

Examination malpractice: A threat to quality education

Abstract

Examination malpractice is an unwholesome practice encapsulating different types of malicious means adopted by unserious students to cheat during examinations in order to score high marks and pass in the examinations. The incidence of examination malpractice has become so endemic that the penalty hitherto meted out to its perpetrators is almost having no statistically significant effects on them. There is an astronomical increase in the number of people and institutions involved in this social malaise. The public has not thought of the effects and the repercussions of their endorsement of examination malpractice. This paper therefore addresses the prevalence rate of examinations malpractice, the forms and agents involved in examination malpractice. The paper also highlights the effects of examination malpractice on the economy.

Keywords: Examination malpractice, prevalence, quality education, threat, agents

Introduction

In recent times, examination malpractice is becoming a norm and culture in most countries including Ghana. Examination malpractice is experience in almost all examinations at every level of education. According to Buah (2014), examination malpractice is undoubtedly a canker in the educational system of Ghana and examination malpractices happen everywhere in the world irrespective of their kinds or nature. This is because students, teachers, parents, security personnel and the examination bodies are reluctant to change their minds and attitudes towards examinations. It is important to note that examination malpractices are not only limited to Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) and West African Senior Secondary Certificate Education (WASSCE) candidates alone, but also there have reported cases at the tertiary level across the country.

The problem is that the country is likely to miss the quality education target in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) if she continues to compromise the integrity of the system of assessment that usually form part and parcel of any quality education delivery system.

In other words, if the country continues to experience examination malpractices it would affect the achievement of quality education which the country is yearning to achieve under the SDGs. In spite of the interactions with candidates during sensitization programmes and engagement with stakeholders, quite a number of malpractices are recorded every year (Onuka & Durowoju, 2013; Onyibe, Uma & Ibina, 2015)

Examination malpractice

Olanipekun (2013) and Omemu (2015) defined examination malpractices as all unaccepted means that students use to pass examination. Examination malpractice according to Ojonemi, Enejoh, Enejoh and Olalunmbi (2013) is cheating in the examination or any intention to benefit or give undue advantage to oneself or another by deceit or fraud, before, during and after examination.

Available evidence shows that in Ghana since 2009, the incidence of examination malpractice has been on the rise, especially in the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) and the West African Senior Secondary Certificate Examination (WASSCE) (WAEC, 2016). The table shows the prevalence of examination malpractice in WASSCE from 2006 to 2018.

Table 1: *Statistics on examination malpractice in WASSCE*

Year	No. Sat	No. Of Cands. involved in Malpractice Cases	% Of Cands. involved in Malpractice Cases
2006	120492	9872	8.19
2007	129479	4101	3.16
2008	131353	2160	1.64
2009	152584	3273	2.15
2010*	-	-	-
2011	148697	4209	2.83
2012	173655	3439	1.98
2013	409711	5653	1.38
2014	240662	8051	3.35
2015	267741	12746	4.76
2016	270318	11936	4.42

2017	287353	13793	4.80
2018	316999	2787	0.88
2019	346094	48,855	14.1
Total	2647232	130875	4.37

*Ghana did not present candidates for 2010 WASSCE for school candidates

Source: (WAEC, 2019)

From Table 1, it could be seen that after 2006 there was a reduction in the percentage of students involved in examination malpractice from 8.19% to 1.64% in 2008. However, the percentage rose thereafter to 2.83% in 2011 after which again reduced to 1.38% in 2013. Once again, the centre got loosed and the malpractice rose again up to 4.80% in 2017. Once again the percentage reduced to 0.88% in 2018. Unfortunately, 14.1% of the students had their results within because of alleged involvement in examination malpractices. It could be realised that measures adopted to control examination malpractice have not been effective. This is because patterns have been irregular. This means that the measures have not been sustainable and that sustainable measure has to be sought for. The sad part of the situation is that between 2006 and 2019, the nation has registered a total of 130875 unfaithful WASSCE candidates representing 4.37% of the WASSCE candidates between 2016 and 2019. This number is large enough to mere the credibility of Ghana's education system.

Forms of examination malpractice

It is important to note that examination malpractices are not only limited to BECE and WASSCE candidates alone, but also there have reported cases at the tertiary level across the country. According the WAEC (2017), the predominant form of examination malpractice perpetuated by stakeholders are copying from colleagues, seeking and giving assistants from invigilators, teachers smuggling copied answers to students in the examinations, parents and school authorities aiding leakage of examination questions, security personnel aiding and abetting illegalities, and referring to books kept at places of convenience (Olanipekun, 2013; WAEC,2019). Examination malpractice is categorized into three domains and this categorization scheme constituted a prevalence hierarchy: Giving, receiving, or taking information from others; using unacceptable materials or information and besieging the assessment information. Cheating or examination malpractices may also be categorized as hi-tech or low- tech, depending on its

level of sophistication (Oko & Adie, 2016). That is, whether the cheating is individual or collaborative. Examination malpractice in Ghana has graduated to hi-tec and collaborative. This has made the fight against examination malpractice difficult.

Agents of Examination Malpractices

Almost all stakeholders of education in one way or the other contributes to examination malpractice. These include: parents/guardians and school authorities who buy 'live' papers for students to study beforehand or bribe examiners or invigilators to compromise the examination rules; invigilators and supervisors who collect money and turn a blind eye on whatever happens in the examination room; students who want to get the best score at all cost, and the examination officials who construct test items and mark the papers, those in the questions papers printing room, other officials of the examining body who process the question papers, supervise printing arrangements or transport printed questions, to examination centres (Sam, 2012, Nnam & Inah, 2015).

The most popular forms of examination malpractices perpetuated by the agents identified with malpractice include bringing foreign materials to the examination hall, copying from nearby students, exchanging information in examination hall and copying points on tables, one's thighs, hands, etc (Omeri, 2012; Yusuf, Yinusa & Bamgbose, 2105; Sam, 2012; Oyieko, 2017). This means that any mechanism that is able to reduce the degree to which students can utilize materials brought to the examination hall, can copy from colleagues sitting closer, or exchange the information; such mechanism has the potential to reduce examination malpractice among students during WASSCEs. Performance-based assessment is characterised by multiple correct answers which the approach may differ from one examinee to the other making successful copying or exchanging of information difficult. It is also possible for students to utilize information brought to the examination hall because; the process would have to be created right in the examination hall so preparing answers beforehand would be difficult.

The causes of malpractice by WASCCE candidates have been given as inadequate preparation of students (Ifijeh, Michael-Onuoha, Ilogho & Osinulu, 2015; Ogunji, 2011). This means that by the traditional assessment practice, students are not highly motivated to learn prior to the examination. Also, the students perceive the concepts, difficult to learn because; the assessment tasks have no relationship with real life experience making them completely abstract with realistic bearing. This de-motivates the students to learn and thus resort to other mechanics

to pass the examination (Sam, 2012 & Dzakadzie, 2015). Performance-based assessment have been proven by Arhin (2015); Brennan (2000) and Burkhardt and Swan (2008) to provide feedback to students that stimulates learning and also has positive effect on students learning. This will help students to equip themselves for the WASSCE.

This means that any decision made on these students who escaped the punishments are not reliable. This is because some of the students were affected by the behaviour of others. The end result is that the products of our education system will not be able to serve the purpose of education in Ghana.

Effect of malpractice on quality education

The canker of examination is negatively affecting the quality of education in Ghana. As a result of students' assurance for 'help' during examination, students' commitment to learning is affected. The entire focus of learning has been placed on passing examinations and so if there is hope for assistance during examination, there is no need of spending time to learn (Peters & Okon, 2014). Again, performance of professionals is negatively affected because people are able to cheat in examination even at the level of their professional education. Thus, the individuals come out from the training with nothing to offer society. Because peoples cannot 'live' their certificates, society doubt the process by which students acquire their certificate. So, the credibility of school assessment process is lost. With this, it becomes difficult to employ people base on their certificates because most people are different from their certificate. As a result of frequent cases of examination malpractice, the society is losing confidence in the certificates awarded by some institutions and examination bodies (Suleman, 2015; Uzoigwe, 2015). Cheating in examination has become so 'internalized and legitimized' that some people now regard it as a normal process of passing examination in Ghana and even beyond

It is important to note that those who condone and connive in examination malpractice are not only doing a harm to the nation but also to themselves because the negative effect of malpractice is felt by all. At least all seek professional support (from nurse, teacher, and lawyer). If students are helped to cheat back at school, the society become their victims after school. The time to act is now!

Way forward

Several attempts have been made to control this canker of examination malpractice. For instance, there have been naming and shaming of culprits, cancellation of subject or entire results of students involved. The West African Examination Council (WAEC) has announced new measures to control examination malpractices. These measures include deployment of biometric access control and CCTV cameras at the security printing division of WAEC, strict body search at the press house, among others (WEAC, 2022). These measures would control nation-wide leakage of examination questions.

The limitation to these measures is that it is difficult to control malpractices that happens at the centres such as invigilators leaking questions to people to solve and distribute to the students and collation. It is therefore recommended that the items (testing process) are used to control examination malpractice in itself (Brennan, 2006; Sam, 2012). This is achieved by the use of 'individualized testing' or 'differentiated testing'. In this procedure, the items are constructed to mimic real life situations where students have to produce different correct answers (Gyamfi, 2022). In this, there is nothing like one correct answer. This limits collation in the examination room and those who answer questions for students from outside would have a difficult task producing different answers for each student.

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