Conducting Examinations in Nigerian Polytechnics: A Case Study of Kwara State Polytechnic

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Abstract

This paper posits that the conduct of examinations in any educational institution can make or mar the institution, Kwara State Polytechnic inclusive. This is because examinations constitute the hub of any institution. First, the place of polytechnic education in the growth and development of the country is examined. Next, is a consideration of examinations and the factors involved in the successful conduct of examinations in the polytechnics. The issue of examination malpractice is focused upon and the paper is rounded off by highlighting the way forward.

Keywords: examinations, polytechnic, malpractice, stakeholders

1. Introduction

The importance of technology to any dynamic society cannot be over emphasized. The Encyclopedia Britannica defines technology as "the application of science to the practical aims of human life, or to change and manipulation of human environment" (p. 108). Thus, technology is a major factor of change, growth and development in any society since it is the means by which man maintains a working control over his physical environment and obtains a better quality of life. The impact of technology on our day-to-day activities is such that it has made life easier for us by helping us to subdue our physical environment to a great extent. It has been responsible for the growth of countries which initially were nothing, to become countries of substance in today's world. For example, Japan is a developed country today because of the development of its own technology (Adeniyi, 1995).

2. Polytechnic Education

Although formal education in Nigeria dates back to September 24, 1842 with the arrival in Badagry of Thomas Birch Freeman Society (Taiwo, 1980), formal vocational education which could have led to a rapid technological development was neglected for a long time. It was the report of the Phelps Stoke Commission of 1920-1926 which was instrumental to the commencement of technical education in Nigeria (Fafunwa, 1974).

Thus, in 1932, the Yaba Higher College was established to provide training at a higher level than that of the trade centers. It was the first polytechnic type of institution and it became the cradle of technical education in Nigeria. By the1960s, the earlier established technical colleges were upgraded to the level of polytechnics and they are today able to offer courses leading not only to the National Diploma Certificate, but also to the Higher National Diploma and Postgraduate Diplomas. Thus the focus here (in the polytechnics) is on the production of middle level manpower. Adeniyi (1994, p. 18) acknowledged that "technical education through our polytechnics is critical to our rise to economic success". He maintained that no nation can survive today's economic down-turn without sound technological education.

When Nigeria became independent in 1960, the standard of living was comparable to that of any other African country. The per capita income was 440 US Dollars (Adeniyi, 1994, p. 19). Today, the economy has deteriorated, such that there is growing unemployment and stagnation of industrialization, with heavy reliance on imported technology and raw materials. Yet, the country needs people to man the existing industries and commercial houses with technologically-qualified manpower. According to Osasona (1970), the institutions of technological learning are the ones to train and produce the right manpower to confront the various problems the country is facing today i.e., problems of water shortage, petroleum shortage and spillage, food wastage, storage problems.

3. Kwara State Polytechnic, Ilorin

Kwara State Polytechnic, one of the first generation polytechnics in Nigeria, commenced full operation with the School of Basic Studies in January 1973 with pre-university Advance level courses in Pure Sciences, Social Sciences and Arts. In 1974, new courses leading to Diploma and Certificates in science, technological, managerial and vocational education were introduced. The School of Education was later excised to stand on its own as the College of Education, Ilorin.

At present, the Polytechnic has the following academic institutes and centres:

- Institute of Technology
- Institute of Basic and Applied Sciences
- Institute of Environmental Studies
- Institute of Finance and Management Studies
- Institute of General Studies
- Centre for Continuing Education
- Centre for Postgraduate Studies
- Entrepreneurship Development Centre

All these institutes conduct examinations for students twice in a session i.e. every semester.

4. Examinations

Hornby (1997) defines "examination" as "a formal written, spoken or practical test, especially at school or college, to see how much you know about a subject or what you can do". Kolo (1992) refers to it as the evaluation or assessment of knowledge obtained in the process of learning Writing on the same issue, Bello et al. (2010, p. 23) explained that "examination is the process of finding out how much of the objective of specific learning tasks a learner has learnt." Thus, examination serve as a means of evaluating and assessing learning outcomes in order to know the extent of assimilation or internalization of the subject of learning. In the polytechnic, examinations are administered to students at the end of every semester and students are given certificates based on their level of performances in the examinations. These certificates not only serve as bases for admission into higher levels of education, they determine entry points of holders in the labour market. These realities underscore the importance of preparation and conduct of examinations so that to a great extent the results obtained would reflect the true status of the examinees.

5. Stakeholders in Polytechnic Examination

The Federal Government of Nigeria as a stakeholder formulates policies for polytechnics through the NBTE for the known institutions to implement. The State Government in our case here is a crucial stakeholder since it is a state polytechnic. The State Government oversees the polytechnic through the Ministry of Education and provides that financial backing for the running of the institution. The Governing Council is also a stakeholder as it is the body that takes decisions on matters affecting the polytechnic. Parents also are stakeholders since they maintain their wards. The Management Team of the Polytechnic is also a stakeholder. It sees to the day to day running of the institution, releasing the finances for conducting examinations at the appropriate time.

Non-academic members of staff also have a role to play in the conduct of examinations. Not only do they oversee the practicals in the workshops and laboratories, they get involved with invigilation one way or the other. Lecturers are also part of the stakeholders as they set the questions, invigilate, mark and collate results. As far as the conduct of examinations is concerned, perhaps the examination officers could be said to be most vital. Their performances can make or mar any department/institute. Of course, students are at the centre of it all. They are the ones to take the examinations and they need to conduct themselves properly so as to succeed and not end up behind the bars as a result of examination malpractices. All these stakeholders need to be alive to their duties and responsibilities for the successful conduct of examinations.

6. Steps in Conducting Examinations

One of the first steps in the conduct of examinations includes the setting of the question papers and fixing of the time-table. The lecturers involved in the teaching of the courses will set the questions and get them moderated internally and/or externally as the need demands in order to ensure clarity, validity, reliability and authenticity of the questions. After the questions are set and moderated, they are typed and photocopied. Not only must leakage be guarded against, adequate care must be taken to ensure that sufficient number of question papers is produced

to go round all the students participating in the examination. It is the duty of the Academic Board to fix the dates for the examinations while the various Institutes and Departments see to the making of a time-table. This time table must be displayed for stakeholders in the examination to see, on time, so that nobody will miss the examination because of short notice.

In addition to the above, the Chief Exams Officer in the Institute in collaboration with the Departmental Examination Officers sees to the room allocation and seating arrangement such that every student has a place to sit for his examination. These room, halls, laboratories, and workshops must be prepared adequately before hand to prevent confusion on the D-day. It is also important that invigilators are assigned to various rooms, and notice must be served to them well ahead of time to ensure that there is no failure. These invigilators are expected to be in the halls at least 30 minutes before the start of the examinations to prepare the halls.

At the end of the examination, it is the duty of the invigilator to collect the scripts, arrange them serially, count them and ensure that extra answer booklets are returned to the control room. The examination officer gets the scripts to the examiner who is expected to mark the scripts by himself and submit the scores within the time stipulated, following the markers' guide. The examination officers collate the results in preparation for the Departmental Board, Institute Board and Academic Board approval. At this stage, the Registry Unit of the Polytechnic takes over in preparing the statements of results and the certificates for the students.

There is no doubt that all the stakeholders need to carry out their duties with a sense of responsibility. Laxity on the part of any of the stakeholders usually opens the way for examination malpractices with serious consequences for the parties involved.

7. Examination Malpractice

Examination malpractice is an improper, negligent or criminal conduct in an examination. Failure to observe any of the examination rules or any breach thereof constitutes examination malpractice or misconduct. A student is deemed to have committed examination malpractice if he contravenes any of the examination rules and regulations.

There are rules and regulations governing the conduct of examinations in Kwara State Polytechnic and it is the responsibility of all students and members of staff to ensure that they familiarize themselves with these rules and regulations. Ignorance of these rules is not an excuse. They are contained in the *Students' Handbook* (pp. 53-79). A student or member of staff who contravenes any of the rules and regulations is deemed to have committed examination malpractice.

7.1 Causes of Examination Malpractice

There are various causes of examination malpractices, and these range from socio-economic factors to the general moral decadence and the ethically degenerated nature of our society. Among the causes identified by writers like Denga (1998), Bassey et al. (2010), Bello (2010) are: crave for success at all cost, poor coverage of syllabuses by lecturers, absence of sound moral upbringing, poor invigilation, lack of adequate facilities and infrastructure, love of money etc.

7.2 Penalties for Examination Malpractice

In the handling of examination malpractice in many educational institutions, there is little or no regard for the principle of apportioning punishment in relation to the magnitude of the offence. This approach is rooted in the strong belief that examination malpractice is a potential threat to the name and integrity of any institution. The inevitable need to discourage it makes school authorities stipulate the punishment that can serve as deterrent. That is, the punishment is aimed at serving as a deterrent to others. Though there are different forms of examination malpractice with different levels of involvement and seriousness, a lot of the malpractice carries the penalty of expulsion of the student from the institution. In Kwara State Polytechnic, some examination offences are viewed as serious misconducts and they carry the most serious punishment of expulsion from the Polytechnic. Such offences include:

a.   impersonation;

b.   being in possession of extraneous materials relevant to the examination;

c.   assaulting the invigilator; and

d.   refusal to write statement when asked to do so, after being alleged to have committed examination malpractice.

Other minor offences such as writing before or beyond the time of an examination, conversation, unauthorized

movement or changing of sitting positions, writing on the question paper and copying each other's work are visited with penalties ranging from deduction of certain number of marks to scoring zero in that paper or in all the semester papers.

7.3 Procedure for Handling Malpractice Cases

Every educational institution has a standard procedure, process or apparatus for handling cases of examination misconduct. This is an administrative judicial means of listing, hearing and apportioning punishment for examination misconduct. The processes may differ from one educational institution to another, but they all operate along the same principle of fair hearing and the rule of law.

In the Kwara State Polytechnic, the process commences when a student is apprehended for examination malpractice. The invigilator would on the spot demand a written statement from the affected student, wherein he will state exactly what happened and what he knows about the allegation. He would then be requested to sign the statement. If a student fails to write this statement, the invigilator must drive him out of the examination hall. If he complies and writes a statement, he is to be allowed to continue the examination after the incident. At the end of the examination, the invigilator is to attach the written statement to the student's script and write his own report on the incident. He will then forward these to the Director of the institute, through the institute Chief Examinations Officer. The Chief Examination Officer is to compile the list of all cases recorded in the examination, stating the various allegations, the name of the reporting invigilator, the subject and the examination. He would also attach all the incriminating materials found on the affected students and list them as exhibits. He would then compile his own report and forward same together with the answer scripts of the affected students to the Director of the Institute.

At the appropriate time, the Director of the Institute would constitute a sub-committee of the Institute, which would sit to consider the report and forward its recommendation to the Institute Board which will forward its own recommendation to the Academic Board for consideration. Once the report is approved by the Academic Board, the decision is then forwarded to the Council for ratification.

8. Recommendations

With the setting up of the Governing Councils' Examination Monitoring committee and that constituted by management in 2009/2010 session, there has been a sharp drop in the incidences of examination malpractice cases in the polytechnic. However, the following measures if taken would be useful in ameliorating the present situation:

1) Adequate facilities such as accommodation, sitting facilities, lighting should be provided.

2) New intakes (students and members of staff) should be given proper orientation concerning the conduct of examinations.

3) The 75% attendance at lectures as a prerequisite for sitting for examinations should be enforced.

4) Adequate invigilators and supervision should be provided.

5) Adequate security personnel should be made available.

6) Entertainment of invigilators should be done centrally by a designated committee.

7) The law prohibiting the bringing of handset into the examination halls should be enforced.

8) The sitting arrangement of "2" on a bench should be enforced.

9) Computer based tests should be encouraged.

9. Conclusion

There is no doubt that we are living in an age when the computer is at the centre of everything we do. In order not to be left out, our polytechnics as leading technological institutions must involve Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in the conduct of examinations. This will go a long way in ensuring the realization of the vision of being one of the foremost providers of technological and entrepreneurial skills in the nation.

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