	121	60.5
19.	Cheating is very common in any examination these days.	155	77.5	45	22.5
20.	It is difficult to stop cheating in examinations in our schools	122	61.0	78	39.0
21.	Cheating is alright for difficult examinations with large failure rate e.g. JAMB.	93	46.5	107	53.5
22.	If I don't cheat, those who do will have advantage over me.	70	35.0	130	65.0
23.	Cheating is the only way out if much work done over a long period of time will be examined once.	53	26.5	147	73.5
24.	Cheating is helpful for people who are very nervous about examination.	83	41.5	117	58.5

examinations because some parents/teachers encourage their children/students to cheat in examinations. Majority of the students also report that they would cheat in examinations even when the examination is not difficult. However, 83% of the respondents believe that cheating would not be necessary in any examination if a student prepares well. However, majority of the students also report that they would cheat in any examination if they do not have enough time to prepare for examinations (about 85.5% indicated this). On the other hand, some of the students do not believe that they would cheat in any examination due to low self-esteem or because of the fact that only those who cheat in an examination have high scores at internally or externally conducted examinations (about 56% indicated this). In addition, majority of the students do not believe that they cheat in examinations because the Nigerian society encourages it or because their friends cheat in examination halls.

Question Two

What is the general perception of students towards examination ethics? The answer to this question is presented Table 2.

The following interpretations can be made from the responses in Table 2. The majority of the students believe that examination ethics implies among others: That students should strictly follow the correct examination taking guidelines;

that some teachers could help their students to pass examinations; that some principals could arrange corporate cheating in their schools; that some parents could support their children to cheat in examinations; and students arranging to sit next to someone in order to copy from his/her work. On the other hand, majority of the students do not believe that examination ethics implies the following: Cheating a little during examinations; permitting students to cheat in examinations provided that they are not caught; allowing a friend to copy from one's work during examination; taking examination for another person or holding to a belief that without cheating it would be difficult for any one to pass examination.

DISCUSSIONS

The results of this study indicated that majority of the students believe that examination malpractice is a common feature in the Nigerian school system. And their indulgence in it has the support of some parents, teachers and school principals. This is not surprising because most times lazy teachers who have not taught would at all cost want their student to pass examination since it is seen as a measure of good teaching. On the part of school principals, they arrange corporate cheating for their schools believing that when their students do very well in any given external examination, it will attract other students who may not believe in working hard

Table 2: Students' Perception of Examination Ethics

No.	Students' Perception	Response Categories			
		Agree		Disagree	
		<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
1.	Exam Ethics means cheating can be allowed a little during examination.	2	4.44	43	95.56
2.	It means students are permitted to cheat if they are not found out.	2	4.44	43	95.56
3.	It means students should strictly follow the correct examination taking guidelines.	45	100.00		
4.	I would not like to be restricted to rules in taking examination.	13	28.89	32	71.11
5.	If you do not cheat in the examination it is difficult to pass well.	1	2.22	44	97.78
6.	I do not believe I can pass without people assisting me in the hall.	6	13.33	39	86.67
7.	Some teachers help their students to pass.	43	95.56	2	4.44
8.	Some principals arrange for corporate cheating in their schools.	10	88.89	5	11.11
9.	Some parents support cheating.	41	91.11	4	8.89
10.	My parents do not oppose any opportunity. I have to cheat.	9	20.00	36	80.00
11.	There is nothing wrong if one sees the examinations questions before the day of examination.	9	20.00	36	80.00
12.	It is good to arrange to sit next to someone in order to copy from his/her paper.	43	95.56	2	4.44
13.	I can allow my friend to copy from my paper during examination.	12	26.67	33	73.33
14.	I can take examination for another person.	2	4.44	43	95.56

for their grades to come over to earn good grade through indulgence in examination malpractices. All these may not be far from the total breakdown in our value system. In the past success was achieved through hard work. But today the reverse is the case—Success is measured by how much you can acquire certificates and good grades at school without bothering about the process. This finding is in support of Nanna's (1997) position that parents and school teachers aid and abet examination malpractices to enable them get undeserved grades.

Similarly, Alutu and Alutu (2003) noted that examination malpractice is a socially undesirable behaviour exhibited by students and should be sternly discouraged. It renders the objectives of examination invalid and affects the psyche and integrity of students who are hardworking and have resolved not to indulge in any form of cheating. In addition, Kano (1978) contends that cheating behaviour is based on the belief that a person's ability to obtain a decent job and his socio-economic mobility are by and large a function of his performance in certain examinations and acquisition of relevant paper qualifications. A large percentage of students cheat when they faced with a possibility of failing on a particular examination.

Research (i.e., Aina, 1996; Alutu and Alutu, 2003) has adduced various reasons that have sustained examination malpractice ranging from social, economic, political and personal dimensions, low self-esteem, poor parental-child relationship amongst others. The most notable is the social factor, which places undue emphasis on certificates for school and job placements (Iheanacho, 1997; Alutu and Alutu, 2003). Aina (1996) stated that "Ethics and integrity hold the promise of a panacea for all besetting examination ills, yet implies greater promise far beyond examinations, which when realized may leap the Nation into a meritocratic society where honesty, hard work and virtues are rewarded while indolence and social vices are punished" It should be noted that Examination malpractice which started in this country as a minor misdemeanour has now assumed an alarming proportion. The new trend involves an organized system of the supervisors, invigilators, subject teachers and in some cases principals of schools, there is therefore need for a team effort to stem this social malaise that is inimical to our academic development. For the impact of

examination ethics to be felt in our institutions of learning, there is need for a collective responsibility from the learners, teachers, parents' communities and the government for a redress of this huge national misnomer.

IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNSELLING

If credence is to be given to certificates from Nigerian schools, and if the products are to be given the much-desired respect in the international labour market, there is the great need for revolutionary steps to be taken by stakeholders of the educational sector and society in general to eradicate the crisis of examination misconduct currently pervading the Nigerian school system. In addition, in view of the fact that parents, guardians and teachers are the main custodians of the students there is need to carry out a pragmatic counselling interventions on these groups of stakeholders.

The results of this study point to the fact that the majority of students have a wrong notion about examination ethics. For example they conceive examination ethics to include the following: teachers helping their students to pass examination; parents supporting their children to cheat; and school principals arranging corporate cheating in their schools. It is in this regard that school counsellors may consider advocating the introduction of examination ethics club and through the club activities, useful information will be disseminated to all students and staff of the institutions. School counsellors could even go further by collaborating with examination ethics club to arrange debates in the media to create public awareness about the virtues of examination ethics

The school counsellor by the virtue of his/her training is well equipped to guide students towards achieving optimal behavior during the conduct of examination. This can be achieved through: maintenance of effective communication network between counselors and students, counselors and teachers, counselors and principals, and school counsellors and significant others; giving impromptu talks to individuals and groups of students on the expected behaviour before and during examinations—this helps to sensitize the student and reduce phobia, anxiety and tension usually associated with examination; delivering lectures on how to study effectively and prepare for examinations; formulating and

adopting a personal reading-timetable; organizing talks on examination ethics and sanctions, at least, to all the students at the beginning of every term and a week before the examination; informing teachers/invigilators on the expected behavior during examination (this exercise should be carried out every term in collaboration with the Vice-Principal (Academics) and the Examination Officers); and encouraging subject teachers to refer students who need academic counseling to the counselors in good time.

Apart from referrals made on student to counselling centers, school counsellors should on their own identify weak students and hold counseling sessions with them; counselors should also tap information from brilliant and disciplined students on how they study and write examinations—this will form a masterpiece to assist other students. In addition, counselors should encourage students to dissociate themselves from any form of examination malpractice and to expose such immediately to the counselor who will not divulge the name of such good candidate but use the information.

Even though the majority of the students in this study did not believe that lack of self-confidence make them to cheat in examinations, however, a significant proportion of the participants (34.5%) reported that lack of self-confidence in examinations make them to be involved in examination malpractices. It is in this regard that school counsellors should aim at assisting students who lack self-confidence to build up their self-confidence so that they will shun any kind of examination malpractices. In addition, counselors should use facilities available to him/her to screen students' academic needs. The Study Habit Inventory, the Attitude to Academic Subject Scale and the Self Concept Scale will be very helpful and would be relevant in guiding students in making appropriate subjects selection so that they will choose careers they are well suited for and are interested in.

In view of the fact that some parents and teachers encourage students to indulge in examination malpractices, it is advocated that school counsellors be in constant touch with the parents and teachers. Through discussions with the students, school counsellors will be able to find out their views about examination malpractice and how it can be completely curbed. School counsellors could further sensitize the students on how to resist any indulgence in examination

malpractices. Furthermore, the Parent/Teachers/Students' Association forum could be used to talk to parents on the issue. Also formal training of examiners in terms of expected conduct should be organized periodically.

Through these networking of activities it is believed that the student, teachers, parents, guardians and other relevant stakeholders will imbibe examination ethics so as to have a wholesome perceptions of the ills of examination malpractice. Thus, it is anticipated that when these interventions are fully applied, they will facilitate positive behaviour towards studying and taking examination, which will in the long run reduce, if not eliminate examination malpractices

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