EXAMINATION ETHICS
IN OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING INSTITUTIONS

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ABSTRACT

Students at every level of education, including the ODL system, tend to study to pass examinations. They tend to look for the easiest way out of challenges. As result, they tend to make use of the 'short- cuts', which can lead them to do things which are not permitted in the school system. These include examination malpractices and cheating. In this paper examination in ODL, issues in the administration of examinations in ODL, ensuring high quality examination system, characteristics of a good examination system, and examination ethics in ODL system and stages of examination ethics are discussed.

Keywords: Examination, examination ethics, open and distance learning, institutions, quality.

INTRODUCTION

This age is rightly described as a multi functional age. This is because human beings of this age engage themselves in so many activities at the same time. For instance, a student is doing his assignment, at the same time his earpieces are on his ears as he is listening to music and discussing with another or watching television. A learner in ODL is studying, working and at the same time taking care of his responsibilities in the family and society. As a result they tend to look for the easiest way out of challenges. They tend to use the short-cuts. Most of the times, these lead them to do things which the older society frowns at. In the ODL system, short-cuts lead to exam malpractices and cheating.

In many countries, today, including Nigeria, exam malpractices have taken an alarming dimension.

According to Agunwa and Ademola (2014) exam malpractices has advanced beyond the practice of students bringing foreign materials into exams halls, copying from other students, assaults an intimidation of invigilators and supervisor. It has advanced into a lucrative and organized criminal activity.

The scourge of exam malpractice and academic dishonesty is very large. It is also pervasive with every level of education affected. It starts from primary to the tertiary institutions. This is a problem which is not restricted to any one country, but that of global proportions. At present, exam malpractices are at such a level where admissions, training, assessment, certification, registration, and regulation processes are hopelessly compromised.

According to Agunwa and Ademola (2014) it involves fraud, malpractices, dishonesty and corruption relatively to sale of admissions, teaching malpractices, continuous assessment, automatic promotions of students from one class to another, leakage of question papers, impersonation, alternative to practical, sale of grades and results, sale of honorary degrees, sale of handouts, sale o favorable inspections and accreditation reports, sandwich courses and certificate forgery, hacking into computer data base of public exams boards, extortion of money from candidates by examiners, supervisors and invigilators.

It is very sad to note that almost all categories of stake holders in education are represented in the chains of perpetrators that make up exam malpractice syndicates.

These include parents who provide the funds which the students use to fund the crime. It include officials of exam board who supply leaked question papers to the candidates Or accredits unsuitable schools as centers compromise computer security systems.

What about officials of education ministries departments and agencies who compromise or refuse or neglect to do their oversight functions of supervisions or accreditation to maintain standards and quality.

Where do we place school proprietors' who offer their schools as exam magic centers for mass cheating in public exams?

What about principles and teachers who facilitate mass cheating in their schools?

Where do we place supervisors and invigilators who extort money from candidates or close their eyes and ears so as not to hear, see or report cases of exam malpractices?

The list is endless as it includes community leaders who negotiate how much candidates in their communities or schools pay to supervisor's lectures in higher institutions are not left out. They sell handouts and refuse to teach their courses.

The academic and non academic staff of higher institutions who sell or facilitate the selling of admissions, grades, results, degrees including honorary degrees as well as some staffs of regulatory agencies who sell favorable inspections and accreditation reports, where do we place them. The pupils, students and candidates who are the final consumers of the diet of malpractices are not left out in this list. Nor the accreditation officials who receive fat envelopes and write reports which are not related to their findings.

This goes to the buttress the findings of Okonkwo (2014) and Agunwa and Ademola (2014), that the cancer of exam malpractices has spread to all facet and categories of professionals.

The healthcare professionals including medical doctors, pharmacists, medical laboratory scientist, nurses; even the building professionals including building g engineers architects, highway engineers; aviation professionals; public administrators, judicial officials and lawyers, corporate managers, accountants, bankers, politicians among others are all affected in this malaise.

This is because they all pas through the same odd and examination system. It is a very serious damage to the society when professors, lectures and teachers emerge through exam malpractices and academic dishonesty.

This is why Eghagha (2014) lamented the increase in exam malpractices index every year, describing exam malpractice as a universal disease. It has become a very serious challenge to academics. To this affect, Onyechere (2011) proposed an inspired ethics-friendly education and exam are for all stakeholders to bond and act together as a formidable army of exam ethics to defend the integrity of education and promote best practice in education system.

The basic goals of education include the inculcation of the right type of values and the attributes for the survival of the individual and the society. These include the training of the mind in the understanding of what the world around as well as the acquisition of appropriate skill, abilities and competence both mental and physical as equipments for the individual to live in and contribute to the development of his society (NPE2013).

Education has an essential role of producing leaders, professionals, workers and citizens with the character and competence to move human civilization forward. It is therefore the duties of those involved in the delivery of education service to contribute to this sacred role and responsibility of the education sector.

There is no success without challenges. Therefore education institutions and agencies must rise to the challenge of delivering quality education, if the education sector is to fulfill responsibility of producing change agents with the character to shun corruption and the competence to deliver transformation.

The biggest challenge is the growing deficits of ethics, integrity and best practices which are symbolized by the epidermis of systematic exam malpractices and academic dishonesty.

EXAMINATION IN ODL

Examination in ODL can be regarded as public exams. This is due to the large number of learners scattered all over the country. These learners are located in both rural and urban set ups. They are both young and elderly. According to Okonkwo (2014) the main purpose of exam in ODL is:

- ➢ **Selection:**   To select learners for the next level of education.
- ➢ **Certification:** To show evidence that the learners have certain level of achievements.
- ➢ **Control:**   To facilitate tailoring of content and "spirit" of the curriculum to the national goal.
- ➢ **Motivation:**   Achieved by providing clear goals to strive for; a sense of purpose, and tangible incentives and rewards.
- ➢ **Monitoring:**   Examination results are used to

  - ▪ Gauge changes in achieved all standard
  - ▪ Hold all institutions accountable for their learners' achievements.

We need to note that exam in ODL are very important because;

- ➢ The results of those exams help in determining the future education, vocational or career as well as the survival chances for the state holders.
- ➢ ODL institution's reputations may be affected by the learners' exam results
- ➢ Feedback from the exam results may be subjected to class scrutiny by stake holders because exam related data can reveal the strength and weakness.
- ➢ Exam materials, in addition to qualitative and quantitative feedback can help ODL institutions to improve their efficiency and effectiveness.

ISSUES IN THE ADMINISTRATION OF EXAMINATIONS IN ODL

For exam in ODL to solve the very important purpose for which it is meant to serve, considerations should be given to:

Security

Ss earlier stated the nature of ODL exams manifest more like public exams. As a result leads to greater risk of malpractices if not adequately controlled. This brings pressure to bear on the directorate of examinations and assessments (DEA) to maintain proper security, before, during and after examinations. To this effect, areas of concern include; but not limited to;

- ➢ **Question Paper Setting:** Examinations questions may leak from the lectures that set the questions, and/or moderately panel members. Therefore, the following precautionary measures should be taken.

  - ▪ Reduce the number of persons coming in contact or seeing the questions and the question papers.
  - ▪ Closely monitor those setting the questions in house.
  - ▪ Commission several periled versions of each question paper and choose one of them randomly. And/or
  - ▪ Produce question papers from large item bank.

- **Question Paper Printing:** Examination questions may leak from printers, DEA staffs handling the papers among others. Therefore, secure in-house facilities for printing. In addition use 'just-in-time' printers. This requires that the printing machine should be in good working order all the time.
- **Question Paper Distribution:** Question paper may be leaked while in transits or storage. Therefore take the following precautions:
- Use secure transporter such as banks or the military to distribute the question papers.
- Use reputable private courier.
- Distribute just in time.
- Deliver to banks for storage.
- Allow collection from regional collection points just before the examinations.
- Use tampers evident bags and box for distribution.
- Where facilities are available send the questions electronically to examination centers when it is time for each examination. The centers will print out the question papers according to the number of candidates just in time for the examinations to take place. This is how it is done in National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN).

➢ **Supervision of Exams:** An examination supervisor or invigilator may assist learners or may allow or condone cheating. Therefore, the following precautionary measures should be taken.

- Appoint staffs of high integrity as supervisors.
- Arrange important monitoring of examination venues by other staffs of high integrity.
- Develop regulations and sanctions to guide the conducts of both staffs and leaner's during examinations.
- Apply sanctions as at when necessary.

➢ **Examination Proper:** There are possibilities of learners cheating or cases or cases of impersonations.

Therefore, take the following precautionary measures.

- Use learners' passport on their registration form and the exam room entry card or photo card to identify candidates.
- Cross check learners handwriting and signatures.
- Apply sanctions where necessary.

Cheating in the examination room can be in the form of copying from another learners papers (girafing) coming into the exam hall with implicating materials, copying from text or note books, using hand phones, discussing the answer among others.

These can result if:

- ➤ **The Invigilator Shows Signs of Uninvolvment.**
- ➤ **The Supervisor Condones Cheating or Overlooks Them,**
- ➤ **The Examination Hall Is Overcrowded and Not Conducive Etc.**

  - ▪ **Return of Scripts:** Answer scripts may be amended after the exams are over. Therefore, appoint supervisors with high integrity. Also reduce the time allowed for the return of scripts to the making centers to the nearest minimum.
  - ▪ **Marking:** Markers may favor recognized candidates. Therefore, as much as possible make scripts 'anonymous' by obscuring the names, using coded numbers and matriculation numbers. Again use centralized or conference marking with supervisors. Reduce the marking of scripts at home.
  - ▪ **Data Entry:** Staffs concerned may enhance or alter the marks of favored candidates. Therefore apply strong sanctions against those who tamper with marks. Make sure the system is computerized rather than the use of materials.
  - ▪ **Exam Result Processing:** Staffs involved may enhance or alter the marks of favored students. Therefore, apply strong sanctions against those involved. Again make sure the system is computerized as much as possible.

Packaging and Distributing

The packaging and distributing of examination papers, especially the.pen and papers, is a very difficult task. It is a high volume activity which requires a high level of accuracy. In addition, it carries a high risk of leakages. The difficulties are more in the remote areas and/or with many study centers all over the country taking the same examinations simultaneously. Therefore, activities of interest are:

- ➤ **Identification of study center question papers:** This makes use of an accurate packaging list prepared for the dispatch of question papers. Absence of an accurate, computerized database makes this very difficult and error prone.
- ➤ **Packaging of question papers:** Questions to be considered include-who does the packaging? Are spare papers included? Are papers packed in paper envelopes sealed? The exact number of question papers required plus a fixed number of extra papers should be packed. This should be done in plastic tamper-evident bags. Where paper envelops is used, they should be sealed with security printed tapes.
- ➤ **Distribution of packed question papers:** Questions to be considered here are: How far in advance of the first examinations is the question papers distributed? Who does the distribution? The distribution of the question papers to the study centers or examination venues should be done as close to the first day of examination as possible. The distribution can be done using reputable courier service, other secure services like the banks transportation system can also be used, and institution transportation may be employed in the distribution.

- ➤ **Question paper at the regional centre and study centers. The questions to be considered here include: - is the question papers delivered directly to the study centers or regional centers? Who is responsible for them? Study center directors should be responsible for the safe storage of exam papers delivered directly to their study centers. On the other hand if the question papers are delivered to the regional offices, the study centre directors should be responsible for the collection as at when needed.**
- ➤ **After the exam: Question to be considered include: - are unused question paper returned to the exam unit in the head quarters? How are answered scripts returned to the head quarters? When unused question papers are retained by the study centers, it makes it easier for the learners to access and use them for study purposes. But when question banks are used, the study centers may be required to return all unused question papers. However, it is practically impossible and administratively difficult to prevent the learners from copying the questions from the unused question papers before they are returned to the exam unit of the institution.**
- ➤ **Report writing: - it is very important that a report is written at the end of the examination exercise. The report should include:**

  - ▪ **assessment of the effectiveness of the current practices**
  - ▪ **Identification of the problems with the implication of existing rules and regulations.**
  - ▪ **Establishment of the basis for review of regulations to ensure better efficiency.**

Therefore, the report should include challenge incidences.

- • **Conduct of learners and invigilators.**
- • **Adequacy or inadequacy of accommodation facilities and exam materials.**
- • **Course examined and relevant numerical data such as number of scripts or candidates, invigilators among others.**

ENSURING HIGH QUALITY EXAMINATIONS SYSTEM

According to Okonkwo (2014) a high quality assessment system is essential for a high quality education system. This is done cheaply. It requires vey high level of professional and administrative resources. It's also an important requirement for Open Distance education and Learning institutions to develop assessment hand book which consist of rules, regulations and standards to guide the examination processes.

There is also a need for the instructions to constitute monitoring bodies or committee for the purpose of monitoring exam or exam related processes to ensure quality and compliance to the laid down rules, regulations and standards.

Characteristics of a Good Examinations System

According to Osuji (2012) and Okonkwo (2014) sources of the key characteristics of good exam system are:

➤ **Fitness for purpose: The exam papers and the working scheme or guide should produce scores that are reliable and valid. These could be achieved by ensuring:**

▪ **Evidence of exam technical quality such as reliability, level of difficulty among others.**
▪ **Acceptance by both students and lecturers that the exams are according to the course description and standard.**
▪ **Adequate quality control measures resulting in eliminating of errors on exam question papers to the beeriest minimum.**

➤ **Equity, integrity and stakeholders' confidence: The conduct of exam in ODL system should be seen as fair.**
It should achieve a higher level of stakeholders' acceptance and should ensure that no particular candidate or group of candidates is seen to have an unfair advantage over others.

These should be achieved by ensuring that:

▪ **Stakeholders' have confidence in the results of the exam system.**
▪ **There is high level of trust in the honesty of the exam unit, staff, supervisors and invigilators.**
▪ **The exam system has procedures for rechecking of markings or marks put in place as well as appeal procedure.**
▪ **There is evidence of minimal or no resorting to the use of unfair means or cheating by the candidates.**
▪ **There is availability of special support for disadvantaged candidates.**
▪ **The grading system is applicable on equal basis to all learners.**

➤ **Efficiency and cost effectiveness: The ODL institutions' exam unit should be able to make the best possible use of physical, financial and human resources in delivering the required exam services. The exam should be administered according to agreed schedules. The learners and invigilators should be aware of the schedules for the exams. The exam results should be issued on time. All these could be achieved by ensuring that:**

▪ **The exam unit is sufficiently staffed.**
▪ **The question papers are produced in the most cost effective way without compromising quality and security.**

- The exam unit should demonstrate cost effectiveness through its accounting procedures showing breakdown of cost such as staffing, preparation of question papers, printing, distribution, supervision, correcting, research, publication etc.
- Pre-exam administration processes are carried out effectively.
- Exam results are issued in time and in the appropriate form for proper decision making.
- Feedback on exam performance is provided to stakeholders in good time to influence their future activities.

- ➢ **Transparency:** The exam process should as much as possible be open to stakeholders' inspection. It should not be masked with secrecy and uncertainty. This should be achieved by ensuring that:

  - The marking system and criteria for the award of grades are available.
  - The exam unit maintains record of administrative processes, results and marking scheme or guide.
  - Only staffs of high integrity are engaged with exam process and responsibilities.
  - The institutions handbook on exam processes including rules regulations and standards guiding the administration of exams are widely available to stakeholders, especially the staff and students.

- ➢ **Beneficial effect on institutional process:** ODL exam system should as a matter of necessity foster learners' effective study habit. It should ensure regular, systematic, comprehensive, guidance oriented and prompt provision of feed back to the institution for improvement and to the learners' to faster leaning. This should be achieved by ensuring that:

  - The exam encourages the development of higher order thinking skills not just recall facts.
  - The exam promotes development of performance skills, practical skills and production skills.
  - The exam promotes self-reliant and self-confident skills.

Therefore a good examination system in ODL gives credence to the products of the system by ensuring quality and credibility on the degrees and certificates awarded by the ODL institutions.

It implies that there is need for rules and regulations to be put together in place to ensure that there is a very good exam system in ODL and the benefits therein; there must be ethics which must be kept or practiced before, during and after exam in ODL.

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EXAMINATION ETHICS IN ODL SYSTEM

According to Osuji (2014), exam is the major procedure used for the assessment of ODL students for the purpose of awarding degrees and certificates among other things. The senate of every academic institution including ODL is vested with the authority to organize conducts and control exams and to award degrees and certificate.

Therefore, to maintain credibility, integrity and to ensure quality, the senate of these institutions should prescribe rules, regulations and standards to govern their exams.

This will be presented into he form of exam ethics of the institution. To this effect, exam ethics is viewed as a frame of reference to help in promoting a greater understanding of what constitutes ethical assessment practice.

In other words, ethics simply means the ideals of what is right or what is wrong. It involves regulations, laws and professional codes of conducts. It provides a standard format of moral values and procedures to ensure efficiency.

According to Okonkwo (2014) codes of ethics helps in creating awareness of expected standard that constitute ethical practice and to serve as affirmation of exemplary conduct.

Stages of Exam Ethics

➢ **Stage 1: Before the exam:** Every ODL institutions should write down what they think should be the ideal practice before exam. These should be in particular reference to :

- **Planning for the exam: Setting of questions, moderation preparation, noting the number of students taking the exams per invigilator and per venue, and assigning responsibilities.**
- **Reporting for Duty: Note the number and categories of staff that should report for duty with regards to exam preparations.**
- **Collection of Exam Materials: Get the question papers, answer scripts, attendance sheets, report forms, graph sheets, ropes, etc ready.**
- **Preparing the exam hall: All exam halls should be well prepared with adequate light and space between candidates etc.**
- **Checking the convenience room: All rest rooms or conveniences should be checked to make sure they are functioning.**

Every ODL institution should write down what you think should be the ideal practice in the preparation of exam materials with particular reference to the role of different categories of academic staff.

These include the deans, directors, exam unit staff, these roles include:

- Call for question paper and setting of questions.
- Venturing or moderation of question papers.
- Production of the question papers.
- Packaging of the question papers.
- Custody and distribution of the question papers and answer scripts.
- Handling of exam malpractices.
- Writing of report.

> **Stage 2: Conducting the Exam** Every ODL institution should have written down what they think are the ideal practice during exams. These should be with particular reference to:

- Admitting and sitting arrangement of candidates.
- Distribution of exam materials.
- Starting the exam.
- Confirming the identity of the candidates.
- Getting the candidates to sign the attendance sheets.
- Conducts of invigilators
- Collection of answer sheets or scripts.
- Issues of late arrivals, suspected misconducts, illness, convenience breaks etc.

The ODL institution should also write down what should be the ideal practice during exam with particular reference to the atmosphere in the exam hall.

These should include: ventilation, illumination, chairs and table, spacing of seats or seating arrangements, announcements, noise making, other activities that can distract the candidates and disturb exam etiquette in the exam hall.

> **Stage 3: After Exam:** Every ODL institution should write down what they think should be the ideal practice after exam with particular reference to:

- Collection of answer scripts.
- Unused question papers and answer booklets.
- Collection and submission of collected scripts.
- Report writing.

They should also write down what they think should be the ideal practice after exam in ODL with respect to the role of supervisors, invigilators, students, ICT staffs, academic staff, school and faculties, departments or units, examination officers, the institutions exam units etc in helping to ensure that appropriate procedures are followed and that the desired goals are achieved.

Collective responses and ability to adopt or adapt the fore going recommendations would constitute exam ethics in ODL.

Nevertheless it is the responsibility of the senate of any ODL institution to have the final say in what should constitute the institutions' community the role of staff (both academic and non academic), students, invigilators, supervisors, deans/directors/head of units or departments exam units, the senate etc.

It is also the responsibility of the senate to specify regulations, rules and standards to guide good practice in ODL assessment of students lay outcomes. These they should do preferably in the form of "assessment handbook".

CONCLUSION

ODL System is practiced all over the world as institutions of higher education vested with the power to award degree, certificates and other relevant academic qualifications to students who at the end of their programmes are found worthy in character and learning. It implies that for the proper exercise of this power, the ODL institution must try to ensure the maintenance of high standards in the conduct of exams. Hence, there is a need for the institutions to embrace exam ethics. These can be specified as rules and regulations which should be put in place in the form of "assessment handbook". This will help to ensure quality and credibility on the degrees and certificate which the ODL institutions award.

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