

The Resilience of Examination Malpractice in Nigeria: Cultural and Religious Approach

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Abstract

A peep at the future of Nigeria instills fear and anxiety. This is because the educational sector which prepares the future of the nation has been crippled by the menace of examination malpractice. No one bothers to study anymore, as everyone seems to have joined the examination fraud bandwagon. Ruefully, this baneful act seems to have defiled every eradicating effort. The consequence is the production of half-baked graduates who are supposedly the leaders of tomorrow. Hence, this paper analyzed the Resilience of Examination Malpractice in Nigeria from a Cultural Perspective. With the use of critical phenomenological method, the paper found out some cultural factors that have fuelled and abetted the baneful act of examination malpractice in the country. However, the researchers recommended the involvement of religion in the fight against examination malpractice in order to save the country's educational sector from collapse.

Keywords: Examination Malpractice, Educational Sector, Culture, Religion.

Introduction

For how long shall the menace of examination malpractice continue in Nigeria? This is the question that bothers the minds of many Nigerians. However, it seems to be 'one question, too many' as many factors have contributed in making the issue more complicated and complex. Indeed, the menace of examination malpractice is one of the major seemingly intractable problems facing the country. Though, traceable to decades ago, it has remained afresh and evolutionally thorny in the country.

According to the Director General, National Orientation Agency (NOA), Nigeria is ranked number one in the world, by the Examination Malpractice Index. It is more disheartening when one considers the damage this nefarious act has done to the education sector in the country. Obviously, the education sector has been wrecked and brought to its knees by this menace. Unfortunately, the effects of

these are felt throughout the whole country. There is no doubt, that the baneful act of examination malpractice is the major contributor to the production of half baked graduates, on whose shoulders lies the future of the country. Hence, the future of the nation has become gloomy and grim.

Yet, the Government and Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) have evinced strong desire to eradicate this menace. According to Mr. Charles Eguridu “The incidence of examination malpractice must be checked at all cost if we expect our educational sector to regain not only its past glory, but also improve and compete with those of the other nations” (Ogunmola 2013). Hence, there has been series of efforts aimed at curbing the problem. These efforts range from the seizure of examination results, through enlightenment campaigns, to the enactment of laws and jail terms for offenders.

However, despite all these efforts the despicable act has resiliently continued unabated. Several reasons might have been advanced to explain this, but the cultural context of this problem seems to be the best port of call. Hence, this paper attempts to analyze the resilience of examination malpractice in Nigeria, from a cultural perspective. Also since several other efforts to curb the problem have yielded less desired fruits, the researchers seek the opinion of Religion as a way out.

Examination malpractice, culture and religion: Definition

Examination Malpractice is referred to any act of cheating or dishonesty in or outside examination halls aimed at gaining unmerited advantage. In a broader sense, it is defined as any form of cheating like copying from one another, bringing in prepared answers, collaboration with invigilator/lecturer, impersonation, illegal removal of answers scripts, manipulation of registration forms, purchase or sell of certificates, as well as bribing and soliciting for help during and after examination. It can also be defined as any act of disobedience to the rules and regulations governing examination in schools.

Culture has always been known as the totality of people’s way of life. It includes the belief, values, language, acts and all the cosmological attributes of a people which guide their interactions among themselves as well as with other people.

Religion: it is always difficult to avoid the emphasis that is often made in each attempt to give a definition of religion. This emphasis has always been on the challenge of evolving a generally acceptable definition. Madu (1999:19) attempted a subjective and objective definition of religion. According to him, religion could be subjectively defined as the “very consciousness of dependence on a transcendent being and the very propensity or inclination to exhibit cult or to worship”. Whereas objectively, “it is a complex of truths, laws and rites by which man is sub-ordinated to the transcendent being”. However, for the purpose of this paper, religion can be defined as the belief in the supernatural being which is manifested

in the act of worship and moral practices. Of-course, religion furnishes a two-way relationship which is the relationship between man and the supernatural being as well as the one between man and his fellow man.

Brief History of Examination Malpractice In Nigeria

The menace of Examination Malpractice is quite old in Nigeria. According to historical records, the menace is traceable to the year as far back as 1914, when there was a leakage of question paper into the Senior Cambridge Local Examination. However, some traced the history of this menace to the wave of cancellation of Nigerian's candidate paper in 1984 during the 1940 Matriculation Examination to the then "Yaba" Nigeria Technical (Olushola 2006). Yet, the most popular historical position on the history of examination malpractice in Nigeria is that which is traced to 1970. This is popularly known as "Expo 1970" and was a turning point in the incidence of Examination Malpractice in the country. This was the year that witnessed the exposition of the West African Examination Council (WAEC) question papers on a massive scale in Nigeria. The leakage of the question papers was so much that virtually all the schools and Examination Centres in the country, could lay hands on several subjects. Expectedly, the same year 1970 witnessed the "total cancellation of the papers taken in that examination and all the candidates affected were compelled to retake the examination in May/June 1971, while the first attempt was in November/December 1970" (Opata 2003:3).

It was after this 1970 incidence, that the attention of the general public was formally drawn to the issue of examination malpractice in the country. And what happened in subsequent examinations in the country, is history

The Fight against Examination Malpractice in Nigeria

The realization of the danger of examination malpractice as well as concern for the Educational sector has put the government on its toes in the fight against Examination Malpractice in the country. For instance, as far back as 1984, the government made a Decree popularly known as Decree 20 of 1984, to curb the unbearable increase in the act of Examination malpractice in schools. Part of the Decree reads thus;

Any person who fraudulently or with intent to cheat or secure any unfair advantage to himself or any other person or any abuse of his office, produces, sells or buys or otherwise deals with any question paper intended for the Examination of persons at any Examination or commits any of the offences specified in section 3 (27) (c) of this decree, shall be guilty of an offence and on convict can be sentenced to 21 years imprisonment.(Sulaimon 2010)

However, in 1999, the Examination Malpractice Act was made, in which the above decree was reversed. Section 33 of the Act stipulates punishment ranging from a fine of N50,000 to N100,000 and imprisonment for a term of 3-4 years with or without option of fine. The stipulation relates to the following offences like Cheating at Examination, Stealing of Question papers, personation, Disruption of orderliness at Examinations, Disturbance at Examinations, Misconduct at Examinations, Obstruction of Supervisor, Forgery of Result slip, Breach of Duty, Conspiracy, aiding and Offences by Corporate bodies.

In addition, the Government has been fighting examination malpractice on the platform of the National Orientation Agency (NOA) both at the state and National level. In 2001, for instance, the National Orientation Agency, Enugu State, under the leadership of its Director, Chief O.C. Odo organized a workshop on examination malpractice in schools. This workshop was organized in every educational zone of the state (Opata 2003:23). Likewise, in a more recent development, the Director General of the Agency Mike Omeri met with the Examination Ethics Marshals Internationals in Lokoja, to launch a campaign to raise the integrity standard in the nation's educational system. Also similar enlightenment campaigns and seminars on examination malpractice have been held in several parts of the country by several Non-governmental Organizations like Examination Ethics Marshals International (EEMI), Examination Ethics Project (EEP) etc. and other stakeholders in the country.

The seizure or cancellation of examination results is another way through which the menace of examination malpractice has been vigorously fought in the country. The West African Examination Council (WACE) is at the forefront in the adoption of this method. For instances, as far back as 1970, in which there was the exposition of the West African Examination Council (WAEC) question papers on a massive scale in Nigeria, the country witnessed a total cancellation of the papers written in that year. All the candidates affected were compelled to retake the examination in 1971. However, more recently, in 2011 the menace compelled the Council to seize up to 39, 066 results of candidates who wrote November/December West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE), while in 2012, an estimated number of 47,289 results were withheld as a result of examination malpractice (Ogunomola 2013). Also, apart from the Malpractice Act, Examining Bodies, such as WAEC, NECO, the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) and others have their rules for dealing with malpractices during their examinations. Penalties range from cancellation of results of candidates or centers, blacklisting of schools, and blacklisting of officials found colluding with candidates.

However, despite all these efforts the malaise of examination malpractice has kept soaring and spreading its tentacles all over the country. Where as in some decades ago, school authorities as well as

the government had less to worry about examination malpractice, Now, in the words of Opata (2003:4) they additionally worry about mercenaries who forcibly remove answers from examination halls and go out to write the answers for candidates taking the examination; coded answers left in a carefree manner on black boards and desks in examination halls; copied materials stored away in micro- and macro-sheets tucked away in unmentionable parts of the body, high-powered memory calculators used to store various piece of information, cell phones and power points for illegal use in the examination halls. In fact, currently, there is so much to worry about, as the menace of examination malpractice has become the order of the day in Nigerian schools.

Cultural Factors Responsible For Examination Malpractice in Nigeria

There are some cultural factors that seem to be fuelling examination malpractice in Nigeria. These factors include: Unguaranteed future, Certificate Glorification, Corruption and Materialism and Money Consciousness. These are discussed below.

Fright of Unguaranteed Future

This is a strong factor that continuously fuels the act of examination malpractices in Nigeria. It is true that the future is unpredictable, but it can be guaranteed. A worker, for instance, who is expecting pensions from a government or an institution after his/her retirement, to a great extent, has a guaranteed future. In several countries, the worker's hope of pension in the future has always been the drive for today. However, when these pensions are not there, the future becomes uncertain for the worker. This is true of Nigerian situation. The future is not just unpredictable in Nigeria; it is unguaranteed especially for the workers. This is because of the presence of corruption in the system. For instance, the pension scheme in the country is not impressive and in most times, corrupt individual embezzle the funds entirely. A current case in point is that of Yusuf Maina, who reportedly embezzled the sum of N45 billion pension fund. Hence, the future has remained unguaranteed for a great number of workers in the country. This simply explains why many have got involved in so many things to secure their future. For example, many Nigerian parents work hard to properly position their children, so they could take care of them in the future. Of course, this is not unconnected with the Extended Family System in Nigerian culture, in which children are expected to take care of their parents alongside their immediate families. No wonder, majority of Nigerian parents are actively fueling the act of examination malpractice in the country. The idea is, if ones child intelligently performs well and acquires good certificate in school, it means the future of the parents is promising, as the child will grow up, get a good job and take good care of his

parents. Hence, most parents go to schools and examination halls with their children to pay teachers or invigilators to assist their children in classrooms and examination halls. Some go to the extent of hiring mercenaries to write examinations for their children, whereas, others purchase already-made certificates for them. The overall aim is to secure a good future for their children and themselves. And more interesting, is that this belief is passed on from one generation to another. Therefore, this parental involvement in the act of examination malpractice has obviously made the problem, continue unabated in the country.

Certificate Glorification

This is another cultural factor that directly encourages examination malpractice in schools. Nigerians place certificate over skills and competence and always respect a certificated man more than a skillful and competent man. Even in terms of job opportunities, those with good certificates get the whole attention. For instance, it is common to see job advertisements that specifically state the educational requirements in which some persons are automatically put out of considerations, based on the content of their certificates. Most times, graduates with 2.1 Grade Points and above, are preferred to those with 2.2 Grade Points and below. And in some other cases, University graduates are preferred to 'O' LEVEL holders and Master Degree holders are preferred to First Degree holders and so on. This is not to suggest that genuinely merited certificate qualifications are not common in the country or that certificates should not be accorded due respect as well as considered in job recruitments. It rather suggests that the overemphasis on its acquisition as the only access to good life and opportunities in the country, is where the problem lies.

This particularly, has made people to be desperate for either merited or unmerited certificates. Examinations in many schools are inundated with so many malpractices that have undermined the standard of education in the country, while impersonation during examination and the sale and purchase of certificates, have become the order of the day. Although it has been established that it is the culture of over emphasis on certificate acquisition that fuels examination malpractices in the country, ironically, it is the level of examination malpractice in the country that has rendered Nigerian Universities Certificates worthless on the international scene.

Corruption

It should not violate ones expectation, that corruption is included as part of Nigerian culture. Undoubtedly, the menace of corruption has eaten so deep into the fabrics of the system, that virtually

everyone is consciously involved in it. Prof. Wole Soyinka has aptly observed that corruption has become so endemic in the country that it now serves as a unifying factor and a National Lexicon understood by everyone in the country (Oritunsin and Osagie 2012:11). In Nigeria, the old and the young as well as the literate and the illiterate seem to be guilty of this act of corruption in one way or the other. And it seems to have been institutionalized as it is found in all sectors of the country. It has wrecked the Nigeria Civil Service, robbed the Nigeria Police, crippled the Nigeria Judiciary and devastated the Educational system. Its presence in the Educational sector is evidenced in the way school authorities, examination officers, invigilators and teachers aid the despicable act of examination malpractice in the country. This is so organized that there seem to be a network among these perpetrators. And it is not surprising when one discovers that there is a cabal at the top of this ignoble act in the country. If not, one keeps wondering why the malaise of examination malpractice has insistently refused to go despite the “hue and cry” all over the country. Also, since the enactment of the Examination Act of 1999, how many persons have been convicted and prosecuted accordingly? Is it to say that some of these well-known Private schools and Lesson Centers that operate the so called ‘Magic or Special Centers’ through which they perpetrate mass examination malpractice, are out of reach?

Materialism and Money Consciousness

The introduction of monetary economy in Nigeria, years ago, seems to have a bad side in the country. Unlike many years ago, social relevance in the country is currently viewed through the lens of material acquisition. Put differently, in Nigeria, one is more respected and given attention according to the level of wealth or riches one has acquired. It is no longer the days when one was respected and rewarded for honesty and hard work, or the days when truthfulness and transparency were highly appreciated and imbibed. Nowadays, the rich are more endeared to the society not minding the source of their wealth. This has obviously encouraged fraudulence and corruption in the country as everyone wants to be rich and socially relevant by all possible means. Even if, it demands collecting bribe as an invigilator, or examination syndicate to aid examination malpractice, or impersonating and buying or selling of already made certificates as students. The truth is that the business of examination malpractice is currently a lucrative business and very few are unwilling to join the bandwagon. According to the Director General, National Orientation Agency (NOA), Mr. Mike Omeri “Exam Racketeers rake in N25 billion annually in Nigeria, and have raked in N375 billion in the past 15 years” (www.thenationonline.net). No wonder, it has resisted and defiled all solutions in the country. Also, there is this belief that money can do everything in Nigeria. For instance, it is believed that with money, one can break rules and protocols with impunity,

as well as obtain whatever educational certificate from ones comfort zone in the country. This has encouraged malpractices in the nation's educational sector.

Culture of Lawlessness

One wonders why several abnormalities take place in the Nigerian society despite the presence of law and constitutions in the country. For example, one would wonder why corruption has continued unabated; and specifically, why examination malpractice has been waxing stronger by day despite the presence of laws that stipulates punishments for these offences in the Country. The reason is that some Nigerians seem not to believe strongly in laws. It is believed that laws could always be broken and maneuvered. The government and its institutions have over the years, evolved series of Laws and Acts to govern the Nigerian society, with less desired results. For instance, the level at which the constitution of Nigerian is strictly followed and obeyed by the government and the citizens is obviously poor. This also applies to the issue of examination malpractice in the country. In 1999, the Examination Malpractice Act was enacted with stringent punishments for offenders, in order to deter offenders. However, this has not yielded much result as the act of examination malpractice has kept increasing in the country. The Registrar, National Examination Council (NECO), Prof. Promise Okpara, has aptly argued that why it seems as if the Examination Malpractice Act is dormant in the Country is because the culture is unsupportive. According to him, "We are not a culture that treats illegality the white man's way. We have a culture of 'go and beg him', or 'settle', or 'get elderly man to go with you and beg' when people do wrong. If a candidate is caught, and you tell the person who witnessed it to testify, you will not see them in court. They would say they don't want to be party to another man's downfall".(Kofoworola 2011). This has on its own part, contributed to the persistent stay of examination malpractice in the country.

The Role of Religion

From the history of mankind, Religion has always been of a great benefit to the society. If not for much, the fact that it holds its adherents in obedience to the laws of the society, is worthy of note. Every religion speaks and preaches moral values that are also expected from the members of the society. Religion fosters peace, cohesion, unity as against disunity, and at the same time demands tolerance and love from adherents. Every religion aims at maintaining a cordial relationship between man and the supernatural as well as between man and his fellow man. Without doubt, Religion demands sobriety, meekness and obedience to the object of worship and to the laws that govern the society. This is because the peace of

the society matters so much to the practice of religion. It is from this perspective that the Philosopher, Emile Durkhem (1858-1917) argued that religion only serves the purpose of the society. For him, religion is merely a sociological tool, therefore, the reality which religious thought expresses is society. Thus, religious beliefs are those that carry with them social obligations. However, while religion cannot be reduced to a mere sociological tool, there is no doubt that religion, in addition to the spiritual emphasis, compels adherents to carry out social obligations stipulated by the society. Therefore, it is from this stand point that the role of religion in curbing the menace of examination malpractice in Nigeria shall be discussed.

The problem of examination malpractice is so rooted that it has defiled all efforts towards its eradication in the country. Therefore, the resort to religion as a way-out, is hereby justifiable. The act of examination malpractice itself is a depiction of sheer laziness, insincerity, dishonesty and disobedience to the rules and regulations governing examination in the country. And these are vices which religion, Christianity, Islam or African Traditional Religion, out rightly condemns. In Christianity, for instance, adherents are told through their holy scripture, that obedience is better than sacrifice, while on different occasions, they are enjoined to avoid laziness, insincerity and deceit. Also particularly relevant is a passage that reads “A good name is chosen rather than great riches...” (Proverbs 22:1).

In the same vein, the Muslims are enjoined through the holy Quran and the Hadith, to uphold hard work, honesty and sincerity in their dealings with fellow believers as well as unbelievers. Yet in African Traditional Religion, it is believed that a life of dishonesty, laziness and insincerity retards the individual as well as the entire community. Hence, values like truthfulness, transparency, hard work and honesty are highly appreciated and imbibed.

The truth is, if Nigeria is filled with true and sincere religious practitioners/adherents including Christians, Muslims and Traditionalists, the country would have lesser problems to battle with. At least, the rate of moral decadence would have been very negligible. However, human beings will always remain themselves both in thoughts, choices and actions

Nevertheless, all hope is not lost as the transformative power of religion has always remained the same. The fact that Examination-malpractice is rampant is a pointer to the level of moral decay in the country. And the whole bulk of responsibility falls on religion to build a morally upright society. Therefore, moral orientation and reorientation will be inevitable in the country. And the best place to start is the family. Since the family is the first contact a child gets, Parents should invigorate those cherished religious values and instill them into their children, all over again, as the case may be. A passage in the Christians Holy Scripture reads “Train up a child in the way he should go, so that when he grows up, he

will not depart from it". Teachers, on their own part, should live up to their calling. Before now, teachers were highly respected and seen as models, due to their moral uprightness and principles. Now, the reverse is the case, as teachers currently abet the sordid act of examination malpractice in the country. This trend must be reversed; teachers should resume their work, which is the moral upbringing of children in schools. Whereas on the other hand, all the religious leaders and organizations must join the campaign against examination malpractice in the country. This can be done through the following ways:

- Awareness creation in every religious gathering and during sermon in churches, mosque, or in village assembly for the African Traditionalists. This awareness should be aimed at discouraging parents and children from the involvement in the menace of examination malpractice while encouraging honesty, hard work and obedience in the country.

- Also, to make this campaign more effective, these religious leaders should speak against this nefarious act on radio and television broadcasts or messages, or better still, they should take this campaign to personal religious/denominational televisions channels like Emmanuel TV, Day Star, etc.

- And also importance, is the production of religion or denominationally based stickers, tracks and bills, for instance, with inscriptions like "Obey Allah, Desist from Exam Fraud" or "This is My Year of Obedience: No More Exam Malpractice".

Indeed, religion holds a significant prospect for the campaign against examination malpractice in the country. This is because of the belief that, whatever injunction given on the platform of religion, tends to attract great level of obedience from adherence. Therefore, it is strongly believed that if religion becomes involved in this fight against examination malpractice in the country, desired success would be achieved and the country's Education sector shall be saved from collapse.

Conclusion

So far, the Meaning, and the History of Examination Malpractice in Nigeria have been discussed. The Fight against Examination Malpractice as well as the Cultural Factors that continuously fuel this menace has also been given a considerable attention. The Role of Religion in the eradication of Examination Fraud in the country formed the fulcrum of the paper. Hence, conclusively, it should be emphatically noted that it is honesty, integrity, truthfulness and hard work that can curb examination malpractice to the barest minimum in the country. And these virtues are what Religion offer.

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