

Persistence of Examination Malpractices as a Reflection of Dysfunctional Social Institutions in Nigeria: Evidence from the Federal University of Technology (FUTA) Akure

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Abstract

This research was conducted to make empirical findings on the persistence of Examination Malpractices (EMs) among students of higher institutions in Nigeria using the Federal University of Technology, Akure (FUTA) as a point of reference. A total of 466 participants responded to the online structured questionnaire disseminated through the social media platforms of WhatsApp and the Telegram over a period of three months (June- August, 2025). The data were analysed using SPSS package involving the use of chi-square for categorical data. Findings revealed that cheating in examination remains persistence because of systemic abnormalities which include some parents and staff who aid and abet cheating in examination as well as a lack of adequate facilities and unconducive environments for examinations. The study recommends among other things that all stakeholders should be held accountable in issues of examination misconduct and adequate punishment measure be meted out to all perpetrators. It also recommends that the governments at all levels should prioritize improvements in the learning environment as well as ensuring the availability of appropriate facilities.

Keywords: Education; Examination malpractices; Social institutions; Systemic abnormalities; Values

Introduction

Education is a potent society tool for development as well as progress while examination remains an integral ladder to promotion and ultimate graduation from the school system. Students enter the school in their formative ages, grow through the system to become adults that will serve the society by relying on the learning processes acquired from it (Adebola, Ewemooje & Adebola, 2024). The school therefore remains a major socialization agent where values, norms and standards of behaviour are inculcated in the students. The success of an educational system largely depends on the efficiency of its examination structure because examination is a fundamental component of the teaching and learning process (Suleman, Gul, Ambrin, & Kamran, 2015). Examinations are arranged to evaluate the academic achievements of students in order to ascertain the extent to which they have achieved an average academic learning and acquired knowledge (Omemu, 2015). Consequently, examination goes beyond the individual student writing it because the school system is interconnected among important stakeholders including parents, teachers/lecturers, non-teaching staff, school administrators and the government.

However, over the past three decades, examination malpractice has emerged as a serious dysfunction within the educational system. It is defined as any deliberate misconduct by a student or group of students which may be in cohort with some other people, carried out in order to cheat in an examination. It is a gross misconduct that is increasingly becoming the norm with profound psychological and ethical implications (Ugobueze, 2024). Okunlola (2024), described examination malpractice as a pervasive problem across all levels of education in Nigeria, which undermines the intensity of academic assessments and pose significant challenges to the education system.

Okoye, Ighodaro, Obainoke, & Ugese (2024) reported from their findings that the rise in examination malpractice in tertiary institutions weakens the social fabric of the Nigerian society, including that of our national identity and norms. In the same vein, Udim, Abubakar, & Esseini, (2018), posited that examination malpractice leads to irreversible loss of credibility, negative consequences on the individual and institutions of learning; moral decadence, corruption as well as a lack of hard work among the students.

Social institutions as defined by Yusuf & Omokore (2015), refer to complex, integrated set of social norms that is designed to meet certain basic needs of the society and support societal survival. The society relies on these social institutions which include, the family, religion,

education, and government among others, to remain functional particularly in upholding the values and accepted standards of behaviour. These institutions collaborate and function well to ensure that the younger generation is raised in the consciousness and continuity of existing norms and values in order that the society will run smoothly (Ezeali & Obeh, 2018).

Contrary to expectation however, research has shown that the systems that are expected to guide and guard against examination malpractice are themselves complicit as the school, family, religious bodies, and government have all failed to mitigate the menace. The persistence of examination despite concerted efforts made at overcoming it, is the outcome of dysfunctional social institutions. For instance, Anakwe, (2010) opined that important stakeholder in education including teachers, parents and even school administrators have all become collaborators in issues of examination misconduct. Indirectly too, the lack of adequate facilities and acute shortage of human resources constitute a major hurdle in examination processes (Mauti, Masagara & Nyakwama, 2025) This study therefore considers the persistence of examination malpractice as a failure that is rather systemic and would be solved only when the latent triggers are addressed and not just during the examination period per se

Study Objectives

The main objective of this research was to determine the persistence of examination malpractice among students of tertiary institutions in Nigeria with a particular focus on the Federal University of Technology Akure (FUTA) as a case study. The specific objectives were to:

Ascertain the reasons why students are involved in examination malpractices

- i. Identify the common types of examination malpractices
- ii. Determine students' core values as correlated against their involvement in examination malpractices
- iii. Identify the institutional deficiencies responsible for examination malpractices

Hypotheses:

- i. There is no significant difference between students' desperation for success and indulgence in examination malpractices
- ii. There is no significant difference between students' core values and their involvement in examination malpractices

- iii. There is no significant difference between institutional deficiencies and examination malpractices

Literature Review

Education is a fundamental human right, the acquisition of knowledge, development of skills, attitude and temperaments that foster a harmonious personality, which positively impacts the society at large. Tertiary Education is a tool that the government expects to harness the workforce that will serve in different capacities and contribute positively to a nation's socio-economic and political development (Olagbemi 2014). An important aspect of education that cannot be overemphasized is writing examination, because it is synonymous to value addition as it is meant to improve the quality or chances of an individual's growth and gradual progress (Suleman, Gul, Ambrin, & Kamran, 2015). It is defined as the formal test of one's knowledge or ability in a particular subject, especially by means of answering questions or practical exercises (Milube, Phiri & Nyirenda, 2022). It is a formal process of determining whether a candidate has reached a certain level of performance, competence and learning that would certify him to be promoted to higher level, or certify him as qualified for certain public and private positions at graduation (Mogapi, 2016). Hence, education for students, ride on the wing of performance at examinations, but it is being undermined by examination malpractice which refers to irregularity or negative act that transpires before, during and after examination (Bibi, Muhammad & Dahiru, 2020).

Examination malpractice can be referred to as any deliberate act of wrongdoing or cheating by a candidate or any group of candidates before, during, or after an examination (Adegbite, 2019). As revealed from several studies across Nigerian higher institutions, examination malpractices manifest majorly as 'giraffing', impersonation, collusion, collaborating with others to cheat or share answers during exam; receiving or offering bribes to influence examination results; theft, stealing examination materials before or after exam, materials such as question papers or answer script; forgery, falsifying examination documents and assistance, receiving unauthorized help from teachers invigilators and others (Abdulkadir, Umar & Ladi, 2021; Ugobueze, 2024). The persistence of examination malpractice despite efforts mitigate it, has become challenging (Omojuwa, & Olukorede, 2025). Even though there are clear cut guidelines for examinations and sanctions against examination misconduct not achieved much in curbing the menace (Okoye, Ighodaro, Obainoke, & Ugese, 2024).

A myriad of studies has shown that students engage in examination misconduct not for themselves per se, but much more because of systemic vulnerabilities. For instance, Udim, Abubakar, & Esseini, (2018) affirmed from their study that the fear of failure or the phenomenon of the “diploma disease” as well as efforts to satisfy parents’ wishes have pushed students into examination malpractice. Other reasons advanced for this awkward situation include financial burdens and parents’ socio-economic circumstances (Agaba, Ambali et al, 2021). Poor remunerations for teaching staff, few numbers of invigilators and a lack of facilities have all been identified as major challenges that lead to ineffective examination processes (Adegbite, 2019; Enebong, Ataide, & Ataudo, 2024).

Theoretical Framework

This study is guided by Robert K. Merton’s (1938) Strain theory. Merton's theory begins with the proposition that in any society there are a number of important cultural goals which provide a frame of aspirational reference and the most important of these goals is that of worldly material success (Merton, 1938). Merton added that there are defined legitimate institutionalised means for achieving the cultural goals which may include a good education, good job, as well as investment among others. However, he asserted that when an individual has internalized a certain goal, and the legitimate means for achieving such a goal are blocked, the individual is put under pressure which may make him resort to illegitimate means to achieving the goal. This theory explains the reasons why students who want to succeed by all means get involved in different forms of examination misconduct.

Merton’s Strain Theory highlights how societal structures and cultural expectations create pressures that lead individuals to deviant behaviour (Mauti, Masagara, & Nyakwama, 2025). The application of Merton’s Strain Theory to the combined systemic deficiencies driving examination misconducts in Nigerian higher institutions indicates that every society is a reflection of what it permits because the school is a mini society that reflects the values of the wider society. The reasons advanced through the literature review as being responsible for persistence cheating in examinations border more on the quest for success and wealth, which remains a major challenge in all capitalist nations including Nigeria, where wealth is concentrated in the hands of very few people.

Methodology

This study used the cross-sectional research design to collect data from undergraduate students across the 10 schools of the Federal University of Technology, Akure (FUTA),

Nigeria. The order of proceeding booklet for the 36th convocation ceremony of FUTA (2025) puts the undergraduates' students' population at about 20,000. Simple random sampling method which gives all respondents an equal opportunity of being selected was used to administer the questionnaire. This was achieved by allocation of each school as a stratum and the online questionnaire were administered using the class representatives of each selected department in the school. The questionnaire was uploaded for a period of three months (June-August, 2025) to gather background information such as socio-demographic characteristics, respondents' exposure to human value education, as well as examination malpractices and factors driving it. Students' consents were sought before the link and the questionnaire was shared with them. Respondents were given the option to stop at any point they feel uncomfortable. Accordingly, the questionnaire was treated with utmost confidentiality.

The sample size for the study was determined using Yamane's (1973) sample calculation formula:

$$n = N / (1 + N(e)^2),$$

Where n = sample size, and,

N is the population size and e is the marginal error.

The sample size was calculated based on the approximate population of FUTA undergraduate students of 20,000: $n = (20000) / (1 + 20000 (0.05)^2)$, which yielded 392. To correct for non-responses 19% of the sample size was added which makes a total sample size of 466. Data were harvested at the end of the month of August, 2025, and analysed using the SPSS package involving Chi-square for categorical data

Table 1: Socio-demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Socio-demographic Characteristics	Frequency	Percent
Age group		
Less than 20 years	226	48.5
20 years and above	240	51.5
Gender		
Male	332	71.2
Female	134	28.8
School		
School of Earth & Mineral Sciences	80	17.2
School of Physical Sciences	40	8.6
School of Logistics and Innovation Technology	116	24.9
School of Electrical System Engineering	58	12.4
School of Agriculture and Agricultural Technology	40	8.6
School of Environmental Technology	52	11.2
School of Basic Medical Sciences	18	3.9
School of Computing	62	13.3
Level of Study		
100 Level	162	34.8
200 Level	114	24.5
300 Level	60	12.9
400 Level	64	13.7
500 Level	66	14.2
Place of residence in school		
Hostel	96	20.6
Off-campus	370	79.4
Geopolitical zone of Origin		
North Central	36	7.7
North East	0	0.0
North West	2	0.4
South East	20	4.3
South South	36	7.7
South West	372	79.8
Religion		
Christianity	406	87.1
Others	60	12.9
Family income level in Naira		
Less than 100,000	100	21.5
100,000 - 149,000	76	16.3
150,000 - 199,000	54	11.6
200,000 - 249,000	42	9.0
250,000 and above	194	41.6
Parents'/Guardians' employment		
Self-employed	246	52.8
Civil/Public Servant	164	35.2
Non-governmental Enterprise	56	12.0
Total	466	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 1 represents the socio-demographic indices of the 466 respondents. The analysis revealed that respondents are almost evenly distributed by age, with 51.5% aged 20 years and above and 48.5% less than 20 years, reflecting the typical age composition of undergraduates. Other important indices shown in the result include uneven gender divide, with male dominated respondents in the ratio of 71.2% male compared to 28.8% female. This is because there are more male students in the institution than females. There is also a differential in respondents by school, and across levels of study. A large majority of respondents live off-campus (79.4%), with only 20.6% living in hostels, which could affect exposure to peer influence and supervision. In terms of socio-economic status, 41.6% report family incomes above ₦250,000, while about 21.5% earn less than ₦100,000, showing that the respondents come from diverse economic backgrounds. Parental employment reveals that 52.8% are self-employed, 35.2% are civil/public servants, and 12.0% are in non-governmental enterprises, suggesting that the students' support systems are primarily entrepreneurial or public sector-based.

Results

There are various forms of examination misconduct known to students as exemplified in this study with some practices being more prevalent than others. The most widely recognized malpractice type is “giraffing” (looking over at others’ work), identified by 66.1% of respondents, followed closely by the exchange of ideas/scripts in the exam hall (59.7%), entering into the examination hall with prohibited materials (56.2%), and use of electronic devices (52.8%). These results suggest that direct, in-exam strategies of cheating are the most common and visible forms of malpractice. Lateral connections or pre-arranged seating (52.8%) and impersonation (30.5%) also appear as relatively frequent practices. This indicates that beyond spontaneous cheating, there are organized and premeditated strategies being employed by some students. Practices such as writing on body/clothes (29.6%), stealing/buying exam questions beforehand (8.6%), and staff collusion (7.7%) were reported less frequently, but their presence is still concerning. These methods reflect systemic and structural breaches in examination integrity.

Table 2: Common Types of Examination Malpractice in FUTA

Known /Common Types of Exam Malpractice	Frequency	Percentage
Stealing/buying of exams questions	40	8.6
Copying materials into the hall	262	56.2
Impersonation	142	30.5
Exchange of ideas/scripts in the Exam Hall	278	59.7
Writing on body/clothes	138	29.6
Parental involvement	20	4.3
Giraffing	308	66.1
Lateral connection (pre-arranged sitting together)	246	52.8
Staff Collusion	36	7.7
Use of electronic devices	246	52.8

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The results revealed interesting insights into students' awareness and moral evaluation of parental involvement in examination malpractice. About 41.2% of respondents acknowledged being aware that some parents pay for examination malpractice on behalf of their wards, while 58.8% denied such awareness. This shows that although not the majority, a substantial portion of students recognizes the role of parents in facilitating malpractice, which suggests that the issue is not merely student-driven but can also be family-enabled. Despite this awareness, the overwhelming majority (94.4%) of respondents consider such parental actions to be wrong, while only 5.6% do not see it as a bad thing. This suggests that students generally uphold a strong moral stance against parental facilitation of examination malpractice, even though a notable proportion recognizes its occurrence.

Table 3: Parents' Involvement in Examination Malpractice

Statement	No	Yes
Are you aware that some parents pay for examination malpractice on behalf of their wards?	(274) 58.8%	(192) 41.2%
Do you consider such parents' actions a bad thing?	(26) 5.6%	(440) 94.4%

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The results highlighted some perceived reasons why parents may pay for their wards to engage in examination malpractice. The most highlighted reason, with 77.3% of respondents, is desperation for success. This indicates that parents may prioritize academic achievement above ethical considerations, reflecting the high societal pressure to succeed educationally at all costs. A significant proportion (41.6%) believe that parents' obsession with obtaining a certificate drives their involvement. This aligns with the cultural emphasis on formal qualifications as a gateway to employment and social mobility in Nigeria. About 15% of

respondents pointed to financial constraints, suggesting that some parents may enable malpractice to avoid the economic burden of their children repeating a year or semester. While a smaller proportion of the respondents (7.7%) mentioned other unspecified factors, which may include fear of stigma, societal comparison, or pressure from extended family/community expectations.

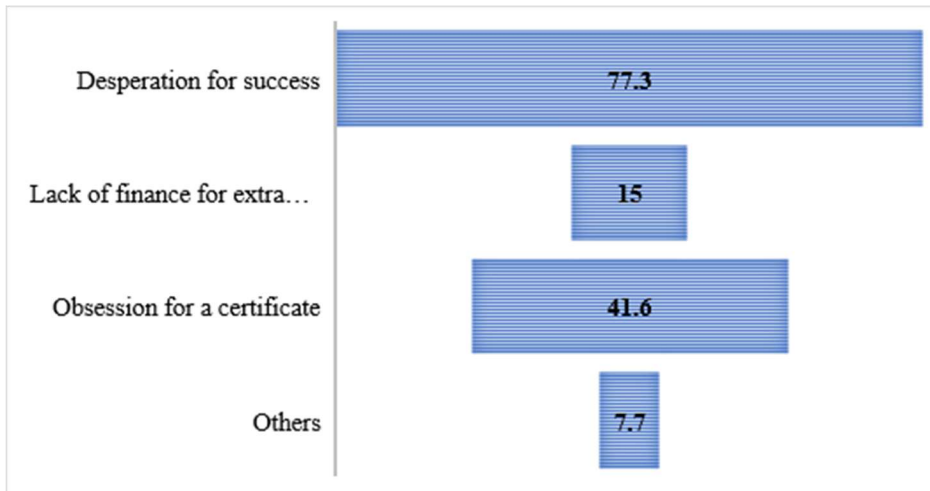
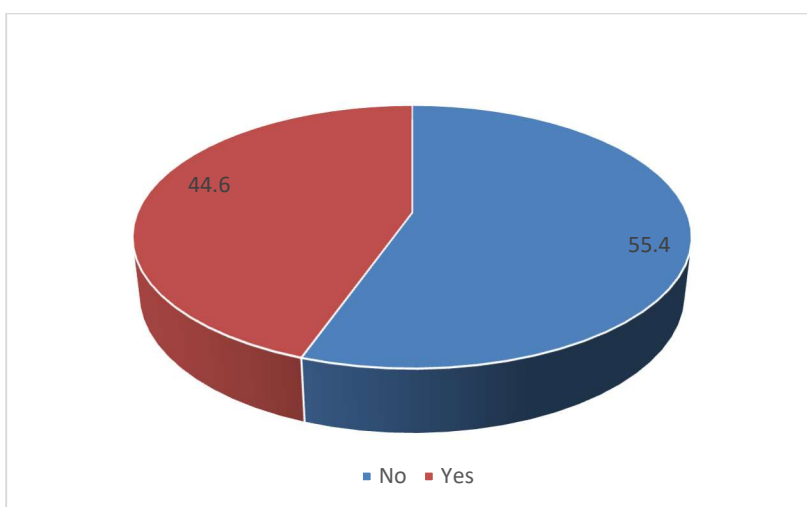


Figure 1: Reasons for Parents' Involvement in Examination Malpractices

Respondents as well attested to their awareness of staff collusion in EM as presented in this study, while 258 respondents (55.4%) reported not being aware, the remaining 208 (44.6%) indicated that they were mindful of such collusion. This suggests that nearly half of the respondents perceive staff involvement in examination malpractice, highlighting a significant concern for institutional integrity.

Fig. 2: Awareness of staff collusion in examination malpractice



The reasons staff abet EM are multifaceted, the most common however, is financial gain which is about 40.8% in this research. When combined motives are considered, financial gain in combination with other benefits accounts for a significant proportion (10.3% + 9.4% + 18.9% = 38.6%). Purely sexual gain or combined with other minor benefits is relatively low, totaling only 3.4%. Overall, financial incentives, alone or in combination with other benefits, appear to be the primary driver of staff involvement in examination malpractice. The poor pay pack of staff in institutions of higher learning in Nigeria has always stood in the way of honest values as expected.

Table 4: Reasons staff agree to such misconduct

Reasons	Frequency	Percent
For financial gain	190	40.8
For other material benefits	80	17.2
For sexual gain	10	2.1
For financial gain and other material benefits	48	10.3
For financial and sexual gains	44	9.4
For sexual gain and other material benefits	6	1.3
For financial gain, sexual gain, and other material benefits	88	18.9

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Institutions of learning have been shown to also contribute immensely to examination malpractices. In this study for instance, 55.8% of the respondents affirmed that the school or institution can be blamed for examination malpractice, while 44.2% reported otherwise. This suggests that a majority perceive institutional factors, such as poor supervision, weak policies, or inadequate enforcement, as contributing to examination misconduct. Similar to the findings in this study, a recent study by Tongshinen & Tukur (2025) finds that the school authority is a factor that leads to examination misconduct among students of tertiary institutions, because issues of examination misconducts are not properly handled most of the time. Suleman, Gul, et al, (2015) listed poor invigilation, poor implementation of exam rules, as well as inadequate preparation for exam, as major challenges to conducting quality examination in Nigerian schools.

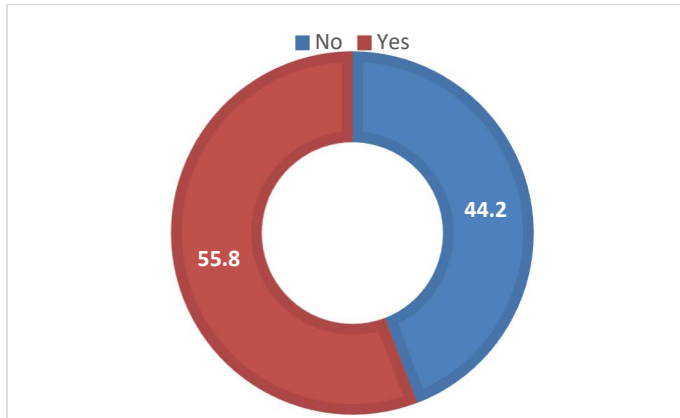


Fig. 3: Can we say the school/institution is at fault concerning examination malpractice?

Infrastructural deficiencies have continued to jeopardize attempts made at ensuring that examinations are fairly conducted. Poor supervision, overcrowded examination halls, and weak punishment systems are widely agreed to promote examination malpractice, with more than 65% of respondents either agreeing or strongly agreeing. Interestingly, a notable proportion of respondents are neutral or disagree regarding invigilators turning a blind eye (36.9% Neutral, 21.9% Disagree/Strongly Disagree), suggesting that staff negligence may be perceived as less pervasive than other institutional factors. This table clearly shows that institutional deficiencies, especially supervision, overcrowding, punishment systems, and ethics education, play a key role in enabling examination malpractice.

Table 5: Level of agreement on institutional deficiencies.

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Poor supervision encourages EM	(20) 4.3%	(28) 6.0%	(96) 20.6%	(194) 41.6%	(128) 27.5%
Weak punishment systems encourage offenders to continue doing bad	(22) 4.7%	(46) 9.9%	(104) 22.3%	(174) 37.3%	(120) 25.8
Overcrowded exam halls promote malpractice	(16) 3.4%	(30) 6.4%	(86) 18.5%	(200) 42.9%	(134) 28.8%
Some invigilators turn a blind eye to cheating	(32) 6.9%	(70) 15.0%	(144) 30.9%	(140) 30.0%	(80) 17.2%

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Discussion of Findings

The findings from this study about students' awareness align with earlier findings across other tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Students have always attested to different kinds of examination malpractice being perpetrated during examination and students are

knowledgeable both about the types and the consequences or punishment if caught. Scholars such as Popoola, (2017); Udim, et al (2018); and Enebong, et al (2024) all showed from their research findings that students are involved in different types of examination misconducts. Abdulkadir et al (2021) affirmed that students are no more afraid of getting caught while cheating in examination because of the porosity of the system and weak values system. Appropriately, parents should be responsible for the development of a child through their guidance, encouragement and good parental examples but research has shown otherwise (Popoola, 2017). In the same vein, Omonijo, & Fadugba, (2011) affirmed that parents have been accomplices in their children's examination misdemeanors while examination malpractice has been listed as one major outcome of moral decadence and value crisis because of parents' involvement (Ebradouye, Aminigo, & Osaat, 2024)

It has been shown that some parents encourage their wards to participate in examination malpractice. Agaba, Ambali & Orianwa (2021) in a study among secondary school students in Bekwarra Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria, reported that family type and socio-economic factors play huge roles in parents who collaborate with their wards to cheat because they want their children to succeed by any means whether fair or foul. The report also added that there are even parents who promote cheating by registering their wards during major examination including WAEC and NECO in 'magic' or 'special' centers and pay 'cooperation' fees for supply of cheating materials usually referred to as 'expo'. Similarly, Anakwe (2010) stated that parents usually aid, abet and finance examination malpractice for their children. Previous studies revealed that parents' consensus to examination malpractice even though considered an aberration, happens for many reasons, some of which include the excessive value placed on certificates over actual skills and knowledge, which pits immense pressure on students to obtain certificates by any means (Ugobueze, 2024); as well as high cost of education in Nigeria which places financial strain on families, as well as parents' prestige (Bulchari et al, 2023).

The complicity of staff in issues of academic dishonesty, has been validated over the years in Nigerian higher institutions (Enebong, Ataide, et al, 2024). It is such connivances that made examination misconduct difficult to arrest (Adegbite, 2019; Agaba, Ambali & Orianwa, 2021; Bulchari et al, 2023). Adegbite (2019) cited economic downturn and poor remunerations which makes teachers and lecturers finds it difficult to meet up with daily basic needs, as some of the reasons for staff complicity in examination malpractice. Similarly, several studies have related how staff also give questions to students for exchange

of sexual intimacies, though such cases are usually treated as sexual harassment, there have been studies that revealed cooperation between staff and students for such academic fraud (Onoyase, 2019; Aina-Pelemo, Oke, Alade, 2021).

Across most of the public universities in Nigeria, there is deficit of both human and infrastructural facilities which has been linked to poor examination conduct and outcome. Ogunode, Audu & Ahaotu (2020) noted that the problem of poor facilities particularly in Nigerian public universities is enormous and have implication for academic performance of students. Correspondingly, other recent studies identified the same pattern of amenity deficits, adding that academic output would always be poor until maximum attention is given to acute shortage of both human and infrastructural deficits (Ayoko, Peter & Jegede, 2023; Moses & Umar, 2024). Examination halls remain unconducive for both staff and students alike, as they are usually overcrowded and examination facilities at times are shared as against the rule in a proper examination conduct (Maiyeri, Bin, & Liu, 2022).

Conclusion

The findings from this study confirm the enormity of examination malpractice as a challenge that is persistence because of the interconnectedness of the social institutions driving it. This correlates with the breakdown in law, order and value system of Nigeria. Obviously therefore, the effectiveness of any proposed solution must go beyond the students per se, to comprise other important stakeholders and agents including the family, teachers/lecturers, and significant others like peers and religious places among others. The school system must as a matter of urgency, be revamped to meet up with global standards that take cognizance of the relevance of both human and infrastructural resources. Additionally, value reorientation must be sustained among all segments of society while policies around honest labour and dignity of hard work, as well as the promotion of self-efficacy skills should be encouraged.

Recommendations

Having validated that examination malpractice is becoming the norm, this study recommends stricter measures not against student alone but all perpetrators. It also advocates that society gives more attention to value reorientation in order to address value crisis among young people. Systemic rehabilitation is essential so as to ensure that each institution performs its function appropriately. Essentially too, students should be trained to believe in themselves and give attention to what they can achieve without relying on falsehood and cheating.

Ethical clearance

Participation in this study was based on all respondents giving their informed consent for inclusion. The data were collected in accordance with protocol approved by the committee on ethical issues at the Centre for Research and Development (CERAD) of Federal University of Technology, Akure, Nigeria. The approved ethical number assigned to this project is FUTA/ETH/25/241. Respondents were also made to participate in the survey voluntarily while participants were given the freedom to leave or exit the interview at will.

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