ENHANCING QUALITY BY ELIMINATING STUDENTS' CORRUPT PRACTICES IN UNIVERSITIES IN NIGERIA USING ASSESSMENT

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Abstract

Assessment is the process of determining the amount of learning that students have acquired after exposure to some learning experiences. It is a process of collecting meaningful information about the students and interpreting their information based on the internal standard. The results are used to understand and assist students to cope with problems. Results of assessment are also used to make important and lasting decisions that affect the future life endeavours of the students in the areas of (i) instruction and career guidance (ii) administrative purposes (iii) selection for future activity and (iv) employment. Since assessment results are all this important, stringent measures should be taken to control all factors capable of confounding the results. This is expedient because if the results do not reflect the true abilities of the students, the decisions and interpretations made about the students based on the results will be misleading. Unethi-

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cal activities of the students on campus constitute corruption because they thwart the normal course of assessment leading to invalid results. This is the reason this author is prescribing ways of handling discrepancies using the terminal assessment procedures involved in marking, scoring and interpreting results. This will make the universities' reports of students tally with their out-of-the-school performance.

Keywords: Students, Corruption, Assessment

INTRODUCTION

Corruption consists of any act that thwarts the normal course of action where the private gain is accrued. It usually involves the pervasion of rules and ethical principles to be favoured. Corrupt practices are common in all sectors in Nigeria, including the educational sector. The youths are consciously or unconsciously influenced by the corrupt practices of their parents and adult members of society. Presently, there is a general concern that the standard of education is falling because university graduates do not exhibit commensurate skills in real-life settings as the certificates awarded to them would show. Outside Nigeria, the certificates awarded by the tertiary institutions in Nigeria are not valued. Part of the reasons is the corrupt practices of the students which confound the assessment results based upon which certificates are issued to them. Sorting has been identified as one of the major threats to quality assessment results (Nwokeme, Ukozor and Offor, 2015). Sorting according to Nwajiuba, Nwajiuba and Ume (2008) is the unethical practice of the students by which they try to induce their lecturer with gifts to get unmerited higher grades. Apart from sorting, several other corrupt practices of the students aimed at getting unmerited good grades to abound. What can be done to stop the unethical practices of students in examination since the Examination Malpractices law has not been effective in deterring students from committing the offence? This is the concern of this author in prescribing some assessment procedures that would help to eliminate students' corrupt/unethical practices and increase the quality of results vis-a-vis certificates. However,

this paper is directed to written (paper and pencil) assessment since e-assessment is not yet fully operational in most universities in Nigeria.

Perhaps, it is important to briefly paint the picture of the Nigerian educational system to enable a proper understanding of the social milieu of those students before they enter into Universities. Nigeria is a society that attaches so much respect to certificate acquisition. Every parent would want the child to get the certificate whether the child can read up to tertiary level or not. Some parents are ready to pay examination syndicates to write the qualifying examinations for their wards to enable them to enter the universities. The implication is that some students who ordinarily cannot cope with the academic rigours associated with university education also gain admission to universities. While in the university, they continue the corrupt practices through which they got admitted. This calibre of students is not interested in acquiring knowledge; rather, they want a certificate, and they are ready to get involved in all sorts of corrupt practices to have it. Ejiogu (2000), quoted one time Nigerian President, Olusegun Obasanjo, as referring to Nigeria as a place where people are prepared to destroy anything to cover up crime if doing so promotes their economic interest and might. Students in universities are the learners, who have completed their senior secondary education, were successful in the Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) and were admitted into universities of their choice in Nigeria. Since corruption has permeated into the fabrics of Nigeria's society, these students are already products of perverted society.

The term corruption is quite elusive in its definition. It is not easy to get a single sentence that is inclusive of all the ramifications of the concept. Corruption or corrupt practices have been looked at in terms of (i) time and place, (ii) ethical and professional provisions, and (iii) moral principles. Citing Okojie and Momoh, Offor (2012) opined that corruption is a generic term describing acts that people consider immoral, such as fraud, stealing, graft, dishonesty, indiscipline, favouritism, lying, and sexual pervasion. Paraphrasing Obaighene, Angiobeneno (1995) affirmed that there is often difficulty defining the limits of corruption in the African traditional setting. With the extended family system and widespread poverty, many families see their highly placed relatives as their ultimate breadwinners

from whom all milk and honey flow. However, if there is equity and justice where everyone gets his/her due, such expectations from highly placed relatives will not be there. Transparency International defined corruption as the abuse of public office for private gain (Offor, 2012). *The Webster Dictionary* used the following terms to explain corruption: pervasion of integrity, moral depravity, the pervasion of state of purity and debasement of a language (Angiobenebo, 1995). The concept of corruption is understood in the context of its siblings - bribery, fraud, over-invoicing, pre-negotiated kickbacks for contracts awarded for all manner of goods and services, outright embezzlement and misappropriation of public funds or property (Angiobenebo, 1995). It implies that using one's position to secure certain advantages, such as jumping the queue, being waved off at checkpoints or making others bend the rules to accommodate one's demands are all forms of corrupt practices. Talking about using one's position to favour the relatives, it may be pertinent to refer to the divine example. James and John were first cousins to Jesus Christ, and they were in His apostleship. Their mother came to ask for a favour for her two sons, for one to sit at the right side and other at the left side of Jesus in His Kingdom. The request was not granted by Jesus despite the relationship, rather, Jesus used the scenario to teach the ideals of good leadership (Matthew 20:20-28, NIV). This shows that being in a position of authority does not imply that the person should use the position to thwart rules in favour of the relatives. Similarly, it was said 'do not accept a bribe, because it blinds those who see and twist words of the righteous (Exo. 23:8, NIV). These days, those in the position of authority employ only their friends and relations without competitive interviews. Onuka (2012) has this to say;

> *There is corruption everywhere not only in terms of giving and taking bribes but also in terms of perversion of justice, inequity, abuse of due process, etc. Parents will not teach their children morals nor live uprightly but corrupt their children by teaching them perverted values (p.24)*

This goes to say that parents' corrupt practices provide a good base for students' unethical behaviours in the universities.

The focus of students' corrupt practices is to get unmerited grades as mentioned earlier. Examination malpractices are forms of corruption. They are a branch of academic dishonesty which manifest as crib notes copied on desks, clothes, exchange of papers and other higher technological methods, such as texting or mailing during examinations (Oluwatayo, Obi and Akwezuilo, 2016). In his Keynote Address, Ojerinde (2015) gave a comprehensive list of students' corrupt practices during examinations as follows: impersonation, swapping of paper, use of mobile phones, smuggling out question papers and/or answer sheet, collusion, copying from prepared answers, leaving the examination hall without permission or taking permission to go out under false pretense to ease oneself. Asim (2017) pointed out that corrupt practices do not occur only during examinations, they also occur before and after assessment. This paper focuses on dealing with all forms of corrupt practices that occur before, during and after examination through the marking, scoring and grading processes.

Assessment

The term assessment refers to the processes involved in determining the extent to which learning has taken place in the students. It is a way of ascertaining that teaching and learning took place. Assessment has been described as formal attempts to determine students' status concerning educational variables of interest (Ojerinde, 2012). Such attempts involve a series of testing measurement and the organization of data in a way that facilitates evaluation (Nkwocha, 2015). *Encyclopedia of Educational Evaluation,* as contained in Nkwocha (2015), describes assessment as a multi-tract, multi-method and multi-source process of gathering information about the variable of interest. Afemikhe (2017) simply defined assessment as the collection of information for decision-making. Quoting Falayajo, Asim (2017) explained assessment as the process of collecting information about objects (students) using different procedures to decide on the objects (students). Similar to this is the definition that sees assessment as the process of gathering data and fashioning them into interpretable form. From the foregoing, it can be deduced that assessment entails

collecting data about the students using different interventions and organizing and interpreting the data in a way that interested groups will understand them when published.

After collecting the responses of students during examinations, the lecturer sits down to mark and score the scripts using a standard marking guide. It is at this point that the lecturer will deal with irregularities that might have taken place unobserved during an examination.

Eliminating Corrupt Practices of Students through Assessment

Assessments in Universities are highly regulated that any behaviour of the staff and the students that bends the rules constitutes corruption, for instance:

- a student who fails to make up to 25% attendance in classes in any course is not qualified to take examinations in that course

- a student who is up to 30 minutes late to examination should not be allowed to take the examination

- each question number should begin in a fresh page

- there should be no handset or written materials relevant to the examination seen around the students during examinations.

This is to mention just a few of the items in the *Academic Regulation Document* as concerned assessment. Although there can be slight variations according to each university, it is worthy to note that evidences of most of the unethical practices of the students are there in their answer scripts and should be treated appropriately during marking and scoring of scripts. When the lecturer is painstakingly reading the students' responses to questions, he/she is determining the level of appropriateness of the responses. The lecturer should also represent the level of the appropriateness of each response with a number he/she is said to be scoring. When lecturers represent the student's total score in a course with letters such as A, B, C, or D, they are grading scripts. When lecturers carry out these processes dedicatedly, they will detect and checkmate (a) different hand-

writings in one answer script, (b) copied works (c) scripts written outside the examination hall (d) scripts with handwriting different from earlier submissions of the students' on Continuous Assessment (CA) before summative assessment, and (e) cancelling of name and matriculation number and replacing it with another, and the like.

As much as possible, lecturers should conduct continuous assessments during lecture periods to get the true 'picture' of the students' performance and handwriting. Scripts written outside the hall or answers that are lifted from a source can easily be identified from the scripts written under examination conditions. Scripts with the above issues can be sorted out and handed over to the Examination Malpractice committee working in conjunction with the quality control section of the University for further investigations. The culprits are not likely to have scores in that assessment, except if they are found not guilty after thorough scrutiny. This means that the fight against corrupt practices does not end in the examination hall but continues after. Therefore, the unethical practices that are not noticed during examinations due to large student population can still be identified during the process of marking, scoring and grading of responses. By so doing, those students who have come to the university not to acquire knowledge but to pick certificates will be shown a way out.

Thorndike and Hagen (1977) asserted that marks and marking are very deeply embedded in educational culture, and they are the basis for a wide range of actions and decisions within a given educational institution. Given the importance of marks in certification, maximum care should be given to the process that gives rise to marks. This is the reason conference marking is sometimes preferred. Conference marking is the situation where a group of lecturers who teach the same course come together at a round table to mark the students' scripts. Sometimes peer vetting of the scripts marked by individual lecturers is undertaken at the departmental or faculty level. This is done to ensure that the total score of the students will be freer from bias since it does not emanate from one person's idea. When the assessment is meticulously carried out, quality will be enhanced. Quality here refers to the degree of congruency or match between the certificates issued to the students and the students' performances outside the university. These mea-

sures, if applied, will not only make students sit down to study but will make them realize that malpractices are no longer workable. They will imbibe hard work and settle down to read and earn their deserved marks. The job of coordination and invigilation of examinations will be easier because students would comply with rules. In addition, students' attendance at lectures will increase knowing that there is no other way to be successful in examinations. Individuals who cannot benefit from University education would consider other career options so that individuals who seek University admission would be those who have the capabilities and desire to acquire the knowledge. It is by so doing that certificates issued to graduating students would be true reflections of their abilities. It is then that the stakeholders, the employers of labour and the general public will begin to trust the practice and programmes of education.

Costs of Enhancing Quality through Assessment

Quality is value-laden. It has to do with the worth of University education which has to do with the goals of University education. The goals include to: (1) produce high-level manpower for national development; (2) prepare students with the knowledge and skills for self-reliance and the world of work (FME, 2012). To achieve these goals, corrupt practices have to be eradicated through assessment; inputs to education have to be adequately provided to ensure smooth implementation. However, to ensure corruption-free and valid assessment, the following conditions have to be met, and the following are therefore recommended:

1. Sufficient assessment and learning materials: If these materials are not sufficient, it creates room for assessment to be compromised;

2. Reduction of students' population per lecturer; the recommended class size of 50 students should be enforced. Large class size makes control and monitoring ineffective and proper assessment is jeopardized.

3. Provision of sufficient lecture and examination halls filled with comfortable seats and enough lighting and ventilation to enable good

sitting arrangement. This helps to make invigilation less cumbersome, and assessment would be more error-free.

4. Lecturers' salaries and other entitlements should be promptly paid. Delayed salaries and allowances can weaken the lecturers' ability to resist the students' sorting tendencies that endanger assessment results.

5. Every lecturer should be provided with computer and computer accessories to aid assessment, record-keeping of students' information and their retrievals. This will forestall falsification of assessment results.

6. Funding of Universities should be made more meaningful to help in tackling the internal mechanisms and academic policies regarding assessment so that there would not be loopholes to warrant corrupt practices.

Summary and Conclusion

Assessment has to do with getting to know what the students have gained as a result of exposure to some contents. Corrupt practices affect assessment results in many negative ways. They lead to spurious assessment results that present false interpretations of students' abilities. By so doing, quality is lowered and achievement of education goals becomes difficult. This paper therefore recommends ways to curb the corrupt practices of the students so that quality can be raised. These corrupt practices are geared towards getting unmerited higher grades. Therefore, evidences of most corrupt practices are usually seen in the students' answer sheets. This is the reason this writer is suggesting the terminal stages of assessment which involve marking, scoring, and grading of results as the final corrective stages of all the actions of the students that culminate in corrupt practices. Lecturers are at the central point in doing these, but when they work under harsh conditions, scrutiny may be difficult. Hence, the conditions that would be met to enable corrupt practices to be eliminated in Nigerian Universities using assessment include supply of adequate teaching, learning and assessment facilities, as well as provision of good working conditions for lecturers

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