



Keywords

School Grade,
Falling Standard of Education,
Examination Malpractice,
Job Performance

Received: February 19, 2016

Revised: March 8, 2016

Accepted: September 30, 2016

Grading System and Effects of Examination Malpractices on Falling Standard of Education and Job Performance

Ibrahim Ishola Abdul Rahaman

Faculty of Education, Sule Lamido University, Kafin Hausa, Nigeria

Email address

abduhrahamanibrahim2@gmail.com

Citation

Ibrahim Ishola Abdul Rahaman. Grading System and Effects of Examination Malpractices on Falling Standard of Education and Job Performance. *International Journal of Modern Education Research*. Vol. 3, No. 6, 2016, pp. 46-51.

Abstract

The development of a reliable and valid grading system is an area which still deserves much attention to help solve problems of examination malpractices in Schools, particularly in Nigeria. This paper attempt to discuss historical development of grading and its effect, 'purpose of examination, causes and forms of examination malpractice,' influence of cognitive development and effects of strike action on school learning. Thereafter appropriate suggestions for stakeholders including, teachers, government and parents toward solving the identified problems are offered.

1. Introduction

Like other developed countries such as Britain, USA, Canada, and Japan it is time for Nigerian Educational Training Programmes to focus on functional education and assessment technique that is capable of showing skills acquisition instead of paper or certificate possession. From the available record, Nigeria adopted most of educational system and policies from the western word but seems to be having problem with examination malpractices and functional education which will allowed the citizens to put in to practical use skills that are learned during schooling (Olaofe, 2001 & Aliyu, 2006). There are indications that Nigerian society attached high premium to paper qualification and material wealth than they do with what goes on in the school and the school learning. Perhaps this could be one of the reasons why the issue of Examination malpractice and unemployment has become the biggest problem facing educational development in Nigeria. In fact, at all levels of education presently there is en-mass cheating by the students to ensure passing at either internal or external public examinations (Omotosho, 1990).

Some students cannot defend the grade obtained in the examination. In some cases Primary and Secondary School students are found not to be able to spell their name or write the name of their school correctly. Worst still is report of some Medical Doctors who can't defend their certificate by not been able to perform any operation or prescribe good drugs. That is to say that educational standard is falling and something urgent needs to be done to avert the trend.

"Grades" resulting from testing or examinations has remained one of the problems of education to which adequate solution has not been found and which require adequate attention to prevent the country from total collapse. Perhaps the anxiety which is associated with examination is assume to have led many students to devised various

ways to beat the system in order to achieve academic success

Examination malpractices is defined as any form of cheating which directly or indirectly falsify the ability of the student in or outside the exam hall, so that the student obtained a grade or score above his/her academic ability.

2. Grading System

According to some notable authors (Taylor, 1981 & Shaney et al, 2005) there are differences in opinion on the reliability of grade and even their necessity in teaching-learning process. To them the marks awarded as means of showing students' academic performance often have greater effects on students growth and development. For example, students who obtain low mark in a test may feel unhappy, annoyed and feel relaxed in his studies and subsequently have his academic performance affected thereafter. The reverse is the case if a student gets unexpected or inflated grade beyond his/her expectation. This could account for the reason why Simon (1970) argued that whenever teaching and learning go on grades are reality, but beyond the reality is amount of confusion it tends to create. He explained further that grading in general must be examined or critically looked into because of the following reasons:

- (i) Grade separate both students and teachers in to warring camps.
- (ii) Grades, at times, rewards the wrong people and punish students who need to be punished the least.
- (iii) Grades encourage or reinforce competition.
- (iv) Grades cause students to under-estimate worth of learning capacity (self-concept).

The above points when examined, could account for the reason why most of the American Schools adopted one form of grading system called "Pass-Fail. In this criteria reference system, a student's is awarded a pass or given "F", failure for mastery of the subject matter or non-performance in a prescribed examination respectively. According to Bloom (1976) perceptions and the expectations held by the students with respect to their academic abilities and performance affect the amount of work they will invest in each of the learning tasks, and consequently their level of achievement. He went further to say that if a student has a high capacity for achieving, there is very possibility that such a student will strive or work harder to fulfill his desire by studying more than another student who got confused and feel that no matter how much he tries he would not achieve.

It is only when reasonable assessment technique such as Contract or Negotiation exemption grading or other efforts are made to reduce examination malpractices that the anxiety associated with failure that this country can boost of producing graduates who can meet the challenges of the 21st century.

A detailed description of Pass-Fail grading system as well as its advantages and disadvantages over other forms of grading are given by Gilman (1974).

Actually, the way an individual reacts to a threatening

situation varies depending on the nature of similar problems in the past. It cannot be ruled out that many Nigerian students often show concern over their marks. While it will be expected that students who academically competent should not be threatened by schools test and examinations, Saraton (1980) opined that, no matter what, many students are threatened during the period of examinations and react with high level of achievement anxiety. For example, some students are known to request for medical excuses or perhaps instigate others to cause riot for an unjust cause so that they could write the examination at a later time when they would have been fully prepared.

While most of the previous discussion appeared to have focused on the negative effect of academic anxiety and other related effects, it cannot be ruled out that an individual needs some from an anxiety in every evaluative situation in order to perform well (Tobias, 1979). Never the less Bloom (1976) argued that perceptions and the exceptions held by the students with respect to their academic abilities and performance affect the amount of work they will invest in each learning task, and consequently their level of achievement. He explained that if a student's has a high capacity for achieving, there is every possibility such a student will strive to fulfill his desire by studying more, paying more attention during lessons and spending more time on the relevant tasks than a similar students who is confused and feels that no matter how much he tries he would not achieve.

3. Contract Grading

To help solve the problem of anxiety and other related problems that are associated with other methods of grading, another forms of criterion-referenced method of grading which is being suggested by writer and which are being used in some schools in Western countries is "Contract grading". Contract grading can be defined as a procedure whereby the instructor and the students early in the course agree in writing to the grade each student will receive when he/she produces or completed the activities required to earn his grade.

In this grading system, it is guaranteed that each student will receive the grade contracted for unless the students did not complete the required work satisfactory (Gilman, 1974). Where the student failed to meet the requirements to be given the marks contracted for, the student generally accept that the teacher gives the marks on grade that justified his/her efforts in the given assignments or projects. With this system, in most cases, students can be asked to rewrite projects or assignment that have been turned in but which the teacher thought had not been satisfactory done (Book, 1975). Hassencahl (1979) gave a detailed description of what Contract grading is, including the advantages and its disadvantages. The regular contract which is instructor controlled with some students input and weighted contract which involves both teacher and student input.

Among the studies conducted to determine the

effectiveness of Grade contract, Dash (1970) & King (1972), indicated that students learned more and received higher grades in Grade contract. These because the system permits that students be held accountable for their learning activities. Besides that, students reported that they experience a sharp decline in grade anxiety under this method of grading (Parks & Zurhellen, 1978). From personal experience this contract grading system looks like a good method of assessment in a programme such as the Distance Learning, Sandwich or the In-service training programmes in Nigerian institutions, considering the age group, socio cultural background and the limited time available for running this programme.

On the basis of the principle of contract grading system and the flexibility involved in the selection of learning activities, the writer feels that older individuals (adults), Semi illiterates and those that had been out of the educational system for quite a long time period would prefer to select activities that will only earn them a pass mark. In other words, there is opportunity to select activities that each student is capable of handling, more or less giving room for individual differences.

Even in English and Mathematics where students often have problem making Credit pass and want to engage in examination malpractice in order to gain admission into higher institutions, a Contract form of assessment to place students on pass or failed will be more preferable. While the contract grading system might be good for the above reason, the major problem that could be associated with it is the non-commitment by the teacher and insincerity of some Nigerian Students. The author believe that many problems that are associated with examinations such as anxiety, fairness, leakages, etc, will be drastically reduced if the Negotiated grading system is also being put into trial and use in the school system.

4. Functions of Examinations

The main purpose of examination is to provide evidence that a person has achieved a specified standard of attainment depending on the grade received. According to Obe (1980), examinations in schools are carried out for the following purposes:

1. to test the efficiency of teaching.
2. to ascertain whether or not a specified standard of knowledge or performance has been reached.
3. to indicate to the students how they are progressing.
4. to predicts students future performance.
5. to screen for placement in the class or for job in institutions and or organisations.

5. Forms of Examination Malpractices

The fear of failure of examination due to some factors like lack of confidence, poor study habit, poor teaching or marking or attempt by the students to get rich quickly

contributed to their being involved in examination malpractices. Examination malpractices take different forms such as:

1. Leakages of questions to the students intentionally or carelessly through the class teacher, examination body personnel, typist, etc. before the actual examination is conducted.
2. Bringing in of prohibited materials like calculator or summary note by candidate into the examination hall.
3. Illegal exchange of information, written or verbal, by copying or giraffe among candidate inside the examination hall.
4. Smuggling in of, or replacement by, already worked answers scripts into the examination hall by candidates.
5. Bringing into the examination hall answers written or thigh, piece of paper; hand or other hidden parts of the body called "tattoo or dubbing".
6. Connivance and turning a blind eye on obvious malpractice by supervisors and invigilators already bribed or compromised.
7. Impersonation by the examinee by the so-called "mercenary" candidates, who could be fellow students, friends, undergraduate students of any tertiary institutions, etc.
8. Certificated racketeering in the form of changes in, and /or issuance of false certificates or statements of results.

6. Causes of Examination Malpractices

Having examined at the form of examination malpractice, it is equally necessary to examine some of the factors that contribute to why students are engaged in examination malpractice. According to Jimoh (1997), when the school curricula are inadequate and or poorly implemented, students tend to shift their energy from learning to other anti-social like truancy, frauds, drug abuse, calling for strikes or students demonstration, etc.

6.1. Strike Action and Students Academic Achievements

A part from the issues raised above, one other factor that seems to be affecting students to perform below expectations or the graduate not been able to perform the skills expected of them has to do with the effect of frequent strike action on students learning. Unlike in the Saudi Arabia and industrialized countries like Japan and USA, education sector in Nigeria is not adequately funded by the Government at all levels. From the Federal to Local Government level, Government do not put education on their priority lists in the annual budget. The government, through its attitude, non-fulfillment of its promises, sometimes makes teachers not take their work with seriousness and this in turn affect students both academically and psychologically. Strike actions are cause most especially when workers demands are not yielded to, or whenever there is a communication gap between the workers

and the government or their employer. At times, it could be due to implementation of unwelcome programme, nonpayment of salary increment or an observation of some form of injustice to some group of people.

Whenever strike occurs, it is generally used by workers to express grievances or enforce a demand. Similar to what happen in the United State then, in 1992, some lecturers of Tertiary institutions went on strike because of Federal Government's attitude or unfulfilled promises made then (Makukwe, 1995). No doubt strike action by teacher forces students to have undue period of relaxation outside school environment. This in turn can cause extension of study period and consequently psychological depression. One can argue that students unrest and strike action are among the factors responsible for students poor performance, increase in examination malpractice and the fall in educational standard.

For example the mass failure which was recorded in 1998 SSCE results Nationwide was a result of 1998 strike action embarked upon by the teachers which was directed by the Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT) in that year. Similar mass failure was recorded in 2013 before the introduction of Computer Based Test (CBT) for use in the Joint admission and Matriculation Board exams in Nigeria.

With the new examination system, as an innovation, students at all levels of education and now trying at all costs to pass the prescribed examinations or make better grades even when their academic ability and performances do not justify such.

It is not uncommon to hear students make remark like "I will prefer being simply awarded a pass mark of 40% or that they are in a given programme just to have a certificate without necessarily working much for such". Generally speaking, public or ends of year examinations, create certain feelings in students and at times healthy competitions and frustrations that encourage students to want to be engaged in examination malpractices.

6.2. Societal Factors and Citizen's Perception

Considering the huge amount of money paid in training a child from the primary to University, many parents especially those that had their children in private school would not want such money to be wasted. In other words, both parents and teachers do in a way contribute to the aforementioned problem of examination malpractice. In fact, some parents are reported to have devised various means to ensure that their students or children do pass with better results. While some have used positive means like engaging in lesson teacher/tutor, encourage attendance of extra-mural classes, there are some parents who are interested in a do-or-die affairs, like following their children to the examination venue, sponsoring of buying examination question papers and other forms of examination malpractices (Omotosho, 1990).

To the extreme end, unhealthy pressure from parents on children to pursue courses for which they have little aptitude, and interest can push some students to be engaged in antisocial behaviours or examination malpractices. The same

applied to the present conditions in schools where teacher's promotion is tied to the students' success rate in public examinations (Falayajo, 1986). For example there are some schools Heads or Principals who are reported to assist in perpetrating examination malpractices simply because of the social approval that comes with high level of success in public examinations.

Schools that consistently record high success rate are usually given social recognition to the extent that parents prefer to send or withdraw their children to such recognized schools. Schools that do not have long history of high performance rate on the other hand, and for the fear of losing their students, may therefore be engaged in aiding their students to commit examination fraud or malpractices. According to Bajah (1985), an assessment is considered to be objective when the techniques and test items used to evaluate the performance in question is not biased or introduce prejudice against the person (s) tested or examined.

6.3. Teacher and Teaching Career

Teaching can be defined as a systematic rational and organized process of transmitting knowledge, values, attitudes and skills in a formal setting in accordance with the acceptable professional principles. Therefore teachers play significant role in the development of a nation. No matter how innovative a policy, good and instructional materials and methodology are, unless the classroom teachers are carried along and ready to work, the new programme is bound to fail. That is to say that most problem encountered in the society can be solved, only if the teacher who are in charge of the students are more committed, adequately trained and satisfied in terms of salary package.

Unlike in the past, teachers in Nigeria have lost public respect and the professional competence of graduates are doubtful as many foreign countries have to screen their certificates before been considered for admission or employment in all professions in overseas countries.

It is obvious that many teachers in Nigeria are not committed to teaching and have entered teaching profession mainly because they could not get any other lucrative jobs. A part from that, unlike in the foreign countries some teachers are reported to have combine teaching with Business, and begin to sell shoes, clothing materials or food items, even during the school hours. What kinds of learning do you expect in this situation? This attitude makes the students to be at the mercy of Lesson Notes, textbooks and being forced to buy the reading material in order to pass. In fact, it is surprising that you can now see small, younger or underaged students who are trying to enter university. Apart from the age this group of students are not ready mentally to comprehend what goes on in terms of activities and curriculum contents.

6.4. Cognitive Development and Academic Performance

What is the point in knowing or having knowledge of

something and not being able to express it orally or practically? The practice of having pupils or students entered secondary or tertiary institutions at an early age than normal years should be discouraged. Because the pupils may not be matured enough to comprehend very well if E/C is moved from lower level to higher level above his/her age. This is because some psychology principles made us to believe that some behaviour are learned only when some maturation or mental growth has taken place properly and this growth pattern cannot be hastened or delayed unnecessarily (Siann & Ugwuegbu, 1980).

Any attempt to get at the root of the problem of examination malpractices and its effect, must look at, pertinent questions that related to students' mental readiness and preparedness as well as environmental factors such as teaching facilities, student population per class and admission selection processes (Turton, 1992). It can be argued that there is relationship between student cognitive abilities, the syllabi, and examination questions/items and this account for high students failures in public examinations and semester examinations in tertiary institutions. Some students appear not to be mentally prepared or matured before outgoing entrance in to secondary schools or tertiary institution, and even when they managed to escaped for a while they ended up not being able to perform towards the final stage when the content materials given is above their level of comprehension.

Arising from Piaget's cognitive stage of development, for example majority of the secondary school students are expected to be at their formal reasoning stage. Therefore the external examinations such as SSCE, GCE, JAMB and UME examinations items which are set to assess formal reasoning will be found difficult by those students who might not have attained this level of reasoning. This could account for mass failure recorded in some years. Turton, (1991) argued that the new SSCE syllabi produced by WAEC body lies between "O" and "A" levels because of increases in contents and depth of understanding.

7. Discussion

The certificate mentality, inadequate coverage of the teaching syllabus and strike actions in Nigeria society has made classroom learning to be reduced to teachers coaching students mainly toward passing some prescribed examinations. The Government, parents and the classroom teachers do have some roles to play toward finding lasting solution to these problems.

Of course, at all level of education, the course content or syllabi is revised periodically. There is need to pay attention to the grading system being adopted in schools, most especially in the core subject like English Language and Mathematics. While Arts students are expected to have at least a "Credit" in English, one wonders why a student who obtain a grade "A" or Excellent in History or Literature but happen to have just "Pass" in English should be denied admission. After all, this same student made use of English in

writing the History or Literature paper.

To minimize punishing students unnecessarily as a result of this lapse, it is suggested that a "Pass-Fail" method of Grading should be adopted for use in these two subjects. Apart from removing examination anxiety, more students who might have been denied admission for not having "Credit" pass will have the opportunity to further their education. In other words attention should be focused of what an individual will be capable of contributing to the social, technological and economical development of the society rather than the number of success rate in examinations.

On the part of the government, like other foreign countries more funds will have to be made available for educational development at all levels, and for prompt payment of salary and provision of infrastructural facilities for teaching and learning in schools. Besides that, efforts should be made to minimize or prevent anything that could bring strike action or make students to stay at home other than the holiday periods. In addition the problem of unemployment should be addressed for there is no justification for the students spending years in schools only to end up not getting any job.

The high expectation and excessive demand by the parents for a student to take a particular course or subject that qualifies him/her for a specific profession should be minimized or discouraged. However, parents are advised to monitor their children at school and make adequate provision for the welfare.

Presently news about examination malpractices is too much that teachers hardly focus on their main primary assignment. There are examinations malpractices in Ghana and other developing countries but hardly do these countries make public their observations only to have them controlled internally before getting out of hand. Although there is need to seriously look into the issues raised in this paper, all effort will have to be directed at making the parents, students and the Teachers know the implication behind every action of theirs.

You will not be surprised that examination malpractice has been drastically reduced at SuleLamido University, Kafin Hausa mainly because the newly admitted students were informed early, during the orientation for the new intake for 2015/16, among other things, all about examination malpractices, effect and punishments.

8. Conclusion

From all the above discussions, it seems more attention will have to be given to awareness and sensitization campaign against examination malpractices. Instead of minor punishment of say 'fines or imprisonment' for a year or two, any student caught should be banned from writing that Examination again in the next three (3) years and information about such affected students, should be sent to all other institutions in the country to prevent such candidates from registering in other institutions within the stipulated time. Finally, Government at all levels and the teachers will have to be more serious with their responsibilities, while teachers

should ensure adequate coverage of the course contents in order for the students to learn, have necessary information and acquired skills that are necessary to perform satisfactorily on the job after graduation.

References

- [1] Aarons, G. A. (2005). Measuring provider attitudes toward evidence-based practice: consideration of organizational context and individual differences. *Child Adolesc Psychiatr Clin N Am*, 14, 255-271.
- [2] Adegoke, B. A. (2000). Test response mode, numerical ability and gender as determinants of students cognitive achievement in senior secondary school physics. An unpublished M. Ed. project. University of Ibadan.
- [3] Aliyu, U. D (2006). The strategies for combating examination malpractices through community participation in Kano State. A paper presented at the annual National Conference of Kano State College of Education.
- [4] Bajah, S. T. (1983). Strategies for evaluating programme. A paper delivered at the Nigeria educational research council (NERC) Interdepartmental seminar.
- [5] Bloom, B. S (1976). *Human Characteristics and School Learning* New York: Mc Graw Hill.
- [6] Book, C. (1975). Selected approaches to speech communication evaluation: A symposium-ii Contract grading in the international communication course. *Speech Teacher*, 24 (2), 133-138.
- [7] Dash, E. F (1970). Contract for grades. *The clearing House*. 45, 231-235.
- [8] Elsner, P. A. & Brytton, W. C. (1974). Non punitive grading practice and policies. Peralta C. S California, Oakland Office of Educational Services.
- [9] Folayajo, W. (1986). Accountability of implications of continuous assessment: assessing the session. *African Journal of research in education*, 1 (1), 17-26.
- [10] Gilman, D. A. (1979). *Alternative to tests, marks, and class rank*. Indiana: Curriculum Research and Development Centre. 15 (5), 376-382.
- [11] Hassencahl, F. (1979). Contract grading in the classroom. *Improve College and University Teaching*, 27 (1). 30-33.
- [12] Jimoh, A. Y. (1997). School life. *Education and culture*, 14 (3), 15-24.
- [13] King, T (1972). A contract approach to a public speaking course. *Speech teacher*, 21 (2), 143-144.
- [14] Madukwe, U. S. (1995). Strikes in an institution of learning: what hope for the child. A paper presented at WAEC seminar, Yaba, Lagos on 28th April, 1995.
- [15] Obe, E. O (1980). *Educational testing in west Africa*. Lagos: premier press publisher.
- [16] Olaofe, I. A (2001) Enhancing Effective Language Teaching in School of successful UBE Programme. *Journal of Effective language teaching*, 1 (1), 8-24.
- [17] Omotosho, H. M. (1990). Examinations: the face of malpractices in Nigeria. *WAEC News* 4.
- [18] Parks, A. G. & Zurhellen, S. H. (1971). Students attitudes towards the grade contract. *Improving College and University Teaching*, 26 (1). 239-242.
- [19] Saraton, I. G. (1980). *Test anxiety: theory research and application*. Hillsdale, N. J.: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- [20] Shaneyfelt, T., Baum, D., Feldstein, D., Houston, T. K., Kaatz, S., Whelan, C. and Green, M. (2006). Instrument for evaluating education in evidence-based practice: a systematic review. *JAMA*, 296, 1116-1127.
- [21] Siann, J. Ugwuegbu, D. (1980). *Educational psychology in changing world*. London: Allenudwing publishing company.
- [22] Simons, S. B. (1970). Grade must go. *School Review*, 78, 397-402.
- [23] Taylor, H. (1981) The effect of contract grading on students' motivation. Paper presented at the Research Association.
- [24] Tobias, S. (1979). Anxiety research in educational psychology. *Journal of education psychology*, 71. 573-582.
- [25] Turton, P. (1992). System generated failure at the senior secondary level. Paper presented at seminar of ABU, Faculty of Education, Zaria.