

EXAMINATION MALPRACTICE IN NIGERIA



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**IMPLICATIONS OF STUDENTS' SELF AID
RESOURCES (SEAR) AND ACADEMIC
MASTERY IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES:
WHAT LEGALITY?**

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Introduction

University education in Nigeria has arisen through time from it being a luxury to the most needed commodity (Smah, 2011). For example, it has the instrumentality of status symbolism, means of employment or professional progression (Smah, 2008; Yann and Ogunsanya 2000).

The goals of tertiary education as enshrined in Section 8 of National Policy on Education include to:-

- i. Contribute to national development through high level relevant manpower training.

- ii. Develop and inculcate proper values for the survival of the individual and society.
- iii. Develop the intellectual capability of individuals to understand and appreciate their local and external environment.
- iv. Acquire both physical and intellectual skills which will enable individuals to be self-reliant and useful members of the society.
- v. Promote and encourage scholarship and community service.
- vi. Forge and cement national unity and;
- vii. Promote national and international understanding.

The policy states further that tertiary education institutions, one of which is the university shall pursue these goals through the following:-

- (a) Teaching
- (b) Research and development
- (c) Virile staff development programmes
- (d) Generation and dissemination of knowledge
- (e) A variety of modes of programs including full-time, part-time, block-release, day-release, sandwich and so on
- (f) Access to training funds such as those provided by the Industrial training funds (ITF)
- (g) Students Industrial Works Experience Scheme (SIWES)
- (h) Maintenance of minimum educational standards through appropriate agencies
- (i) Inter-Institutions co-operation
- (j) Dedicated services to the community through extra mural and extension services.

As can be seen above, the guiding philosophy of tertiary education is commitment to knowledge and knowledge has four dimensions, which constitute the four University functions namely:-

- i. Knowledge production, that is; discovery and extension; this is achieved through research and publications and is generally regarded as pure scholarship.
- ii. Knowledge interactions and training this is achieved through formal teaching and instruction based on some curricula.
- iii. Knowledge presentation and retrieval: This fundamental specialized knowledge-function very often ignored or at best subsumed under teaching and research is carried out through the library, archives and museums and
- iv. Knowledge applications which is public service and social commitment and entrepreneurial undertakings. (Obikeze 2003).

Presently, records show that there are 102 operating Universities in Nigeria. The Federal government owns 27; state governments 34 and private organizations and individuals 41 (Smah 2011). Also, there are hundreds of thousands of students taking different undergraduate courses in these universities as well as several thousands of applicants who are seeking entry into these institutions of higher learning to study courses of their choice. However, a fundamental component of tertiary education is the examinations and students are often required to take these examinations to determine their academic progress or otherwise.

Onuka and Durowoju (2010), define examination to be common means of evaluating learning achievement in the

African region. It is a process of evaluating for learning improvement. It is also meant to ascertain whether learners have mastered what they have been taught. Evaluation is an essential part of each system. Educational process is incomplete without evaluation; it reveals what students know (Haq, 1989) Cited in Khan and Khan (2011). Educational evaluation is a systematic process to determine educational outcomes (Farooq, 1993). According to Khan and Khan (2011) examination is a part of evaluation and is used to decide who is permitted to go to next level. As a part of the process the results of examinations and teachers judgments have been turned into a grading system in which all the students are classified annually or more frequently.

Examinations always engage the students in fierce competition if they want to achieve good results. This view is corroborated by Khawaja (2005) who added that examinations is essential for their success in today's world, and that such success is measured in terms of achieving a good score, which helps in getting admission in a reputed college or university and a good job and so on. However, beneath the geometric growths in the number of applicants, students and universities, there are some negative factors which are responsible for the decline of interest by students in studying in preparation for examination. One of such negative factors is a tendency for students to rely on self aid resources (SEAR) as the only means of passing examinations and getting high grades.

Self Aid Resources (SEAR): A Brief Search for Meaning

Self aid resources (SEAR) are those unauthorized and unwanted print and non-print materials that illegally facilitates

examination malpractice, cheating, and other forms of misconduct during examinations. These resources when used propels the user to have un-merited high grades.

Scholars have referred to it as “micro chips”, “macro chips”, “down load”, “laptop”, “giraffe” and recently the use of mercenaries who are equally called 'candikot' in Ibibio local parlance to mean 'Human support'. According to the assertion above, micro and macro chips are same techniques except for the variation in the sizes of the imported materials. “Down load” on the other hand, refers to the bringing in of the whole text from which the candidate intends to copy, sometimes the scientific calculator can be used for the storage of relevant data, formula etc to be downloaded for use in the examination hall. As for laptop, the individual candidate's lap is used as the writing surface from where relevant information can be copied in the examination as the need arises. This type is however more prevalent with the female in view of the fact that their predominant mode of dressing includes a skirt. “Giraffe” is an age long style whereby candidates use neck stretching to look at another person's answer sheet. All these methods discussed above however look like a child's play when compared with the sophistication and artistry that a mercenary cum candikot represents. A major distinction between the mercenary and other acts of examination malpractice listed above is that in the former a foreign person who is deemed more knowledgeable is imported to write the examination in the place of the candidate while it is the candidate who has registered for the course that takes the examination though relying on self aid resources (SEAR) in the latter.

The Examination Malpractice Act, No.33, Laws of the Federation of Nigeria (1999) stipulates that examination malpractice is any act of omission or commission by a person who in anticipation of before, during or after any examination fraudulently secures any unfair advantage for himself or any other person in such a manner that contravenes the rules and regulations to the extent of undermining the validity, reliability, authenticity of the examination and ultimately the integrity of the certificates issued.

Anon (2002) also asserted that all forms of cheating which directly or indirectly falsifies the ability of the students are called malpractices. SEAR comes in various forms such as leakage, impersonation, external assistance, smuggling of foreign materials, copying, collusion, intimidation and many others. Ugwu (2008) maintains that examination malpractice (SEAR) has equally been baptised with so many esoteric aliases such as “symbiosis”, “mgbo”, “help”, “memory backup”, “mercenary”, “missiles”, “giraffing”, “dubbing”, “Xeroxing” among others.

According to Olatunbosun (2009), the introduction of global system of mobile telephones (GSM) in the country has revolutionized Self Aid Resources (SEAR) or examination malpractices in the university system. The emergence of technological devices has spawned new and more sophisticated approaches to dishonest conduct during examinations. A lot of academic information is stored in handsets for direct use in examination halls or for onward transfer via SMS to other students anywhere in the country. Students with personal digital assistants or cell phones can beam or call data silently

from across a classroom or with a cell phone from anywhere in the school environment.

Ogunu (1992), Ivowi (1993), Imogie (1993), Denga and Denga (1998) cited in Olujowon (2011) refer to examination malpractice as follows: (1) Collusion, (2) Impersonation (3) Smuggling of answer scripts (4) Examination leakages (5) Mass cheating (6) Insult/assault on examination officials (7) Irregular activities inside and outside the examination hall (8) Ekpo (9) Contractor (10) Ecowas or OAU (11) Dubbing (12) Super print (13) Bullets or missiles (14) Micro chips (15) Hi-tech micro computer (16) Networking (17) Refusal to submit answer script at the end of the examination.

Legal Implications of SEAR to Academic Mastery

The problem of SEAR as a facilitator of examination malpractice seems to be as old as the introduction of the formal system of education (Afigbo, 1993). It was the first major incidence of examination malpractice in 1914 that led to the promulgation of Decree 27 of 1973 and miscellaneous decree 20 of 1984 to curb examination malpractice and the latter decree prescribed 21 years jail term for offenders, however these and other measures put in place still do not deter students from relying on SEAR or engaging in other forms of examination malpractice. More recently, in a bid to stamp out the use of SEAR in our institutions the federal government enacted the Examination Malpractice Act No. 33 of 1999 which metamorphosed into the Examination Malpractice Act, Cap E15, Laws of the federation of Nigeria, 2004 with sanctions and penalties spelt out for offenders and participants in examination malpractice but these penalties have not been effectively

enforced by the authorities and bodies initiating them because of the “Nigerian factor.” In addition, these laws lack the institutional framework for the implementation of their provisions (Orbih, 2006). In fact the major problem plaguing the proper implementation of this law is the prevalence of “who do you know” syndrome (Elendu, 2012).

According to Olatunbosun (2009) examination malpractice render the goals of education invalid. The actualization of the goals of education will continue to be a mirage if the scourge of examination malpractice is not eradicated from the system.

This applies most especially to the goals of tertiary education as enunciated by the National Policy on Education (2004) where the stated goals are only printed on paper, with no hope as to its actualization consequently this country will end up producing graduates who lack the knowledge, skill and competence to exploit the resources of this nation, besides such graduates will lack the right type of values and attitude needed for survival in a globalised economy. In summary, Nigerian universities will produce graduates who are not marketable at home or abroad.

When carefully observed, SEAR as a form of examination malpractice in the Nigerian universities is equally a picture of our corruption ridden society and the fight against corruption cannot succeed if examination malpractice continues to be pervasive in the educational system. To this end, Onuka and Durowoju (2011) stressed that the police and judicial officers in our nation are either corrupt or are unwilling

to enforce the law basically because of the absence of political will. In Nigeria, it is commonly known that the constitution or rule of law has no stronghold on the citizen especially those who are big in names, power, fame or wealth, they feel they are above the law despite the legal axiom which states that there is no sacred cow and that all men are equal before the law. As it is with the fight against corruption, these sanctions or penalties as prescribed by the law have not been meted out to offenders who have been proven guilty by a court of law which is why the perpetrators of this vice are on the increase for instance, there is no case of an offender who has been sentenced to prison for twenty one years (21) as this would have served as a deterrent to other potential culprits thus the law is viewed as a toothless bulldog who can only bark but cannot do much harm thereafter.

Ajayi and Osiki (2008) in their study on “Procrastination among the undergraduates in a Nigerian University: Implications for time management” found that one of the effects of procrastination among undergraduates was poor academic performance which certainly led them to indulge in examination malpractice as a means of shoring up their grades and meeting up the academic requirements.

The Implications

1. Procrastination of Students:-

Postponement of study or poor study habits lead to poor academic performance which would ultimately result in a student's resort to SEAR and such students who habitually engage in examination malpractice throughout their university days cannot even defend their qualifications and so in essence are not experts in their acclaimed field of endeavour whose

certificates they brandish.

2. Campus Cultism

The cult platform seems particularly appealing to those candidates seeking admission into institutions of higher learning who employed others to write examinations for them as this would explain the antecedent of those found with this habit in our institutions of higher learning hence the rather mutual relationship that lies between cultism and examination malpractice in these institutions.

3. Certification

With respect to the examination fraud in the country, the erstwhile Nigerian President, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo asserted that students in the country see education as a process or channel of getting a meal ticket and getting a job. He further argued that this perception or orientation must change so that students could appreciate the inherent value of education which is the total development of the individual to be able to make meaningful contributions to the family, community, the country and the world at large. This recurrent issue of certification was brought to the fore once again by Uya (2009) who declared that there is a decline of interest in real education and the ascendancy of emphasis on certification in our education systems at all times. In his opinion the mounting and seemingly uncontrollable incidences of examination malpractices at all levels can be traced to this malady. When the pursuit of certification replaces education in any country, interest in books which is essential to any serious education project declines. In addition therefore, Nuraini (2008) asserted that these evil practices hamper the creativity and resourcefulness of students.

It wreaks great havoc on the social, religious, economic and political lives of a nation and these students who engaged in examination malpractice get employed in jobs where they are not suited as they cannot display any form of academic mastery of the subject of knowledge which they profess to have by virtue of the certificate.

4. Devaluation of Nigerian Certificates Abroad

It is a known fact that when Nigerian graduates cross over to other developed nations in search of greener pastures, they are usually subjected to a further examinations to test their mastery of their subject areas which they claim to possess/know or are relegated to perform menial jobs such as janitor, waiter among others which ordinarily they would not do such jobs over here. This is an evidence that these certificates have lost their credibility and are not worth the paper they are printed on. In the same vein, Olatunbosun (2009) pointed out that certificates no longer seem to reflect skill and competence.

5. Debased Value System

It has often been said that the educational sector is a direct reflection of the society, in other words, the core traditional values have been eroded by vices.

According to Nwabuisi (2000), the dominant traditional values include love and promotion for family and family name, filial piety, honour and respect not for parents alone but to elders. While the debased values of most Nigerians in the modern era include keeping of African time, jealous and witch hunting of colleagues, excessive quest for material possessions, apparent worship of money, unpatriotism, egocentrism, socio-centrism, tribalism, ethnocentrism and ethnicity. The debased

values system of the nation directly affects and influences the educational sector which explains why cases of SEAR and other forms of examination malpractice are on the increase now.

6. **Decline in Reading Culture in Nigeria**

There is a precipitous decline in the reading culture in our country today. Few, in Nigeria, including our political leadership read anything at all Uyah (2009). Most students only read when they have examinations to take, while others do not read at all but prepare to use SEAR in the examination. This ugly trend has led to the eroding of the educational standard.

7. **Certificate Forgery**

With the prevailing emphasis on certification in present day Nigeria, students who are not able to demonstrate any form of mastery of their subject area would naturally descend to forging academic certificates with a view to gaining employment (for which they are not qualified for)

8. **Low Rating of Nigerian Universities Internationally and In Africa**

According to a newspaper report by Amaku and Awosinya (2012), no Nigerian University was listed in the top 2,500 in ranking web of world universities and in the same vein, no Nigerian university was deemed fit to be included in the first 10 in the African category. Perhaps it is the cumulative use of SEAR by students in Nigeria universities that is the reason why Nigerian Universities have performed abysmally in this assessment by the International community.

9. **Illegal Activities**

Undergraduate students who are handicapped by lack of any form of academic mastery eventually end up participating in illegal activities, becoming thugs for politicians, yahoo boys and more lately, getting involved in acts of terrorism.

10. **Aiding and Abetting of Exam Malpractice by Children**

These leaders of tomorrow who have gone through the school system characterized by academic fraudulent behaviour in any organization wherein they find themselves, they will always attempt to cut corners and so will be destined to a life of crime, fraud and corrupt practices. One wonders what would happen to children raised by this class of youths?

Conclusions

From the foregoing discourse, it is apparent that examination malpractice has pervaded the entire fabric of our university system. The nature of Self Aid Resources (SEAR) employed by the students is getting sophisticated daily and the results of these practices are very glaring for all to see, thus all stakeholders must jointly ensure that this evil is permanently eliminated so as to restore credibility to the education sector.

The Way Forward

In order to avert the negative implications of SEAR and other forms of examination malpractice, it is therefore necessary for a team effort to stem this social malaise that has become the bane of educational development in the country. It is therefore advocated that:-

1. All levels of education especially the tertiary education

should strengthen and emphasis moral and proper value education in their curriculum. Time consciousness should be instilled into the students. All stakeholders of the educational system should continuously discourage examination malpractice among students.

2. Only Nigerians with good values should be recognized and presented with national honours.
3. Mediocrity should be discouraged by all Nigerians in every facet of the society.
4. The home is the starting point. Parents and guardians should be dissuaded from aiding and abetting or giving tacit support to their wards in the act of examination malpractice. Onyechere (2008) and Ojerinde (2008) called on all stakeholders in the educational sectors across the country to wage a war against examination malpractice.
5. Examination malpractices should be viewed strictly as a criminal offence in the same light as robbery, election-rigging among others, therefore suspects who have been proven guilty of the commission of such offence should feel the full weight of the law as this would serve as a deterrent to others.
6. An Examination Malpractice Commission should be established as this would address this social malady; such a body should be independent and fully empowered to have its team of investigators and prosecutors. Also in order to facilitate its quick dispensation of justice, a body of rules should be formulated to sidetrack the prevailing

procedural rules which often lead to inordinate delays. In addition, such a body should be independent, devoid of government interference and provision for its funding backed by law (Orbih 2006).

7. **Less Emphasis on Certificates**

According to Nwadiani (2005), the market place value and reward for the level and face value quality of certificates promote tendencies for and acts of cheating in the process of certification. Many school leavers have certificates without knowledge and skills and it is common knowledge that most graduates today are handicapped when it comes to reading and writing. It is high time therefore that the nation took certificates no more as passports to jobs or higher education, and more emphasis should be placed on competence and skill acquisition. The potential employer should view the certificate only as a pre-requisite for employment but should continually assess such employee on the job.

8. **Campaigns and Seminars on the Dangers of Examination Malpractice.**

Grassroot campaign and seminars should be organised by all stakeholders in the education sector on the dangers associated with examination malpractice. This will help to sensitise and conscientise the people. (Olatubosun 2009). These campaigns will help the people to internalize the true values of time and overtime shed the vices associated with their existence.

9. **Re-Orientation in Universities Libraries**

Academic libraries should be adequately stocked with

multiple copies of books acquired and placed on the open shelves as this would make for easy access and retrieval of relevant material by the students. This would also go a long way to reducing incidents of the use of SEAR to advance examination malpractice.

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