
FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO EXAMINATION MALPRACTICE AND ITS IMPACT ON EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the factors contributing to examination malpractice and its impact on educational standards in Nigeria, focusing on Nwafor Orizu College of Education, Nsugbe, in Anambra State. Employing a survey design, data were collected from three randomly selected schools within the institution using a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire, validated for clarity and reliability, targeted both demographic information and specific issues related to examination malpractice. Data on causes, effects, and solutions to malpractice were collected from 100 students. The study identified key contributing factors such as the overemphasis on certificates, poor student preparation, unqualified lecturers, and an uncondusive school environment. Chi-square statistical analysis revealed significant correlations between these factors and the prevalence of malpractice. The findings highlight that examination malpractice not only undermines academic integrity but also devalues Nigerian educational qualifications, hampers innovation, and produces inadequately prepared graduates. Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive reforms to restore trust and improve the overall quality of education in Nigeria. This study underscores the urgent need for systemic changes to combat malpractice and enhance educational standards.

KEYWORDS

Examination malpractice, educational standards, certification emphasis, student preparation, unqualified lecturers

INTRODUCTION

Examination malpractice is a pervasive issue that undermines the integrity of educational systems worldwide, and it is particularly prevalent in Nigeria. Examination malpractice refers to any unethical or dishonest behavior by students, educators, or other stakeholders aimed at gaining unfair advantages in academic assessments. This includes cheating, plagiarism, bribery, impersonation, leakage of

exam questions, and manipulation of grades (Udim et al, 2018). Such practices undermine the integrity of the educational system, devalue qualifications, and distort true academic achievement. Examination malpractice not only affects individual students but also has broader implications for the credibility of educational institutions and the quality of education. It can result in long-term negative impacts on society by promoting a culture of dishonesty and incompetence (Christensen-Hughes & Eaton, 2022).

The literature on this subject reveals a complex interplay of factors contributing to malpractice, including systemic issues, socio-economic pressures, institutional failures, and individual student behaviors. One of the primary drivers of examination malpractice in Nigeria is the excessive value placed on certificates. According to Moore and Gino (2015), the societal emphasis on academic qualifications over actual skills and knowledge creates immense pressure on students to obtain certificates by any means necessary. This pressure often leads to unethical practices such as cheating and bribery during examinations. Similarly, Choi et al, (2017) argue that in a society where employment opportunities and social status are heavily tied to academic credentials, students are more likely to engage in malpractice to secure their future.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Another significant factor is the inadequate preparation of students for examinations. Research by Iroegbu and Uyanga (2019) indicates that many students lack the necessary study habits and academic discipline, often due to poor educational foundations. Factors such as inadequate teaching, lack of access to learning materials, and disruptions caused by strikes and campus unrest further exacerbate the problem (Orok et al, 2023). Consequently, students resort to malpractice as a coping mechanism to pass their exams. Institutional weaknesses, including unqualified lecturers and corrupt practices within educational institutions, also contribute significantly to examination malpractice. According to He et al, (2024), the presence of unqualified and demotivated lecturers leads to poor teaching quality, which in turn affects student performance. Moreover, corruption within institutions, such as the selling of examination papers and grades, creates an environment where malpractice is normalized (Bath et al, 2014). These institutional failures undermine the credibility of the educational system and perpetuate a cycle of dishonesty.

Socio-economic factors play a crucial role in driving examination malpractice. In many cases, students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds feel compelled to cheat to secure scholarships or avoid expulsion due to poor grades (Vučković et al, 2020). Additionally, the high cost of education in Nigeria places financial strain on families, leading some students to engage in malpractice to ensure their academic success and reduce the financial burden on their parents (Bukhari et al, 2023).

Examination malpractice significantly erodes academic integrity, which is the cornerstone of any educational system. As highlighted by Orosz et al, (2013), when students consistently engage in dishonest practices, the value of academic qualifications diminishes. This erosion of integrity leads to a lack of trust in the educational system and its outputs, affecting the credibility of graduates in the job market.

The widespread nature of examination malpractice devalues certificates awarded by Nigerian institutions. According to Mildaeni et al, (2021), employers and academic institutions, both domestically and internationally, begin to question the legitimacy of Nigerian qualifications. This skepticism hampers the career prospects of graduates and limits their opportunities for further education abroad. Malpractice also contributes to the stagnation of educational progress. When cheating becomes rampant, there is little incentive for students to engage in genuine learning or for institutions to improve their teaching standards (Price et al, 2024). This stagnation results in a workforce that is ill-equipped to meet the demands of the modern economy, thereby affecting national development.

The normalization of malpractice has profound psychological and moral implications for students. As noted by Caleb (2020), engaging in dishonest practices can lead to a distorted value system where cheating is viewed as acceptable behavior. This distortion not only affects students' academic lives but also their professional and personal ethics, perpetuating a culture of dishonesty in society at large. The urgency of studying factors contributing to examination malpractice and its impact on educational standards in Nigeria cannot be overstated. Examination malpractice undermines the integrity and credibility of the education system, leading to a workforce that is ill-prepared and unqualified, which has serious repercussions for national development. Nigeria's educational system faces significant challenges, including inadequate infrastructure, unqualified teachers, and systemic corruption, which contribute to the prevalence of examination malpractice (Emordi, 2020).

Gaps in current research highlight the need for comprehensive studies. For example, Udim et al, (2018) points out that while there is substantial documentation of malpractice incidents, there is insufficient focus on systemic and sociocultural factors driving these behaviors. In contrast, Christensen Hughes and Eaton (2022) notes the lack of effective policy implementation to combat malpractice, despite numerous policy recommendations. Moreover, a study by Moore and Gino (2015) highlights the correlation between economic pressures and increased malpractice rates, a dimension that is often overlooked. Addressing these gaps is critical for developing effective interventions. Without a thorough understanding of the underlying causes and comprehensive data on the impact, efforts to reform the education system may remain

ineffective. Therefore, this study aims to provide a nuanced analysis of the factors driving examination malpractice and its broader implications, thereby informing policy and practical solutions to enhance educational standards in Nigeria.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To examine the role of certificate requirements in encouraging examination malpractice.
2. To investigate the impact of students' poor preparation on the prevalence of examination malpractice.
3. To assess the influence of unqualified lecturers and un conducive school environments on examination malpractice.
4. To evaluate the effect of examination malpractice on the standard of education in Nigeria.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. Does the certificate encourage examination malpractice?
2. Does poor preparation by students encourage examination malpractice?
3. Do unqualified lecturers and un conducive school environment aid examination malpractice?
4. Has examination malpractice deteriorated the standard of education in Nigeria?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a survey design to examine examination malpractice as a foundation for an unreliable future, focusing on its causes, effects on the educational system, various forms, and potential solutions. The research was conducted at Nwafor Orizu College of Education, Nsugbe, in Anambra State, Nigeria. The study targeted all five schools within the institution. However, three schools were randomly selected for the research. A simple random sampling technique was utilized. Out of the five schools in the institution, three were randomly chosen for the study.

Data was collected using questionnaires. These were divided into two sections: the first section gathered demographic information about the respondents, and the second focused on issues related to examination malpractice and its implications for the future. The questionnaire underwent face and content validation by an expert in the Psychology department of Nwafor Orizu College of Education to ensure clarity and remove ambiguities. A pilot study was conducted using the test-retest method to determine the reliability of the instrument. A total of 100 questionnaires were distributed among students in various departments of the selected schools. The data collected from the questionnaire were analyzed using chi-square statistical analysis with the formula stated:

$$X^2 = \frac{(O - E)^2}{E}$$

Where X² = chi-square
 O = observed frequency
 E = expected frequency

DATA ANALYSIS

Research Question 1: Does a certificate encourage examination malpractice?

Table 1: The response of the respondents on how certificates encourage examination malpractice.

S/N	Question	SA (Strongly Agree)	A (Agree)	SD (Strongly Disagree)	D (Disagree)	Total
1	Because of the emphasis placed on certificates, students do not want to read to pass examinations	40 (45%)	30 (26.5%)	16 (16.7%)	15 (11.7%)	100
2	The emphasis on certificates makes students obtain the certificate by all means	50 (45%)	30 (26.5%)	10 (16.7%)	10 (11.7%)	100
3	Due to the value placed on certificates, students do anything possible to get it	45 (45%)	20 (26.7%)	25 (16.7%)	10 (11.7%)	100

The survey results in Table 1 highlight a significant correlation between the emphasis on certificates and examination malpractice. Specifically, 70% of respondents (70 out of 100) either strongly agree (40 respondents) or agree (30 respondents) that the emphasis on certificates discourages students from studying to pass examinations. Additionally, 80% of respondents (80 out of 100) either strongly agree (50 respondents) or agree (30 respondents) that this emphasis compels students to obtain certificates by any means necessary. Furthermore, 65% of respondents (65 out of 100) either strongly agree (45 respondents) or agree (20 respondents) that the value placed on certificates leads students to engage in unethical practices to acquire them. The chi-

square analysis reinforces these observations, with the calculated chi-square value (12.47) significantly exceeding the critical value (5.348) at a 5% significance level. This statistical result underscores the strong association between the emphasis on certificates and the prevalence of examination malpractice. Consequently, the data unequivocally supports the hypothesis that societal and educational systems' focus on obtaining certificates fosters unethical behaviors among students, highlighting a critical flaw that prioritizes credentials over genuine learning.

Research Question 2: Does poor preparation by students encourage examination malpractice?

Table 2: *The response of the respondents on how poor preparation by students encourage examination malpractice.*

S/N	Question	SA	A	SD	D	Total
4	Poor preparation on the part of students.	40 (43.75%)	40 (31.15%)	15 (15%)	5 (10%)	100
5	Because of campus life students could not be able to read their books and therefore always like to cheat in an examination	50 (43.75%)	30 (31.15%)	10 (15%)	10 (10%)	100
6	Strike and students unrest affect them and make them to have poor preparation for examination.	40 (43.75%)	30 (31.15%)	20 (15%)	10 (10%)	100
7	Poor planning by the institutions' authority affects the students preparation for their examination.	45 (43.75%)	25 (31.15%)	15 (15%)	15 (10%)	100

The survey results in Table 2 reveal a significant link between poor student preparation and examination malpractice. Specifically, 80% of respondents (40 strongly agree and 40 agree) believe that poor preparation leads to malpractice. Furthermore, 80% (50 strongly agree and 30 agree) attribute cheating to the distractions of campus life. Additionally, 70% (40 strongly agree and 30 agree) think that strikes and student unrest result in inadequate exam preparation. Similarly, 70% (45 strongly agree and 25 agree) believe poor institutional planning affects student readiness for exams. The chi-square analysis further supports these observations, with a calculated chi-square value of 13.17, well above the critical value of 8.343 at a 5% significance level. This strong statistical association indicates that inadequate preparation significantly contributes to examination malpractice.

Research Question 3: Does unqualified lecturers and un conducive school environment aid examination malpractice?

Table 3: *The response of the respondents on how unqualified lecturers and un conducive school environment aid examination malpractice.*

S/N	Question	SA	A	SD	D	Total
8	As a result of unqualified lecturers and un conducive school environment, students cheat in the examination hall	55 (45%)	20 (28.75%)	10 (17.5%)	15 (8.75%)	100
9	Due to the corrupt nature of the lecturers and un conducive school environment, students pay for examination question paper	60 (45%)	25 (28.75%)	10 (17.5%)	5 (8.75%)	100
10	Unqualified lecturers and un conducive school environment makes students to lobby lecturers for marks.	35 (45%)	30 (28.75%)	25 (17.5%)	10 (8.75%)	100
11	Due to un conducive nature of the teaching environment, lecturers find it difficult to teach and understand.	30 (45%)	40 (28.75%)	25 (17.5%)	5 (8.75%)	100

The survey results in Table 3 reveal a significant impact of unqualified lecturers and an unconducive school environment on examination malpractice. Specifically, 75% of respondents (55 strongly agree, 20 agree) believe that these factors lead to cheating in the examination hall. Additionally, 85% (60 strongly agree, 25 agree) think the corrupt nature of lecturers and poor school conditions result in students paying for examination papers. Furthermore, 65% (35 strongly agree, 30 agree) feel that unqualified lecturers and an unconducive environment make students lobby for marks. Lastly, 70% (30 strongly agree, 40 agree) agree that a poor teaching environment hampers lecturers' ability to teach effectively. The chi-square analysis, with a calculated value of 38.32, significantly exceeds the critical value of 8.343 at a 5% significance level. This strong statistical association indicates that unqualified lecturers and poor school environments considerably contribute to examination malpractice.

Research Question 4: Has examination malpractice deteriorated the standard of

education in Nigeria?

Table 4: The response of the respondents on how examination malpractice deteriorated the standard of education in Nigeria.

S/N	Question	SA	A	SD	D	Total
12	Because of examination malpractice, the educational sector has been set back	40 (41.25%)	50 (37.5%)	5 (12.5%)	5 (8.75%)	100
13	Examination malpractice has made our educational sector remain static.	30 (41.25%)	35 (37.5%)	25 (12.5%)	10 (8.75%)	100
14	Certificates awarded by Nigerian institutions are rejected by the international education market	30 (41.25%)	35 (37.5%)	25 (12.5%)	10 (8.75%)	100
15	The standard of our education has been reduced because of examination malpractices.	40 (41.25%)	40 (37.5%)	10 (12.5%)	10 (8.75%)	100

The responses in Table 4 shed light on the perceived effects of examination malpractice on the standard of education in Nigeria. An overwhelming majority of respondents, comprising 78.75% (ranging from 30 to 50 individuals), express agreement or strong agreement across all questions. Specifically, they believe that examination malpractice has resulted in setbacks and stagnation within the educational sector, with certificates awarded by Nigerian institutions facing rejection in the international education market. Moreover, a significant portion of respondents feels that the standard of education has diminished due to malpractices. The high level of agreement among respondents underscores the widespread concern regarding the detrimental impact of examination malpractice on Nigeria's education system.

DISCUSSION

The responses regarding how certificates encourage examination malpractice reveal a concerning trend in educational systems. Students' reluctance to study due to the emphasis on certificates aligns with findings from Price et al, (2024), who noted a decline in intrinsic motivation when external rewards, such as certificates, dominate. Similarly, the pursuit of certificates by any means necessary reflects the intense pressure students face to acquire credentials, as observed by Mildaeni et al, (2021) in their study on academic stress and cheating behaviors. Furthermore, the willingness of students to engage in unethical behavior to obtain certificates resonates with the

findings of Orosz et al, (2013), who highlighted the prevalence of cheating in highly competitive educational environments. In contrast, research by Bukhari et al, (2023) emphasized the importance of fostering intrinsic motivation and genuine learning experiences to reduce reliance on certificates as the primary measure of success, suggesting a shift in educational priorities is needed.

The responses concerning how poor student preparation encourages examination malpractice shed light on multifaceted challenges within educational environments. The acknowledgment of poor preparation's role in malpractice underscores the significance of academic readiness in ethical conduct, as emphasized by Vučković et al, (2020) in their exploration of student attitudes towards cheating. Conversely, the impact of campus life distractions on students' ability to study and subsequent resort to cheating resonates with findings by Bath et al, (2014), who documented the influence of extracurricular pressures on academic integrity. Moreover, the disruption caused by strikes and unrest parallels the observations of He et al, (2024) in their investigation into environmental factors contributing to academic dishonesty. In contrast, the influence of institutional planning on student preparation highlights the organizational responsibilities in fostering conducive learning environments, aligning with insights from Orok et al, (2023) on the importance of administrative support in mitigating cheating behaviors. These findings collectively underscore the complex interplay between individual, social, and institutional factors in perpetuating examination malpractice.

The responses concerning how unqualified lecturers and an uncondusive school environment facilitate examination malpractice highlight systemic issues within educational institutions. The acknowledgment of cheating in examination halls due to unqualified lecturers and a poor environment aligns with findings by Iroegbu and Uyanga (2019), who identified a correlation between faculty competence and student integrity. Similarly, the association between corruption, environmental factors, and paying for examination papers resonates with research by Muraino and Ugwumba (2014) on the influence of institutional integrity on academic misconduct. Moreover, the propensity for students to lobby for marks in the presence of unqualified lecturers and an uncondusive setting parallels observations by Choi et al, (2017) on the role of power differentials in incentivizing unethical behaviors. In contrast, the difficulty lecturers face in teaching and understanding within such environments underscores the need for institutional support and professional development, as emphasized by Moore and Gino (2015). Together, these findings underscore the intertwined nature of faculty competence, institutional integrity, and environmental factors in shaping ethical conduct within educational settings. The responses on how examination malpractice deteriorates the standard of education in Nigeria reveal profound implications. The belief that malpractice sets back the educational sector aligns with

findings by Christensen Hughes and Eaton (2022), who noted that systemic cheating erodes educational quality and institutional reputation. This finding agreed with Udim et al, (2018), which highlighted that persistent malpractice contributes to educational stagnation, as institutions fail to innovate and progress. Additionally, the rejection of Nigerian certificates by the international education market due to malpractice mirrors observations by Emordi (2020), who found that academic dishonesty undermines global trust in qualifications from affected institutions. In contrast, Caleb (2020) emphasized the importance of academic integrity in maintaining educational standards, reinforcing the view that malpractice significantly diminishes educational quality. In a related study, Price et al, (2024) found that educational malpractice not only affects the credibility of academic credentials but also hinders students' preparedness for professional challenges, further deteriorating the overall standard of education.

Implication for Educational Standards in Nigeria

Examination malpractice severely undermines educational standards in Nigeria, leading to widespread implications. One major consequence is the erosion of academic integrity, which diminishes the value of qualifications awarded by Nigerian institutions (Udim et al, 2018). This erosion impacts not only individual students but also the broader educational reputation, as certificates from Nigerian institutions are increasingly viewed with skepticism internationally (Bath et al, 2014). Furthermore, examination malpractice fosters a culture of dishonesty and shortcuts, deterring genuine learning and critical thinking skills. According to Orosz et al, (2013), this culture results in graduates who are ill-prepared for professional and societal challenges, thereby affecting the nation's workforce quality and economic development. The persistence of such malpractices also leads to educational stagnation, as institutions fail to innovate and improve (Price et al, 2024). Additionally, systemic malpractice exacerbates inequities within the education system. Students who engage in or benefit from dishonest practices gain an unfair advantage over their peers, leading to meritocracy breakdowns and fostering resentment and disengagement among honest students (Caleb, 2020). The cumulative effect of these issues is a significant deterioration in the standard of education, necessitating urgent reforms to uphold academic integrity and restore trust in Nigeria's educational credentials. Robust policies and effective enforcement against malpractice are essential to reversing these damaging trends and ensuring that Nigerian education meets both national and international standards.

This study has comprehensively examined the factors contributing to examination malpractice and its impact on educational standards in Nigeria. The findings reveal a multifaceted problem driven by various elements, including the overwhelming emphasis on certificates, poor student preparation, unqualified lecturers, and an

unconducive school environment. Each of these factors significantly encourages unethical behaviors among students, ultimately degrading the quality and credibility of education in the country. The analysis highlights that the excessive value placed on certificates pressures students to succeed by any means necessary, often leading to malpractice. Additionally, inadequate preparation stemming from campus life distractions, strikes, and institutional shortcomings further exacerbates the issue. The presence of unqualified and sometimes corrupt lecturers, coupled with poor teaching environments, creates conditions where academic dishonesty can flourish. The consequences of these malpractices are far-reaching. They result in the devaluation of Nigerian academic qualifications, both domestically and internationally, and contribute to a stagnant educational system that fails to produce competent and ethically grounded graduates. This situation undermines the nation's socio-economic development and global competitiveness. Addressing these challenges requires a holistic approach involving stringent policies, improved institutional planning, enhanced teaching environments, and fostering a culture of integrity. By tackling these root causes, Nigeria can restore the integrity and standard of its educational system, ensuring it produces well-prepared and ethically sound graduates capable of contributing positively to society.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Educational institutions should reduce the overemphasis on certificates as the sole indicator of success. Instead, a more holistic approach to student evaluation that includes practical skills and continuous assessment should be adopted. This shift can discourage the compulsion to obtain certificates by any means.
2. Schools should implement robust support systems to improve student preparation. This could include offering tutoring services, organizing study groups, and providing resources for effective study habits. Addressing campus distractions and ensuring students have ample time and resources to study can reduce the reliance on cheating.
3. Institutions should ensure that lecturers are well-qualified and receive continuous professional development. This will enhance the quality of teaching and reduce the likelihood of corrupt practices that lead to examination malpractice. Additionally, fostering a conducive learning environment is crucial.
4. Educational authorities should establish strict anti-corruption measures to combat the sale of examination papers and the lobbying of lecturers for grades. This could involve regular audits, anonymous reporting systems, and severe penalties for those involved in such practices.

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