

A Re-Appraisal of Attitudes and Reactions towards Repentant Examination Cheats

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Abstract

The article takes a critical look at attitudes and reactions towards repentant examination cheats. Specifically, the author examines the issue of examination malpractice and efforts made at informing external examination bodies of former examination cheats and reactions of the awarding body and society that may amount to cynicism. What are the implications of these attitudes and reactions to external examinations, former examination cheats and the general educational development of any country?

Keywords: Examination cheats; re-appraisal; attitudes; repentance.

1.0 Introduction

Examination malpractice is any form of deviant practice or action that amounts to a violation of the ethics or rules and regulations governing any examination. It is viewed as an illegal or unethical behaviour by somebody and it is an evil act which is also a misconduct for one's personal advantage [1, 3]. It has also been stressed that malpractice is a deliberate act of wrongdoing contrary to official examination rules and is designed to place a candidate at an unfair advantage or disadvantage [7].

The West African Examination Council (WAEC) is the colossus in external examination that certifies candidates for admission into higher education, especially into the University in the West African Sub-region. Unfortunately, this organization has had to grapple with the monster of examination malpractice over the years. In spite of the measures to check malpractice, some people still beat WAEC to it.

Some of the perpetrators of examination malpractice have after several years written to the West African Examination Council (WAEC) to confess their previous negative exploits that earned them the WAEC certificate they now possess. What should be the attitude and reactions towards these self confessed examination cheats? Should it be one of cynicism, pity, reintegration and reorientation, pardon/forgiveness?

2.0 Forms of Examination Malpractice

There are various types of examination malpractices. This article will limit itself to those malpractices in which the candidates go all out to outwit the examiners to gain undue advantage.

2.1 Leakage

This involves revealing the content of the examination or any part of the examination prior to taking the examination. This malpractice usually involves one or more of the following members of staff of the examination body, printers, proof-readers, messengers, and personnel employed to develop the papers, moderators and school administrators. All these groups of persons are reachable by desperate candidates who may be ready to make mouth-watering offers to people of weak minds.

2.2 Impersonation

In this form of malpractice, an individual who is not registered as a candidate poses as the real candidate. It may involve collusion between the candidate and the supervisor. University undergraduates are the greatest culprits in this deal, which most often involves huge financial reward or in kind by offering sexual favours. Some older relations get involved in this particular form of malpractice as a way of helping a close relation who may have attempted these examinations several times without success or eager to help a sibling or friend.

Some people who indulge in impersonation try to perfect their acts in ways that are impossible for the invigilators or examiners to detect that they are involved in any form of examination malpractice; for example, the hired candidate inserts his/her photograph in all the examination documents and give the impression that they are the genuine candidate. This type of malpractice is extremely difficult to detect.

2.3 Smuggling of Foreign Materials

This is probably the most common form of malpractice. This relates to the importation of relevant materials into the examination hall; this may include textbooks, pamphlets, question and answer texts, notebooks, answer booklets, summarized notes, ready-made answers to multiple choice questions, written formulae inside calculators, palms and on the laps and other parts of the body and dresses. Unfortunately, some invigilators and security agents aid and abet this form of malpractice.

2.4 Copying

Copying has to do with the reproduction of another candidates' work with or without permission. Usually this is facilitated more in crowded examination halls where there is no adequate spacing. Sometimes the copying involves the exchange of examination booklets by the candidates. This is quite common among fraudulent candidates. An unsuspecting or lax supervisor may not be aware of any malpractice involving copying in an examination hall.

2.5 Collusion

Collusion involves the unauthorized passing of information between candidates; usually done by exchanging notes or script. It involves only the candidate but can be facilitated by inadequate spacing between desks and lax supervision.

The list of malpractice is almost endless as cheats continue to fashion out more methods of circumventing the rules and regulations governing the conduct of examinations. World Bank [7] has advanced some reasons for malpractice. They include the following: high stakes of the examination, teacher and school status, personal factors, quota system; inadequate school facilities, inadequacies in public examination, location and examination centres, low salary levels to which can be added poverty and greed. Whatever are the reasons for examination malpractice, the act remains condemnable at any time and anywhere. Examination malpractice can never be condoned or treated with kid's gloves.

3.0 The Issue of Restitution

In a study conducted by WAEC [6], a random sample of 50 candidates who were requesting for restitution was selected. However, only 13 of these candidates agreed to participate in the study. Similarly, 400 members of the public were purposively selected, and only 296 members of the public responded. This now formed the basis for the figures 13 and 296 as referred to subsequently in this article. 60.7% of females of the candidates seeking restitution did not bother if their higher institutions were informed of their past examination misdemeanour, 62.5% of the males felt the same way. In addition, 75% of the females were ready to surrender their certificates obtained by fraud, while only 40% of the males were ready to part with their ill-gotten certificates.

Females formed majority of the respondents (61.5%), while the males accounted for (38.5). There were also more single candidates (69.2%) than married ones (30.8%). 92.3% were Christians while only 7.7% were Muslims. The greater majority of candidates had not proceeded for any higher degree.

4.0 Reasons for Seeking Repentance

To relieve conscience (7) 53.8%; Religious belief (3) 23.1%; 23.1% (3) students claimed that they did not seek for restitution rather that they were implicated by others.

The table above shoes the background information on members of the public who responded to the questionnaire. 51.4% were males and 41% females. Majority of the respondents were within the ages of 31-40 while 77% of them were married. About 78% of the respondents were Christians, while 20.3% were Muslims.

53.8% (7) candidates sought restitution in order to relieve their conscience; 23.1% (3) restituted based on religious belief; while another 23.1% (3) claimed they were implicated, not that they were restituting.

Table 3 showed that 71.9% believe that restitution is good while 26.9% disagreed. Majority of the respondents (63.2%) were of the opinion that WAEC should allow the candidates go free after confessing. 54.1% of the respondents agreed that withdrawal

of candidates' certificates is too harsh; 28.7% disagreed, while 11.1% were undecided. Majority (58.4%) believed that the West African Examination Council (WAEC) has no moral justification to withdraw the certificate, since the candidates were not caught during the examination. 34.5% of the respondents however hold a contrary view.

Furthermore, 53.7% of the respondents disagreed with the idea of WAEC informing other institutions of the offence. A greater percentage of the respondents (53.7%) also disagreed those candidates higher degree is cancelled. Similarly, 65.2% were of the opinion that WAEC should simply forgive the restituting candidates and not retrieve the certificates. Majority of the respondents, 70% were not of the view that restituting candidates be handed over to the police. 82.4% of the respondents agreed that restitution relieves the candidates from the feeling of guilt and emotional disturbance.

5.0 Appraisal

Examination malpractice is a social malaise that cannot be condoned by any moral society. Restitution is a commendable action that can be taken only by courageous individuals; and that means being ready to face the consequences of your action(s). The issue of restitution is a moral and religious issue. To retribute implies restoration, to bring or give back. The Bible teaches about restitution. Exodus 22 deals exhaustively on the subject. The bottom line in all the instances mentioned, the defaulter was expected to restore and in some instances, more than the value of what he or she had stolen, destroyed or allowed to be stolen. This must have been the spirit behind the action that Zacchaeus took in Luke 19, especially verse 8.

And Zacchaeus stood and said unto the Lord; Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor, and if I have taken anything from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold.

The implications of Bible concept of restitution and the dictionary meaning of restitution distills down to the same thing. The cheat or offender must make up or restore fully what he has taken illegally or stolen. Therefore, the question of one claiming to be restituting, yet is not ready to return the certificate that you got through cheating is not morally tenable. The one restituting should be ready for the consequences of his/her misdemeanour. The examination body has the prerogative to withdraw the certificate or not. The public should not encourage examination malpractice, by covertly wanting to shield examination cheats or to allow them go scot-free because they have half or part restituted.

6.0 Conclusion

Examination malpractice is a scourge and a destroyer of the moral fabric of any educational system. It is noteworthy that in spite of the moral decay of our times, some former examination cheats could muster courage to denounce their previous unwholesome academic exploits. Repentance should be total and genuine. The public should not develop a cynical attitude towards self-confessed former examination cheats. The school system should encourage greater moral practice that would discourage examination malpractice. Invigilators, examiners and everyone connected with examination should be more thorough, dedicated, transparent and exemplary in their behaviour and conduct. A situation where an invigilator is non-chalant and allows candidates to do what they like in any examination situation, does not promote a healthy environment for examination that is free of malpractice. The war against examination malpractice is for all-the public, teachers, students and administrators. If in spite of the safety values in the system some individuals are still able to get involved in examination malpractice and their conscience pricks them to repent their evil deeds, the society should not discourage them by its cynicism. The issue of morality and religion and their role in sharpening the life of young people have been variously discussed [see 4, 5 and 2]. Teaching young people to be diligent and honest is a task before educators in the 21st century. In spite of the moral decay, the negative impact of peers and the wider society, young people can still be trained and thought to be courageous to tell the truth at all times and to shun examination malpractices in all its shades. The society should not tacitly encourage examination malpractices. They should expose examination cheats, whether among students or teachers. Our young people need to develop a stronger sense of character that is rooted in true religion and a more defensible system of values. For young people who have come to the realization that they had cheated on the society or system, people should not hold the youths in derision or be cynical about their repentance. If society develops the attitude of cynicism towards repentant examination cheats, potential restituting cheats may be discouraged and would remain with the guilt. By so doing, the society may be stifling the conscience of young people that had been awakened to doing things the right way.

Competing Interests

The author declares that he has no competing interests.

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Table 1: Background Information on Repentant Candidates.

	Biodata Item	Number	%
Gender	Female	8	61.5
	Male	5	38.5
	Total	13	100
Marital Status	Married	4	30.8
	Single	9	69.2
	Total	13	100
Religion	Christianity	12	92.3
	Islam	1	7.7
	Others	0	0.0
	Total	13	100
Qualification	WASSCE/GCE/SSCE	10	76.9
	OND/NCE	1	7.7
	HND/BA/B.Ed/B.Sc.	2	15.4
Age	14-19	1	7.7
	20-29	8	61.5
	30-39	2	15.4
	40-49	1	7.7
	Age not indicated	1	7.7

Source: WAEC, 2002.

Table 2: Background Information on Respondents (Public).

Biodata Item		Number	%
Gender	Female	152	51.4
	Male	122	41.2
	Total	22	7.4
Age	14-19	20	6.8
	20-30	21	7.1
	31-40	155	52.4
	41-50	85	28.7
	5- & above	11	3.7
	Not indicated	4	1.4
Marital Status	Single	58	19.6
	Married	230	77.7
	Separated/Divorced	4	1.4
	Not indicated	4	1.4
Religion	Islam	60	20.3
	Christianity	230	77.7
	Traditional	3	1.0
	Others	1	0.3
	Not Indicated	2	0.7

Table 3: Attitude of the Public towards Issues of Restitution.

S. No.		Yes		No		%	
		No	%	No	%		
1	Restitution is good	213	71.9	79	26.7	4	1.4
2	WAEC to forgive and not retrieve certificate	193	65.3	96	32.4	7	2.4
3	Withdrawal of certificates is too harsh	160	54.1	85	28.7	33	11.1
4	WAEC is not morally bound to withdraw the certificate, since the candidate was not caught.	173	58.4	102	34.5	21	7.1
5	Allow candidates to go free after confessing	186	63.2	105	35.4	4	1.4
6	Inform other institutions	134	45.3	159	53.7	3	1.0
7	Other higher degrees should be cancelled	135	45.6	159	53.7	3	0.7
8	Hand candidates over to police	84	28.3	209	70.6	3	1.0
9	Penalty for restitution should be categorized	189	63.9	102	32.5	5	1.7
10	Restitution penalty (cancellation of certificates) is greater than that of other malpractices	92	41.0	176	62.9	18	6.9
11	It is no business of WAEC to inform other institutions of candidates seeking for restitution of their past acts of their past acts of examination malpractice.	171	57.8	108	36.5	17	5.7
12	Restitution relieves a fraudulent candidate of feelings of guilt and emotional disturbance	244	82.4	45	15.2	7	2.4
13	Since the candidates were not caught during and after the examination, WAEC has no reason to now punish them.	181	61.1	106	35.5	9	3.0
14	WAEC's strategies to curb malpractice are not fool proof.	234	79.1	52	17.5	10	3.4