

# Causes of Examination Failure among the Students of Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria: A Review

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**Abstract:** - Nowadays, the academic of performance of students in most Nigerian tertiary institution has become an object of inquiry. In view of the above statement, a literature review study was conducted to identify, highlight and summarize the major causes of examination failure among the students of tertiary institution in Nigeria. From the findings of the study, failure in examination could be attributed to two variables, which are internal and external factors. The internal factors are basically student-related, whereas the external factors are teacher-related, parent-related, school-related and government-related, but the bulk of blame was shifted to teachers and students even though some researches indicated contrary view. The paper highlighted critically the role and extent of each factor in causing examination failure. It also buttressed some of the flimsy excuses student should do away with as they indication of failing individual. Example of these excuses were, I cannot manage my time, I cannot work on my lecture notes except in the class, I don't have a caring friend etc. However, it is therefore recommended that, each stakeholder should study their role in this regard and work on them in order to avert huge academic failure of students in our tertiary institutions.

**Key Words:** Examination, failure, examination malpractice, teacher and student

## I. INTRODUCTION

Today we live to witness an era where by cases of general examination misconduct and examination malpractice with their different forms are becoming rampant, academic corruption is rapidly growing, moral decadences are perpetuating, quality of education is dramatically reducing; all in the name of avoiding examination failure. In due course, students will do everything possible to satisfy their desire of passing at all cost in order to obtain certificates- without which they cannot be employed, and to protect themselves from family and societal stigmatization due to failure. The end results of these social-vices are; students involved in malpractice end of being rusticated or expelled from schools, having fake graduates with fake certificates enshroud under the umbrella of the compromised certificate and graduates who cannot optimally or even minimally deliver the services required of them.

So many researchers opined that, in the circumstance, corrupt practices become the order of the day, then the school as a micro-society must reflect the practices in the wider society. For example, Itedjere (2006) clearly expressed that,

examination malpractice is a product of a society that nurture cheats and mediocrity and turns them into celebrities. In Nigeria, moral decadence has reached to an extent where we have pen robbers, armed robbers, smugglers and drug barons who are glorified by the grace of their ill- gotten wealth. Itedjere (2006) therefore, reiterated that the school, like any other social institution, does not exist in a vacuum, rather it exists within a geopolitical and socio-milieu. Hence, behaviours are expected to conform and reflect the acceptable societal norms and ethos as regards various functional roles and the executions of duties and services.

The assertion of Itedjere (2006) is in line with previous findings by Okafor (1990), who blamed the society for examination malpractice. According to him, in a country where dishonesty has been enshrined by the adult sector as an idol of worship, children have learnt to steal with impunity, examination malpractice in all shades and forms consequently becomes the order of the day among our students at all level of the educational arrangement. Hitherto, the reason why in Nigeria today, people value money more than any other thing thereby reminding one of a saying that "the end justifies the means".

According to Omemu (2015), students do not understand their self-concept in Nigeria any longer. This is as a result of parents or guardians who want to choose a course of study for their wards and not minding what that child is capable of doing in terms of ability and intelligence. If the parents choose a wrong course for their wards, they will probably not do well academically because that is not their area of interest. However, the parents will want their wards to pass that chosen course by all means. On the part of the wards, they will want to pass by all means so that they will not look as failures to their parent. This situation propels them into examination malpractices to satisfy the needs of their parents. This study therefore was conducted to review literature, identify some of the major causes of examination failure among the students of tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

## II. CAUSES OF EXAMINATION FAILURE

Since education is a complex process based on mutual interaction of many factors, examination failure is known to be based on different and versatile reasons. According to researches carried out in this context, the reasons for failure

are explained with not only characteristics related to family and school, but also individual characteristics of student, school resources and Institutional environment which are also known to affect educational outcomes. However, regardless of its reason, an individual's failure in developing his/her behaviours is a great loss for family, country and further for humanity. In this respect, better success line for each school is not an option but an obligation (Onder, 2016).

Stakeholders have continued to trade blames on the causes of mass failure of students in general, public or even private examinations. Some shifted the blame on government, some on parents, some on society and students themselves with the teachers having lion share of the blame. As accusations and counter-accusations on who to blame on the mass failure of students will persist, the fact remains that all the stakeholders have roles to play in solving the problem of abysmal failure of students in examinations. Nevertheless, there is need to identify the major causes of the problem with a view to providing lasting solutions.

In a nut shell, mass failure of students in examinations could be traced to several factors that can be compartmentalized into the domains of parents, students, teachers, schools, government, and society. In other words, causes of mass failure of students in examinations are multi-dimensional in nature.

#### 1. Parents:

Parents play significant roles in the education of their children and wards. Apart from the fact that they pay school fees and other levies, they buy textbooks, uniforms and other materials required by their children and wards, they are expected to supervise their academic works and give them good moral training. They are also expected to visit schools from time to time to find out how their children and wards are behaving with a view to take corrective measures where and when necessary.

However, failure of parents to play these roles could negatively affect the academic performance of the students. Parent could cause failure in examinations in the following ways:

- lack of proper guidance by parent
- their inability to provide foodstuff
- their inability to provide reading materials
- their inability to provide other basic school need
- less interaction with children
- less interaction with children's teachers/lecturers
- insufficient parental income, and
- family type
- unsatisfying relations with family; often hear students saying things like:
  - ✓ I don't have a caring family, or
  - ✓ My family is not supportive of me, or
  - ✓ I don't have satisfying relations with my family, or

- ✓ I don't feel comfortable when I am with my family, and/or
- ✓ My family is uneducated

#### 2. Teachers:

The importance of teachers in the success of the students in examination cannot be overemphasized. The quantity and quality of instructional delivery by the teacher will, to a large extent, determine the academic performance of the students. That is why; poor academic performance or failure of students is largely blamed on the teachers who are regarded as the custodian of knowledge, skills and values required by the students to excel in various aspects of life.

Various causes of examination failure of students which were attributed to the teachers include:

- ✚ Non-use of verbal reinforcement strategy
- ✚ Lateness to school/lectures
- ✚ Poor interpersonal relationships which can emanate in the following forms:
  - ✓ Teachers attitude is usually negative, or
  - ✓ They are not trustworthy, or
  - ✓ There is no consistency between what they say and what they do, or
  - ✓ They are very authoritarian, or
  - ✓ They disregard students, or
  - ✓ They don't treat students equally, or
  - ✓ Teachers don't provide students with the reading materials needed, and/or
  - ✓ The exams questions are related to the details but they don't capture the essence of the material
- ✚ Absenteeism
- ✚ Inability to complete the syllabi/course content
- ✚ Less interest in students' understanding of lectures
- ✚ Poor methods of teaching; often here students in this regard saying:
  - ✓ They don't lecture well, or
  - ✓ They come to the lecture room unprepared, or
  - ✓ They lecture unwillingly, or
  - ✓ They don't relate the different components of the course to each other, or
  - ✓ They cannot give relevant examples for his/her lecture, or
  - ✓ The voice of the teacher is very verbose and monotonous, or
  - ✓ Teachers don't relate the subject matter to other disciplines, or
  - ✓ They can't simplify the lecture, and/or
  - ✓ They don't take the level of understanding of students into consideration
- ✚ Incessant strike
- ✚ Lack of teachers' resourcefulness in teaching

### 3. *Students:*

Considerable research evidences abound to show that students are responsible for their failure in examinations. Students' factors of examination failure are:

- Poor study habits which can expressed in one or many of the following ways:
  - ✓ I am not interested in the course, or
  - ✓ I concentrate on other things during the lectures (e.g. social media; facebook, whatsapp, twitter, imo, instagram etc.), or
  - ✓ I can't concentrate in the classroom, or
  - ✓ I don't like listening to the lectures, or
  - ✓ I don't like to study, or
  - ✓ I don't study systematically, or
  - ✓ I don't come prepared for my classes, or
  - ✓ I don't like this department/faculty or university, or
  - ✓ I can't make the best use of my time while studying, or
  - ✓ I prefer to have fun, and/or
  - ✓ I am not able to absorb the information
- Psychological adjustment problems; the signs of which are:
  - ✓ I can't solve my personal problems, or
  - ✓ The relations with my friends are not satisfactory, or
  - ✓ I am never sure of myself when it comes to being successful, or
  - ✓ I am not encouraged to participate in class/lectures, or
  - ✓ I don't have any close friends, or
  - ✓ I feel I'm far away from my family, or
  - ✓ I haven't been able to adapt to the big city, or
  - ✓ I can't communicate with the teacher(s)/lecturers, and/or
  - ✓ I am afraid of being unsuccessful
- Lack of interest in the school programme
- Low retention
- Association with wrong peers
- Low achievement motivation
- Emotional problems
- Lack of financial support
- Absenteeism/Truancy
- Use of local language and poor communication skills in the official school language
- Lack of interest and joy in teachers' lectures
- Learning disability
- Low cognitive ability
- Gender prematurity
- Medical (health) problems
- Problems with time management:
  - ✓ I don't have enough time to get prepared for the examinations
  - ✓ I have to work off-campus to make money
  - ✓ There is no time for fun

- ✓ I have problems in commuting (transportation problems)
- ✓ I am not able to work on my lectures except during class
- Problems with content of the course and the examinations:
  - ✓ The course is very difficult for me
  - ✓ I can't understand the lecture
  - ✓ The intellectual level of the lecturers exceeds my capacity of understanding
  - ✓ I need a lot of time to study for this course
  - ✓ Usually the questions that are asked on the examinations are the ones that we haven't covered
  - ✓ I don't remember the things I studied during the examinations
  - ✓ The length of time to prepare for the examinations is very short
  - ✓ The length of time for the examinations is not enough
  - ✓ Examinations are very stressful
  - ✓ I cannot compete with my friends who come from various institutions
  - ✓ I don't know how to study systematically
  - ✓ The questions on the exams are not clear enough
- Future concerns related to chosen field of study:
  - ✓ I won't be able to obtain an honourable status in the society after my graduation
  - ✓ I am worried about my future
  - ✓ There is no guarantee for me to find a job after graduation (e.g. life story)
  - ✓ I won't be able to obtain a high economic status after graduation
  - ✓ I can't make definite career plans for the future

### 4. *Schools:*

The school system has its own share of the blame for poor academic performance of students. The causes of examination failure traceable to the doorsteps of the school are:

- ❖ Large class size (recommended NUC student: teacher ratio exceeded)
- ❖ Limited teaching materials
- ❖ Problems with learning environment:
  - ✓ Education is not practicum-oriented
  - ✓ There is not enough reference material for the practicum courses
  - ✓ I find it difficult to find material for my studies
  - ✓ Audio-visual material is not widely used
  - ✓ Due to the high cost of books I don't read enough
  - ✓ The questions in the examinations are not based on interpretation of the subjects
  - ✓ The subject matters are not framed in a satisfactory way
  - ✓ There aren't enough courses related to my major

- ✓ There is no orientation towards research
- ✓ The subject matter is not related to real life experiences
- ✓ I can't use my creativeness in the lecture room
- ✓ There are too many things to memorize
- ✓ There are not enough reference books in the library
- ✓ The same subjects are being lectured over and over again

#### 5. Government:

Government plays crucial roles in the management of educational system in terms of policy formulation, programme's implementation, funding, administration, and supervision among others. The extent to which government is committed to these roles could make or mar the educational system. Studies have shown that the causes of examination failure attributed to government were:

- instability of educational policy
- leadership problems
- job losses
- poor supervision
- inadequate funding of education sector, leading to incessant strikes
- poor salary scales for teachers
- irregular payment of teachers' salaries
- inadequate and specialist teachers in school

### III. CONCLUSION

The literature reviewed so far has shown that the causes of students' failure in examinations are multi-dimensional in nature. In other words, solutions to the problems require collaborative efforts of the various stakeholders. However, causes such as absence of suitable study conditions at home and lack of social support and learned failure are said to result in failure. Therefore, emphasis should be shifted towards overcoming them.

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