

Exploring Language-Based Techniques for Mitigating the Alarming Rate of Examination Malpractice in Primary Schools in South-eastern Nigeria

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ARTICLE INFO	Abstract
Keywords: <i>Language - Based techniques, examination malpractice, primary education, revitalization, national development</i> ©2025 Author(s): This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International 	<i>The study explores language – based techniques for mitigating the alarming rate of examination malpractice in primary schools in the South - eastern region of Nigeria. It provides evidence about the effects examination malpractice has on primary education in the south - east using Anambra and Imo states as case studies. The study carries out this research using the descriptive survey design, interviews and a validate questionnaire titled “Measures for Mitigating Examination Malpractice in Primary Schools” (MMEMPS) which are developed in line with the research questions, and use to elicit information from the categories of the population. (teachers and pupils in these states). The statistical model of ascertaining measures, a combination of multi variant regression methods and statistical inference are used in analyzing data generated from the study. The result of the findings are generalized to the entire south east. The study recommends amongst others that Stylometry should be used to analyze styles to identify inconsistencies, which can indicate cheating.</i>

1. Introduction

A cursory look at the state of teaching and learning in Nigeria today is a manifest of diverse forms of examination misconduct and malpractice, particularly in the south eastern region. This situation seems to defile all measures despite government’s effort to down play it. Evidence has shown that examination malpractice is more vibrant now at the primary level of education where teachers in collaboration with school management, parents, internal and external invigilators, encourage and perpetrate examination misconduct among their pupils. The puzzle here is that the teacher does the teaching and then goes ahead to write for the pupils during internal and external examinations. The study observes that this is an error, an anomaly and a misnomer. The study further raises the question of the essence and need of teaching and learning, if the teacher would have to do his work and that of the learner. This phenomena has adversely affected teaching and learning in diverse ways and could be associated to a number of factors inherent within the Nigerian society and the world at large. Owing to this serious and negative incidence, the study seeks to explore the language – based techniques for mitigating the hyper - alarming rate of Examination malpractice in primary schools in the south - east, using Anambra and Imo states as case studies.

The study will adopt the descriptive survey research design, interviews, and a 10 item validated questionnaire titled “Measures for Mitigating Examination Malpractice in Primary Schools” which will be developed in line with the research questions, and will be used to elicit information from the categories of the population (stakeholders in Education); teachers, school managements, staff of the ministry of education, parents and pupils in these states. The statistical model for exploring measures, (a combination of multivariate regression methods and statistical inference) will be used in analyzing data generated from the study. It is expected that the research findings will give

substantial evidence on the nature of the challenges and their impacts on teaching and learning. Findings from the study would be generalized to the entire south east, Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Stakeholders in education have lamented the poor quality outputs of Nigerian students both in character and learning. Findings and suggestions tend to point at issues that have false notions about the true situation of things. Examinations both internal and external in the 21st century Nigeria is battered and flawed by a plethora and litany of examination malpractices and misconducts. It has ceased to be a strange sight and has since been adopted as a norm and culture in Nigeria education system. The most disheartening is that this menace is master- minded and perpetrated mostly by the same key stakeholders in the education sector – the classroom teacher, school management, pupils and parents. Again, this ugly situation renders null and void the objectives of primary education as the bedrock and foundation to other levels of education (as stipulated in the National Policy on Education (2014). One questions and wonders the type and quality of pupils that would be raised from such a foundation that is faulty. This situation is tragic and does not seem to benefit the education sector. It is therefore soul shattering that most 21st century pupils and students no longer study because of this ready short cut that is always made available for them. This ugly scenario has done more harm than good and does not augur well for the Nigerian education sector and consequently needs to be aptly and urgently addressed.

Research Objectives

General Objectives

The study explores language based techniques for mitigating the alarming rate of examination malpractice in primary schools in the south east.

Specific Objectives

Specifically, the study:

- 1 determines whether examination malpractice is perpetrated in primary schools in the south - east
- 2 determines the rate at which examination malpractice is perpetrated in primary schools in the south - east.
- 3 determine the effects examination malpractice has on teaching and learning in primary schools in the south - east Nigeria.
- 4 determines the extent these effects have on teaching and learning in primary schools in the south east Nigeria.
- 5 Proffers solutions to the effects in order to improve the quality of education at the primary education levels.

Research Questions

The following research questions guide the study:

- 1 Is examination malpractice practiced in primary schools in the south - east?
- 2 What is the rate at which examination malpractice occurs in primary schools in the south - east?
- 3 What are the effects of examination malpractice on primary education in the south eastern states of Nigeria?
- 4 What are the extent of the effects of examination malpractice on teaching and learning in primary schools in the south eastern Nigeria?
- 5 What are the possible solutions to the impacts examination malpractice has on teaching and learning in primary schools in the south eastern Nigeria?

Literature Review

Related literatures to the key concepts in the study would be reviewed as follows:

Language – Based

The phrase “language – based” is taken to mean the central role of language in shaping our understanding, communication and expression. (Online)

Examination Malpractice

Examination malpractice in Nigeria is as old as the country herself. According to Anzene (2014), examination malpractice was first reported in Nigeria in the year, 1914, when the question paper of the senior Cambridge Local Examinations were reportedly seen by candidates before the scheduled date of examination. The Examination Malpractice Act (1999) explains examination malpractice as any act of omission or commission by a person who in anticipation of, before or during or after any examination fraudulently secure any unfair advantage for himself or any other person in such a manner that contravenes the rules and regulation to the extent of undermining the validity, reliability and authenticity of the examination and ultimately the integrity of the certificates issued. Again, examination malpractice is commonly defined as a deliberate wrong doing contrary to official examination rules designed to place a candidate at an unfair advantage. (Akaranga & Ongong, 2013). Jimoh (2009) remarked that examination malpractice is any irregular behavior exhibited by a candidate or anybody charged with the conduct of examination before, during or after the examination that contravenes the rules and regulations governing such examination. Onwuka and Durowaju (2013) defined examination malpractice as any dishonest or unauthorized action or deed committed by a student on his own or in collaboration with others like fellow students, guardians, parents, teachers, head teacher, examination officials, supervisors invigilators, security officers or anybody or group of people before, during or after examination in order to obtain undeserved marks or grades.

Techniques

According to Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary, the word “techniques” is taken to mean actions, steps, or strategies taken to address a problem or to achieve a goal.

Mitigating

Also according to Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary, the word “curbing” is an action verb, which is defined as restricting or limiting something, such as a behaviour, action or trend, to prevent or control it.

Alarming Rate

The phrase “alarming rate” could be seen to mean a speed or frequency that is shocking, disturbing or worrying, often indicating a serious problem or trend that needs attention (Oxford Dictionary, 2001).

Teaching and Learning

Teaching and learning could be defined as a transformation process of knowledge from teachers to students. It is referred to as the combination of various elements within the process where an educator identifies and establishes the learning objectives and develops teaching resources as well as implement the teaching and learning strategy (Onyejekwe & Ebeogu 2012). On the other hand, learning is a cardinal factor that a teacher must consider while teaching students. The teaching and learning process consists of four basic elements (a) assessment (b) planning (c) implementation (d) evaluation. It is a method for monitoring and judging the overall quality of learning or teaching based on objective, data and scientific criteria

Primary Education

Primary education is one of the levels of Nigeria's education systems introduced as an important tool for achieving fundamental transformation in the intellectual and social state of the nation. The National Policy on Education (NERDC, 2014), states that primary Education “ is the education given in institutions for children aged 6 to 11 years” (14), It further states that it is the key to the success or failure of the whole system”. According to Ogunleye, (2011) primary education “is the key sector or phase of the entire education system. On one hand, it provides a literate workforce for the country and on the other side; it works like a feeder for the coming stages of education”. (7). This implies that it is the base, bedrock, foundation or pivot of the entire education system.

Quality Primary Education

According to Odeh (2012) quality education implies the attainment of specified targets and objectives”. Quality in education refers to the inputs, processes, outputs/ outcomes. The inputs have to do with the student, teachers, curriculum, facilities, instructional materials and so on. The processes refer to the teaching and learning processes, student/ teacher interactions, use of time and space and so on. The output/ outcomes are the test scores, graduation rates, skilled and unskilled and employable graduates, performance in subsequent jobs. In his contribution, Nwubani (2004) specified that educational quality has various components. These they identified as effectiveness, efficiency, equality, relevance and sustainability. This implies that before any level of education could be said to have quality, it must be seen to achieve the objective clearly spelt out in the National Policy on Education (2014) to include:

- 1 Inculcating permanent literacy and numeracy and ability to communicate effectively
- 2 Laying a sound basis for scientific and reflective thinking
- 3 Giving citizenship education as a basis for effective participation in and contribution to the life of the society
- 4 Moulding the character and developing sound attitude and morals in the child
- 5 Developing in the child, the ability to adapt to the child changing environment.
- 6 Giving the child the opportunities for developing manipulative skills that will enable the child function effectively in the society within the limits of the child's capacity
- 7 Providing the child with basic tools for further educational advancement, including preparation for trades and crafts of the locality

In essence, primary level of education is expected to affect all aspects of the child's life. The degree to which these objectives are attained point to its effectiveness

Education and Examination Malpractice in Nigeria

Examination malpractice impact adversely on the anticipated standard of our educational system. In fact, the credibility of any educational system is questioned when the system cannot meet its objectives. This scourge is destroying the credibility of the Nigerian educational system due to the intensity level and zeal with which people perpetuate this criminal act. This vice has largely contributed to the degradation of Nigerian educational system. The implication of this situation is that students will seek for education outside the country which will be injurious to the nation's economic and cultural development (Hedgers & Eweniyi in Money & Money, 2013). Education is expected to provide an individual with the requisite knowledge and skill that will enable him live a normal and peaceful life and then contribute effectively to the development of the society, But an individual who got involved in examination malpractice would had succeeded in acquiring certificate without developing the required competencies that will enable him live a fruitful and useful life.

This scourge has brought a gap between the examination score and the actual level of knowledge acquired. According to Snowman and Beihler in Osadebe (2009), the use of validity scores as it relates to examination is intended to reflect the actual academic achievement of the

student. In cases where examination malpractice is involved, the scores will not accurately reflect the actual level of students' academic achievement. The institutions will then be caught in the web of giving certificates that are not actually reflecting the capacities of the students (Osadebe, 2009). This has led to the questioning of certificates issued by our educational institutions.

Research Methodology

Nworgu (2015) describes a descriptive survey research as those studies which aim at collecting data and describing in a systematic manner the characteristics, features or facts about a given population. The design was adopted because the study involves the use of structured questionnaires to elicit responses. The reason for this is because; it is only when data are collected that the researcher thinks of analyzing the data. Alegbeleye and Fabunmi (2006) saw instruments as measurement devices or tools which are used for data collection in educational research. With this, the researcher inferred that the basis of any empirical research is the data and its instruments. Therefore research instrument is a tool which gives a researcher access to relevant data/information that acts as the focal point of research engine.

Area of Study: The study was conducted in ten primary schools selected from each state: Anambra and Imo states.

Population of the Study: The population of the study is sixty-two (62) persons comprising of thirty seven (37) teachers in the selected primary schools in Anambra and Imo States and twenty five (25) pupils in both primary schools selected from the two states.

Instrument for Data Collection: The questionnaire was used to collect data on the technique of mitigating examination malpractice in primary schools. The questionnaire instrument has two sections (A and B). Section A is personal data of the respondents. While Section B is based on the questions derived from the research questions. The instrument has four (4) point rating scale. Based on Pearson Model, the instrument has 0.65 coefficient reliability.

Validation of the Instrument: The instruments were validated and modified to suit the purpose for which it is designed.

Reliability of the Instrument: The reliability of the instruments was further established through the use of pilot test.

Method of Data Collection: There were 62 copies of the questionnaire distributed to selected primary schools in Anambra and Imo states. The questionnaires were sent to the Departments by the researcher and was clearly explained to the lecturers and students on how to answer and fill them. On the spot collection method is essential because it enables the respondents to fill them faster and ensures that there was no exchange of ideas.

Method of Data Analysis: The data collected were analyzed using mean. The mean cut-off point for the questionnaire is 2.50.

$$\text{Mean } (\bar{x}) = \frac{\sum fx}{N} \quad \text{where } \sum = \text{summation}$$

F = frequency of respondent under each category

X = normal value

N = total number of responses to items

$$\text{Thus } \bar{x} = \frac{4+3+2+1}{4} = 2.50$$

Decision rule: items with mean rating of 2.50 and above will be considered agreed while mean rating below 2.50 were not agreed.

Presentation of Data

Research Question 1: Do primary schools in the south – east practice exam malpractice?

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	$\sum fx$	$\bar{X}$	Decision
1	Most primary schools in the south east practice examination malpractice	31 124	20 60	7 14	4 4	202	3.25	Agreed
2	All primary schools in the south east practice examination malpractice	17 68	24 72	18 36	3 3	179	2.88	Agreed
3	No primary school in the south east practice examination malpractice	16 64	22 66	12 24	12 12	166	2.68	Agreed
4	Only government primary schools in the south east practice examination malpractice	13 52	14 42	3 6	32 32	132	2.12	Disagreed
5	Only private owned primary schools in the south east practice examination malpractice	17 68	24 72	18 36	3 3	179	2.88	Agreed
6	A few primary schools in the south east practice examination malpractice	11 44	13 39	16 32	22 22	137	2.21	Disagreed

Source: Researcher's Field Survey, 2021.

In table 2 above, research items 1, 2, 3 and 5 have their mean scores as 3.25, 2.88, 2.68 and 2.88 which are above the mean bench mark of 2.50 and are agreed. This connotes that the respondents agree that primary schools in the south east practice examination malpractice. Moreover, research items 11 and 13 with mean scores of 2.12 and 2.21 were disagreed which also means that examination malpractice is practiced in primary schools in the south east.

Research Question 2: What effects does exam malpractice has on primary education in the south east

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	$\sum fx$	$\bar{X}$	Decision
7	It makes pupils to lose interest in their studies	17 68	27 81	13 26	5 5	180	2.90	Agreed
8	It compromises the objectives of primary education	17 68	24 72	18 36	3 3	179	2.88	Agreed
9	It devalues the essence of education	16 64	22 66	12 24	12 12	166	2.68	Agreed
10	It turns education into a trade	17 68	27 81	13 26	5 5	180	2.90	Agreed
11	It makes education very competitive	11 44	13 39	16 32	22 22	137	2.21	Disagreed
12	It promotes of education	416 48	16 44	22 20	20 20	128	2.06	Disagreed
13	It produces half baked graduates	17 68	27 81	13 26	5 5	180	2.90	Agreed

Source: Researcher's Field Survey, 2021.

In table 3 above, research items 7, 8, 9, 10 and 13 have their mean scores as 2.90, 2.88, 2.68, 2.90 and 2.90 which are above the standard mean score of 2.50 and are agreed. This implies that the respondents agree that examination malpractice has negative effects on primary education in the south east. However, items 5 and 6 with mean scores of 2.21 and 2.06 were disagreed. This means that examination malpractice has no positive impact on primary education.

Research Question 3: To what extent does examination malpractice affect primary education in the south east?

SN	Items	SA	A	D	SD	$\sum fx$	$\bar{X}$	Decision
14	It produces fake and unreliable results	17 68	27 81	13 26	5 5	180	2.90	Agreed
15	It kills the moral and enthusiasm that goes with education	16 64	22 66	12 24	12 12	166	2.68	Agreed
16	It discourages hard work	17 68	24 72	18 36	3 3	179	2.88	Agreed
17	It encourages cheating and corruption in the education sector	17 68	24 72	18 36	3 3	179	2.88	Agreed
18	It enhances the production of technocrats	8 32	11 33	16 32	23 23	124	2.00	Disagreed
19	It encourages efficiency and effectiveness in pupils	13 52	14 42	4 8	31 31	133	2.13	Disagreed
20	It enhances incompetency, lousiness and laziness	31 124	20 60	7 14	4 4	202	3.25	Agreed

Source: Researcher's Field Survey, 2021.

Similarly, in table 4 research items 14, 15, 16, 17 and 20 have their mean scores as 2.90, 2.68, 2.88, 2.88 and 3.25 which are above the standard mean rating and are agreed. This implies that the respondents believe that examination malpractice has a long term negative impact on primary education. However, items 18 and 19 with mean scores of 2.00 and 2.13 were disagreed. This suggests that examination malpractice does not have any long term positive impact on primary education.

Research Question 4: What are the challenges to mitigating examination malpractice in primary schools in the south east?

SN	Items	SA	A	D	SD	$\sum fx$	$\bar{X}$	Decision
21	School owners and managers compete unhealthily for pupils	17 68	27 81	13 26	5 5	180	2.90	agreed
22	Parents exert negative influences on school system	16 64	22 66	12 24	12 12	166	2.68	Agreed
23	Teachers compromise the ethics of their profession.	17 68	24 72	18 36	3 3	179	2.88	Agreed
24	Greed and Corruption on the part of examination officers	17 68	24 72	18 36	3 3	179	2.88	Agreed
25	The vaulting desire to be the school with the best result.	17 68	27 81	13 26	5 5	180	2.90	Agreed
26	Poor motivation of teachers in terms of salary and motivation	17 68	24 72	18 36	3 3	179	2.88	Agreed

Source: Researcher's Field Survey, 2021.

Finally, research items 21, 22, 23, 24, 25 and 26 have their mean scores as 2.90, 2.68, 2.88, 2.88, 2.90 and 2.88 which are above the official mean rating score of 2.50 and are agreed. This also connotes that the respondents accepted that the factors enumerated above constitute challenges to mitigating examination malpractice in primary schools in the south east.

Research Question 5: What are the solutions to examination malpractice in primary schools in the south east?

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	$\sum fx$	$\bar{X}$	Decision
27	Stylometry should be used to analyze styles to identify inconsistencies, which can indicate cheating.	17 68	27 81	13 26	5 5	180	2.90	Agreed
28	Plagiarism detection could use algorithms to detect copied text and detect potential cheating.	16 64	22 66	12 24	12 12	166	2.68	Agreed
29	Sentiment analysis could be used to examine the tone and sentiment of answers to detect anomalies.	17 68	24 72	18 36	3 3	179	2.88	Agreed
30	Text similarity analysis could be used to compare answers to identify similarities, which can indicate cheating.	17 68	24 72	18 36	3 3	179	2.88	Agreed
31	Named entity recognition could be used to identify specific entities like names and locations to detect inconsistencies.	17 68	27 81	13 26	5 5	180	2.90	Agreed

Source: Researcher's Field Survey, 2021.

Finally, research items 27, 28, 29, 30, and 31 have their mean scores as 2.90, 2.68, 2.88, 2.88, and 2.90 which are above the official mean rating score of 2.50 and are agreed. This also connotes that the respondents accepted that the factors enumerated above are possible solutions to mitigating examination malpractice in primary schools in the south east if implemented.

Findings

So far, from the result of the study, it reveals that the examination malpractice is practiced in primary schools in the south east. Examination malpractice has a lot of negative impact on primary education in the south east. A lot of factors constitute challenges to mitigating examination malpractice in the south east. The proffered solutions to the challenges to examination malpractice in primary schools in the south east include: stylometry, plagiarism detection, sentiment analysis, text similarity analysis, named entity recognition and pragmatic analysis.

Conclusion

Examination malpractice is practiced in primary schools in the south east. Examination malpractice has negative effects on primary education in the south east. The effects of examination malpractice on primary education in the south east has both short term and long term negative impact. Many factors contribute to the challenges' in mitigation examination malpractice in the primary education in the south east. However, possible solutions to mitigating the rate of occurrences of examination malpractice in the south east could be achieved through a language – based techniques and include the following: stylometry, plagiarism detection, sentiment analysis, text similarity analysis, named entity recognition and pragmatic analysis.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following are recommended:

- 1 Stylometry should be used to analyze styles to identify inconsistencies, which can indicate cheating.
- 2 Plagiarism
- 3 detection could use algorithms to detect copied text and detect potential cheating.
- 4 Sentiment analysis could be used to examine the tone and sentiment of answers to detect anomalies.
- 5 Text similarity analysis could be used to compare answers to identify similarities, which can indicate cheating.
- 6 Named entity recognition could be used to identify specific entities like names and locations to detect inconsistencies.

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