

Engaging Specialized Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Tools in Combating Examination Malpractice in Educational Institutions

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Abstract

Educational corruption has both short-and-long term effects on the educational system, and the society at large. It has many ways of manifesting, one of which is examination malpractice. This paper conceptualizes examination malpractice and considers its types, causes and effects. It further puts forward a number of specialized ICT tools that, if well utilized, will help checkmate examination malpractice in our educational institutions to include biometric machine, Closed Circuit Television (CCTV), body scanner, metal detector, signal detector, among others.

Keywords: Engaging, specialized Information and Communication Technology (ICT) tools, combating, examination malpractice, educational institutions.

DOI: 10.7176/JEP/14-29-06

Publication date: October 31st 2023

1. Introduction.

Instructional evaluation is a pivotal step in the teaching-learning process. It is a means by which the extent of success or otherwise of an instructional exercise is determined. The learning outcomes could be measured at a formative (intermittently) or summative (comprehensively at the end of a course program) level. While formative evaluation could be less cumbersome because of its short-term generalization, summative evaluation which could take the form of internal or external examinations come with so much pressure, challenges and general restiveness, which tend to culminate in some level of compromise by the parties concerned. Umanah (2014) noted that, when summative evaluation is compromised, it makes it unreliable to pass valid judgement about the level of achievement of educational goals and objectives. Naturally, many students nurse phobia for examination, no matter how prepared they may be. The fear of both internal or external examinations, puts students under some kind of pressure, especially when their level of preparation does not guarantee them passing independently.

The whole restiveness exhibited before, during and after examinations by students, teachers, school administrators, parents, examination invigilators, custodians of examination materials, officials of the examination and security operatives could culminate in tendencies of examination malpractice (Onabanjo, 2016). According to Onyeto (2014) examination malpractice has assumed an alarming proportion that has almost become a norm across all levels of education. Tyokyaa (2014) added that examination malpractice has become a booming business to the extent that there are fraudsters who make brisk business by engaging in the shameful act.

The concept of examination malpractice has been variously defined by different scholars, but with a unanimous line of thought. According to Kingsley (2019) it connotes all forms of cheating which directly or indirectly falsify the ability of the student in or outside the examination hall. Tanah (2021) defined it as an act of

compromise of any kind by the examination stake holders, at any stage of the examination process. Ebong (2022) further pointed out that examination malpractice is a situation where a student, teacher, supervisor, invigilator, officer or parent engages in any illegal act before, during or after a given examination, to the end that some candidates may obtain undeserved scores. Therefore, examination malpractice refers to any act of compromise perpetuated by any of the examination stake holders, at any point in the examination process, to criminally affect examination outcomes and favor or disfavor candidates of choice.

This criminal practice has over the years been carried out through both manual and digital means. Bonner (2015) advanced that examination malpractice is no longer only about copying from neighbors, using notes, textbooks and key points, copying on paper, palm, laps and cloths; but now adopts mobile technologies like mobile phones, scientific calculators, invisible ink pens, wrist watches, Mp3 players, wireless receivers ear piece, and printed labels. Examination malpractice looks down on the examination ethics, truth, honor, integrity, credibility and essence, and has brought unpleasant lingering consequences on the students, teachers, educational institutions and system, and the society at large.

In view of the immediate and long-term effects of examination malpractice, the government, concerned organizations, groups and individuals have tried frantically to find sustainable and replicable solutions to the problem, by way of setting and enforcing strict rules and other practical strategies, but not so much has changed over time. More worrisome is the advancement in the strategies of examination malpractice which desperately yearns for more proactive measures that can sustainably militate against it.

The revolution in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has contributed immensely to solving problems in every sphere of human endeavor. ICT has been considered to incorporate electronic technologies and techniques to manage information and knowledge, including information-handling tools used to produce, process, store, distribute and exchange information (Johnson & Udo, 2020). According to UNESCO (2023), ICT refers to the scientific, technical, and engineering discipline and management technics used in the management of information, its application and engagement with social, economic and cultural matters. Many scholars tend to limit the scope of ICT to strictly information production, storage, processing, distribution and exchange.

However, the influence of ICT is seriously felt across education, business, socio-political and other spheres of human endeavors. Johnson (2017) and Johnson et al., (2021) pointed out that there are ICT tools specially designed for surveillance, data capturing, interpretation, management, storage and sharing of information. This implies therefore that there are specialized ICT tools for combating examination malpractices. Considering the potentialities associated with ICT, one is hopeful that, if ICT tools for combating examination malpractice are adopted and effectively utilized, in addition to the already established measures, they could yield the much-desired change. This paper therefore examines the types, causes and effects of examination malpractice, and recommends specialized ICT tools for checkmating them.

1.2. Types of Examination Malpractice

For the purpose of this discourse, the types of examination malpractice are broken into before, during and after examination.

- a. **Examination malpractice before examination:** This refers to irregularities and rules breaking activities that get exhibited prior to the execution of a given examination. They include the following:
 - i. Falsification of candidate's data and examination entry information.
 - ii. Hiring of mercenary to impersonate and write an examination for a candidate.
 - iii. Breaking into an officer's office to obtain examination questions or related materials.
 - iv. Assigning examination center of choice to favored candidates for a fee.
 - v. Assigning compromised invigilators and supervisors to favored centers.
 - vi. Selling and buying of examination questions before the examinations.
 - vii. Preparing manual and electronic cheating materials to enhance smooth cheating.
 - viii. Offering money to or terrorizing invigilators or supervisor to ensure compromise.
- b. **Examination malpractice during examination:** Many irregularities happen at the instance of an examination to enable candidates gain more marks than they can merit, such as the following:
 - i. Instigating issues to disrupt an examination atmosphere.
 - ii. Sneaking bookish or electronic materials into examination hall to aid copying of answers.
 - iii. Collaborating or copying from the works of others.
 - iv. Giving or receiving assistance to copy.
 - v. Writing answers on the board or reading same to students.
 - vi. Moving dull students that have paid money to sit close to intelligent students and copy.
 - vii. Exchanging and transferring roll numbers and answer booklet to favor some candidates for a fee.
 - viii. Refusal to submit answer booklets at the end of an examination.
 - ix. Exchanging answer scripts during examinations.

- x. Removal of answer scripts from examination hall for purpose of filling answers.
 - xi. Submitting prepared answer booklets by substitution for the original script.
 - xii. Asking and sharing answers among candidates.
- c. Examination malpractice after examination:** When an examination is concluded, there are certain “behind the scene” corrupt practices that occur and still end up affecting the outcomes of a given examination. Below are a number of them:
- i. Offering money or sex to examiners to upgrade the score of candidates.
 - ii. Changing of grades with officers in charge of results after submission by examiners.
 - iii. Generating scores and grades for candidates who never took the examination.
 - iv. Conscious omission or misplacement of a candidate’s script.
 - v. Receiving money and sex to exonerate candidate caught in examination malpractice.
 - vi. Award of certificates to underserving persons.

1.3. Causes of Examination Malpractice

There are a number of factors that act as remote and immediate causes of examination malpractice. Alutu and Aluede (2015) observed that race, religious affiliation, nationality and economic status have very weak connection with examination malpractice, but pointed out some of the following as causes of examination malpractice:

- i. Parental and peer approval and support for examination malpractice.
- ii. Poor and unclear instructional delivery by teachers.
- iii. Excessive engagement in extra-curricular activities by students which affects their studies.
- iv. Poor teaching environment and strategies.
- v. Conducive environment for cheating before, during and after examinations.
- vi. Societal pressure on good grades and certificate at the expense of merit.
- vii. Laziness on the part of the students to read and prepare for examinations.
- viii. Fear of failure and resultant stigmatization by family and peers.
- ix. Lack of self-confidence on the part of the students.
- x. Addiction to cheating by students as the only assurance for passing an examination.
- xi. Poor class attendance and engagement in academic activities by students.
- xii. Poor remunerations and incentives for teachers which push them into compromise and mounting pressure on students to pay money for marks.
- xiii. Insatiable greed by examination officers to keep exploiting examination candidates.
- xiv. Desperation by students to make high grades.

1.4. Effects of Examination Malpractice

Apart from the immediate penalties of failure or termination of the students’ academic pursuit, and suspension or total dismissal for staff, there are both short-term and long-term effects of examination malpractice which the student, parents, teachers, academic institutions and system, and the society at large suffers both directly and indirectly. Below are such effects:

- i. **Incompetence and quackery:** Many graduates today cannot live up to the expectations of the certificates they hold because they never followed due process to acquire mastery, but cheated and came out with grades and certificates they cannot defend. Challenges always expose their emptiness as they are bound to make terrible blunders.
- ii. **Unemployability:** Many graduates are unemployable today because all they have is certificates without commensurate expertise. Due to this, they attend interviews upon interviews but never qualify for a job. Even those who get employed by chance get dropped due to their inability to satisfy the needs they are employed to meet.
- iii. **Inability to fit into the society:** A lot of certificate holders end up as societal misfits due to examination malpractice. They get a certificate without the accompanying enlightenment. They can’t even communicate with simple and correct expressions.
- iv. **Tendency for post-criminalities:** Most contractors who use substandard materials to execute contracts; most politicians who steal in public offices, and; most persons engaging in corrupt practices later in life must have engaged in examination malpractice at some point while in school (Agbatogun, 2017). This claim is so true as examination malpractice could sow seeds of corruption in individuals, which keep manifesting later in life.
- v. **Distrust in the educational system:** Presently, even after meeting the standard qualifications required by a tertiary institution for an admission or, in an organization for an employment; one must still write an aptitude test or go through an interview because there is no trust in the processes of awarding certificates – a sad situation caused by examination malpractice.

- vi. **Distrust in professionalism:** Due to examination malpractice also, many people lack trust in professions like medicine, engineering, law and many others. This explains why a person who studies abroad is considered more valuable than a person who studies locally. Also, where professional services are required, one prefers to seek them outside the country, especially when the means of travelling out is available. This is because there is a general belief that those who study in developed climates are likely more professional than those who study at home, due to the high rate of educational corruption at home.

1.5. Specialized Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Tools for Checking Examination Malpractice

ICT has an inexhaustible list of tools that specialize in carrying out various specialized tasks, either by design or utilization. The following, if well utilized, could help to effectively checkmate examination malpractice in educational institutions:

- i. **Making examination/assessment computer-based:** Every examination should be computer-based. Under this arrangement, the examiners must not be responsible for marking and scoring, but should submit their marking guides with scores allocated to the right answers. This will make it impossible for the markers and candidates to have any kind of contact. All assessment must also be submitted to an approved e-mail address to maintain the avoidance of contact between the markers and the students. This will help keep examination questions secret as well.
- ii. **Provision of centralized database for storage of results:** To avoid any kind of alteration, results should be readily uploaded on a central database and made available to every quarter so that any alternation at any point will render the result questionable.
- iii. **Use of biometric equipment to capture images and biometric data of candidates, and issuance of permanent identity cards:** This makes it possible for the biometric and facial details of the candidate to appear on a customized identity card issued by the examination authority, which must accompany the students to the examination venue as an examination pass. With this approach, it is impossible to impersonate as every candidate must only be admitted to an examination hall after screening and ascertaining the biometric details.
- iv. **Utilization of body scanner and metal detector:** As a pre-examination screening exercise, every candidate should be checked using the body scanner and metal detector. These devices will help to reveal any mobile device hidden anywhere on the candidate's body.
- v. **Provision of approved calculator for candidates:** Since some scientific calculators have other specialized functions that could aid examination malpractice, simplified calculators should be provided for the candidates to use in examinations that require calculations.
- vi. **Installation of electronic signal detector:** This device helps to detect and prevent any form of electronic signal in form of SMS, phone call or social media chats. With this in place, no mobile gadget inside an examination hall can communicate with anyone outside.
- vii. **Installation of Closed-Circuit Television (CCTV):** This is a camera that records every activity within its area of coverage. Such recordings are viewed live or stored up for later playback. If this device is installed and connected to a monitor, an invigilator could be assigned to monitor it while the examination lasts. If candidates know they are being monitored, they will not want to cheat, and in case they do, they will be caught and dealt with according to laid down penalties.
- viii. **Boom Mics installation:** Boom mic is known for amplifying silent sounds. If this device is installed at strategic positions in an examination hall, the most silent whispers by candidates will be amplified and the act of whispering answers discouraged.
- ix. **Provision of sophisticated ICT equipped examination hall:** Most halls designated for examinations are just very conducive for cheating. The school management should build and equip examination halls with partitions and sitting arrangements that make it impossible for candidates to interact or cheat freely. Each seat should have a desktop computer that is functional to allow for computer-based examinations. Installation of CCTV cameras and boom mics at strategic positions in the hall and arrangement for light and ventilation will make the hall examination ready. Again, having only one entrance and one exit makes it easier for screening of candidates for a given examination.

Conclusively, examination malpractice, being as old as examination itself has done enormous damage to the students, teachers, parents, educational system, and the society at large. Bearing in mind that it has become a safe means of acquiring certificates for lazy and desperate students and a good business for corrupt officers and teachers, it would take very effective and deliberate effort to combat it. In view of the enormous potentials associated with ICT tools, they could be helpful, if well utilized in taking proactive measures to checkmate every type of examination malpractice.

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