

# Academic Malpractice in Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria: Implications for Quality Education, Quality Graduates and the Nation

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## ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the impact of academic malpractices on the quality of education, the quality of graduates and the nation. So far in Nigeria, we are only talking about examination malpractice which is an integral part of academic malpractice. Academic malpractice is any reprehensible and unhealthy activity or practice that relates to any academic matter. This paper has focused on actions and activities of individuals relating to academic matters in academic institutions that constitute academic malpractices. The causes, the perpetrators and the various forms of such malpractices are discussed in the paper. Academic malpractices pose a great threat to the quality of education, the quality of graduates and the nation. Recommendations are made at the end of the paper, on how to nib the threats in the bud.

**Key Words:** Malpractices, Education quality, Academic malpractices

## Introduction

One of the greatest evils of this era that is negatively affecting the educational sector in Nigeria is academic malpractice which has become regular occurrence in most schools in Nigeria. There is no level of education (primary, secondary and tertiary) where academic malpractices are not being perpetrated. The focus of this paper is however on the tertiary institutions where academic malpractices have assumed a dangerous dimension, and if the situation is not corrected, quality of education, quality of the graduates and national development will be undermined. The malpractice in the educational institutions is a reflection of the decay and rots in the value system of the society. It is now the end that justifies the means instead of the means justifying the end. People are after the result and are not bothered or concerned about how the result is obtained. Unfortunately, what is well known and condemned is examination malpractice. It is an act of insincerity and immorality to down play or silent on a larger problem and focus on an integral part of that larger problem. Academic malpractice is the larger problem while examination malpractice is an integral part of academic malpractice. The searchlight of the society and academic community had never been

beamed on all the acts of academic malpractices. The concern and focus of this paper is on academic malpractice. This paper intends to wholistically appraise all the academic malpractices that are being perpetrated in the tertiary institutions. Academic malpractice is also referred to as academic dishonesty. It is not new in Nigeria, although one may not be able to state categorically when it started.

Academic dishonesty (academic malpractice) is any type of cheating that occurs in relation to formal academic exercise (Ugwu & Ohimekpen, 2010). Cheating is viewed by the society as an act of dishonesty. Any form of cheating which a person commits that relates to academic works or activities directly or indirectly, is academic dishonesty. The essence of perpetrating any act of dishonesty is to benefit or gain unduly from it. Mitchel (2018), defined academic malpractice as any sharp practice done with a view to deriving an undue academic benefit. In many tertiary institutions, female students that offer “sex for marks”, derive an undue academic advantage while lecturers that offer “marks for sex”, derive an undue non academic gain (sexual pleasure) from such offer. These immoral offers are academic malpractices as they relate to academic matter. Academic malpractice is any unwholesome practice that is perpetrated on academic matters which is at variant with academic norms and values. Any academic matter that is done without following due process and also violate the laid down rules and regulations constitutes academic malpractice.

Examination malpractice is a fragment of academic malpractice as it only relates to cheating before, during and after examination. Academic malpractice takes a wholistic view at all the sharp, inappropriate and acts of illegalities done in pursuance of academic matters. Over the years, the focus of the society and the academic community has been on examination malpractice while being oblivious and unmindful of other sharp practices that go on with other academic matters. Admission in tertiary institutions is an academic matter. When the laid down processes and procedures are not observed and followed religiously to the letter during admission exercise, academic malpractice is committed. When an unqualified candidate influences the admission exercise and process with money or personality and is offered admission while another candidate who is eminently qualified for admission is denied or not given admission, academic malpractice is committed. Any aspect of academic malpractices such as examination malpractice is a deliberate act of wrong doing, contrary to the laid down rules on academic matter, designed to give a candidate an undue advantage (Oko & Adie, 2016 ). Any deliberate misdeed on academic matter is academic malpractice. When the school library is stocked with unwanted and irrelevant books, contrary to the ones requested for, from which the officer in charge makes some financial gains academic malpractice is committed.

Knowledge and skills are expected to be imparted through education. Ethical behaviours and moral values are equally expected to be imparted through education. The import of this is that any unethical behaviour conduct and immoral activities

perpetrated or shown in relation to any academic matter constitutes academic malpractice. Stealing of other students notebooks and textbooks by some students is unethical and immoral, it is therefore, an act of academic malpractice. A lecturer who extorts money from his/her project students before doing the needful, commits academic malpractice.

## **Perpetrators of Academic Malpractices**

The focus has been on the students as those who are perpetrating examination malpractice. This is because some students are in the habit of cheating during the conduct of examinations, hence the concept of examination malpractice is usually used. However, some lecturers are equally culpable of examination malpractice which is an integral part of academic malpractices for their ignoble role during the conduct of examination and improper grading of students examination papers (Ugwu & Ohimekpen, 2010 & Daniel, 2018). Cosmas (2012), enumerated actions of some lecturers that equally make them culpable of academic malpractices. These actions are:

1. Aiding and abetting students directly or indirectly to cheat during the conduct of examinations.
2. Failure to report or bring students caught for examination malpractices during examination to book.
3. Abandoning invigilation and delegating a novice or incompetent person to hold forth for them.
4. Lobbying or begging fellow lecturer for marks for students (girl friends, relatives and those they collect money from).
5. Male lecturers offering marks for sex with female students.
6. Demanding money from students in order to pass them or give them undeserved grades.
7. Embarking on unnecessary strike action and suspension of lectures due to management failure to meet some of their demands which may be frivolous and superfluous.

According to Daniel (2018), students are the originators and initiators of examination malpractices (academic malpractice) and they are still in the business, and are now becoming more and more clever than ever before, in committing examination malpractices. Students and lecturers are the major perpetrators of examination malpractice (a part of academic malpractice). Okon (2000) posited that some parents are in the habit of paying for admission for their children when they know that such children may not sail through the admission process on their own. Some go to the

extent of assisting their children to pass their school exams by offering monetary and material inducements to their lecturers in order to pass them and give them good grades. Parents that indulge in such acts are equally part of the perpetrators of academic malpractices in Nigeria and in the tertiary institutions in particular. Oko & Adie (2016) lucidly put it that it is not only students that are involved in malpractices, as he listed business centers inside or around schools, teachers, school heads and examination officers.

## Causes of Academic Malpractices

**The following are the causes of academic malpractices:**

**Quest for Certificate:** The belief that certificate is most important than the skills is what prompted most students into academic malpractices so as to have the required certificate. According to Oko & Adie (2016), the society regards possession of certificate as Alfa and Omega where an individual is only recognized if he possesses certain certificate. People view certificate as an honour, pride and value of the person possessing it. Onyechene (2004) & Awambor (2004) cited laziness, lack of preparation or inadequate preparation for examination, lack of self confidence, socio-economic factors, commercialization of education among other things as the causes of academic malpractices. These factors may make some students, lecturers and parents to indulge in academic malpractices for one reason or the other. Lecturers need money and parents cannot afford to see their children failing as it would amount to a waste of money. According to Ugwu & Ohimekpen (2010), the desire to cheat even when it is against the interest of the cheater can make a student to commit academic malpractices. This is true of those students with the spirit of cheating. Since the spirit and desire are present, the students may be goaded to commit academic malpractice. Failure to bring to book those students who were apprehended in the past for academic malpractices. This may make some other students to commit academic malpractices since cheaters are not punished.

**Reward for the best student.** This may cause some students to embark on academic malpractice so as to emerge as the best student who will clinch the prize. It is like competing athletes who embark on doping so as to win the race and receive the prize.

- The ineffectiveness or poor lecturing by a lecturer which make the students not to comprehend the lectures may make some students to embark on academic malpractice as a means of passing the course.

- Lack or weak institutional policies and regulations on academic malpractices can make students to take advantage of flaws or weaknesses in the system to perpetrate academic malpractices. Nigeria is one of the notorious nations of the world that are corruption ridden (Olawole, 2020).

**Academic malpractice is another form of corruption:** What happens in the nation at large may occur and manifest in any microscopic or subset of it. Since Nigeria is a corrupt nation, any subset of it is bound to manifest corruption. The school system is bound to be corrupt and this is manifesting in the form of academic malpractice among other things. The Corruption in the nation may cause academic malpractice to manifest in the tertiary institutions. The inordinate desire to pass at all cost and by all means may force some students to embark on academic malpractice so as to achieve the desired success. Over ambition that is not matched with one's ability can make student to use inappropriate method such as academic malpractice to realize that ambition.

**Parental pressure:** Some parents mount pressure on their children to achieve success at all cost. This can make such children to do whatever that can make the realization of that success possible. Sometimes, parents 'buy admission' for their children into the tertiary institutions when they are not qualified for it. Such parents can still go to the extent of buying marks for their children while they are in school if they cannot cope with their studies.

**Peer Group Influence:** Studies by Idris (2006) have shown that peer group can influence their fellow student to follow the part of academic malpractice instead of studying hard for their exam. Peer group influence is a potent force that can derail a focused student from positive action to negative action such as academic malpractice. The influenced student can stop studying hard for the exams and choose the path of academic malpractice for success in the exam.

**Obsession for good grades:** When students are obsessed for good grades in their courses, they can use academic malpractices to achieve such desires. When students know that they cannot on their own get good grades in some courses that can make them to go through the back doors in order to get such grades.

## Forms of Academic Malpractices

The following are the actions that constitute academic malpractices in tertiary institutions:

1. **Examination Malpractices:** According to Oko and Adie (2016), the following are some identified forms of examinations malpractices:
  - **Leakage:** This means that the content of examination or part of it is disclosed prior to taking the examination. Usually it involves one or more of the following: staff members of the examination authorities, printers, proof readers, and messengers.
  - **Impersonation:** An individual who is not registered as a candidate for a particular examination takes the place of one that is registered. Usually this involves collusion between the chief examiner and the examination supervisor. It frequently involves tertiary institutions students taking the test for monetary reward or a favor for a girl friend or boy friend.
  - **Smuggling of foreign Materials:** This is perhaps the most common form of malpractice. It relates to the introduction of unauthorized materials (e.g. parts or whole note books, text books, micro chips and answer) into the examination hall. Foreign materials are frequently smuggled in pants, shoes, hems and bras or deposited or fixed in the hall prior to the examination or even smuggled in by the candidates or their aids during the examination.
  - **Copying:** Copying from another candidate's work with or without permission.
  - **Collusion:** Unauthorized passing of information between candidates usually by exchanging notes or scripts. This is usually facilitated by inadequate spacing between desks and laced supervision.
  - **Makers Malpractice:** Deliberate alteration of marks designed to inflate or deflate a candidate's original mark. This can be initiated by examination officials or candidates (Eze, 2014 & Olanipekun, 2013).
2. **Plagiarism:** According to Cosima (2010), plagiarism is the adoption or reproduction of original intellectual creations (properties) (such as concepts, idea, methods, price of information or expression etc.) of another author (person, collective organization, community or other type of author including, anonymous author) without due acknowledgement of the original author (owner) of the intellectual property. Plagiarism is an academic crime and is also an art of academic malpractice. It is usually perpetrated in tertiary institution where lecturers reproduce another lecturer's textbook. Student in tertiary institutions are also fond of committing plagiarism by downloading academics materials from the internet without acknowledging the author and quoting the source. Intellectual properties of people in other countries are downloaded without

due acknowledgement while the perpetrator claims the ownership of the work.

3. **Act of Sabotage:** Hornby (2005), defines sabotage as an act of doing deliberate damage to equipment, transport, machine etc to prevent an enemy (a competitor) from using them. In tertiary institutions, sabotage takes the form of cutting pages of textbooks, diagrams, pictures, and references etc. from academic materials in library and from fellow students' books. This act may be to deny others the opportunity of reading or using them and or to punish the owner of the book or academics materials. During protest by students in tertiary institutions, they can embark on wanton destruction of school properties even to the extent of destroying ICT centre, lecture rooms, laboratories and workshops where equipment for teaching are kept. Every act of sabotage in tertiary institutions is an act of academic malpractice. It is a misdeed and a wrong which affects academic activities in a negative way. The willful destruction of the academic items amount to academic malpractice.
4. **Academic Cultism:** This is carried out by a group of some students with the sole aim of pressurizing lecturers with threats to pass their members in their courses with good grades, failing which they can assassinate or inflict pains and injuries on such recalcitrant lecturer. The group seeks to achieve academic goal through academic cultism. This is an act of academic malpractice.
5. **Admission Malpractice:** Many parents due to their quest and that of their children to study some courses such as Law, Medicine, Pharmacy and etc. go to the extent of offering financial inducement or gratification to officials in tertiary institutions who can assist them to get their children admitted for their preferred courses. It is usually done by those students who may not get admitted through the normal process and laid down criteria due to one reason or the other. Admission exercise in tertiary institutions is an academic matter. Any sharp practice in the process is an academic malpractice. Lobbying and using influence to get admission into most competitive and golden courses in Nigeria are the order of the day during admission exercise in most tertiary institutions. It is usually done by people with the influence and power who may not be admitted without lobbying and using their influence (Cosmas, 2012). This act constitutes academic malpractice.
6. **Acts of Academic Misconduct:** Any act of academic misconduct constitutes academic malpractice. Academic misconducts are so prevalent in many tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Examples of such acts are:



- a. Marks for sex from lecturers to female students.
  - b. Sex for marks from female students to male lecturers.
  - c. Improper grading of students papers.
  - d. Refusal to report acts of cheating during the conduct of examinations.
  - e. Increasing the passing rate unnecessarily by adding undeserved marks to the scores of the students in order to improve the teacher's performance rating.
  - f. Deliberately failing some students.
  - g. Setting difficulty questions for the students which are outside what the lecturer has taught the students. This is usually done so that the students can come and be begging the lecturer with money or sex to pass them. Creating favorable conditions/atmosphere for students to cheat during examinations which is an act of encouraging the students to cheat in an examination constitutes academic malpractice. This is usually done by the invigilator of that examination.
  - h. Failure of lecturers to teach the students and setting of questions on courses not taught at all or properly taught is an act of academic malpractice.
7. **Fabrication:** According to Hornby (2005), this refers to the invention of false information in order to trick people. In fabrication, data or information are falsified, cooked up and used as citations to buttress an argument or stand. Lies are invented, dressed and polished to become fact which can lead credence to an argument. This is an act of academic malpractice.

## **Implication of Academic Malpractice on the Quality of Education, Quality Products and the Nation**

Education has a process which must be followed tenaciously for a successful final measurable outcome to be achieved. If the process and the inputs are defective due to any form of academic malpractices, the final outcome (graduates) will also be defective, lacking in quality and effectiveness. This will also have negative effects on the nation. Academic malpractices are challenges and dents on the quality of education. The nation will not be able to boast of the quality of its education. Academic malpractices are stigma on the nation's educational system. Institutions where academic malpractices are well pronounced and rampant will have no good reputation. The implication of this is that employers of labor will not want to employ graduates from such institutions.



Academic malpractices are challenges to the philosophy of education, the revised National Policy on Education (2004) and pose serious threats to the continuous existence of institutions that are notorious for such nefarious activities. According to Idris (2006), the students from such institutions will end up being certificated without really having the real value of that certificate (Knowledge and skills). The end product of education is the graduate. Graduates from a system, process and academic institutions where academic malpractices are the order of the day may not be of quality in comparison with graduates from institutions where academic discipline, hard work, principles and quality are their watchwords. Academic practices will not lead to the production of quality graduates.

Graduates who indulged in academic malpractices may not be able to secure employment and perform in the world of work. The low or poor quality of the graduates and their limitations may lead them to pose a threat or danger to the society. This can be a foundation and an opening for other social and economic vices which can negatively affect the nation and individuals. Academic malpractices in the tertiary institutions portend great dangers to the nation as such practices can also be perpetrated in other sectors of the nation. If cheating is done in the educational institution, it can also be carried out in the banking industry as well as in other places. The graduates from the tertiary institutions where academic malpractices are done are mostly youths who are often times referred to as the leaders of tomorrow. The instinct to cheat which is already in them will keep on pushing them to cheat wherever they go and in whatever they do. They can also cheat the nation. They have become people without moral values and discipline; such people cannot therefore be good leaders of tomorrow. The nation will consequently suffer from bad leadership.

Education is to help in the development of a nation, quality education and quality graduates. But when the system and process of education are characterized by academic malpractices and the products are lacking in quality, there may not be any meaningful contribution coming from education and products of that education (institutions) to the development of the nation.

## **Conclusion**

Academic malpractices take place in different forms in the tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Before now, the focus of the society has been on examination malpractice which is a part of academic malpractices. This paper has brought to the fore, the causes, types of academic malpractices and the perpetrators. Academic malpractices are misdeeds on academic matters in the tertiary institutions. Academic malpractices will undermine the quality of education, quality of the graduates, and national development. It is therefore necessary to nib the menaces in the bud to save education from imminent collapse.

## Recommendations

The following are the recommendations of this paper:

- Staff and students should be strictly warned to desist from any act of academic malpractices.
- Tertiary institutions should set up a powerful committee on academic malpractices to keep an eye on all academic activities. Staff and students found of committing academic malpractices should be brought to book.
- Severe punishments should be set out for the different types of academic malpractices.
- Transparency must be emphasized and allowed to characterize all academic activities.
- Students should be discouraged from taking to examination malpractices through regular counseling and orientation.

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