



Conduct of undergraduate examination in the faculty of education and extension services: Salient issues to ponder

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Abstract

Examinations are academic activities, conducted in an organized form as a tool and a fair way to measure merit. The paper diligently observed the conduct of undergraduate examinations in the Faculty of Education and Extension Services, Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto. Considering the various stages and the many people involved in handling examination tasks, the paper extols the salient issues threatening its credibility. The challenges discussed in the paper include inadequate preparation, inadequate invigilation, examination malpractice as well as poor processing of results. The paper contends that until these (and other factors) are curtailed to the barest minimum, the bulk of the effort of the staff of the Faculty in the provision of well trained teachers to serve the educational needs of the nation would be a mirage. Against this backdrop, therefore, the paper suggests among other things that; the use of technological gadgets like CCTV could go a long way in bringing perpetrators of examinations malpractice to justice especially during examinations; an Examination Preparation Team should be set up by the Faculty to ensure that adequate preparation is made in due course; Departmental and Faculty Board meetings should be held prior to and after examinations for proper orientation and sensitization of staff on the position of examination as the life line of the University.

Keywords: education, examination and invigilation

Introduction

Education forms the bedrock upon which all other developmental progress is hinged. Citizens are often time given educational opportunities in order to contribute to the overall development of their nation. Any nation that relegates its education sector to the background is only doing so at its own peril. That could explain why advanced nations of the world allocate substantial part of their budgetary allocation to the education sector. However, it is one thing to invest in education and another to ensure that the bulk of the aims and objectives of the educational programmes are achieved. These are often measured globally through the conduct of examinations. Saima and Qadir (2011) ^[11] view examination as a tangible proof of fitness of a student for higher class or a particular professional course. Educational institutions conduct examinations regularly to ascertain the ability and knowledge base of their students. Although written examinations have often been criticized for not being true tests of a person's intelligence, they remain widely used as parameters for educational merit.

Being an integral part of an educational system, examinations are taken for diagnostic, placement, certification and quality assurance in Nigerian universities as obtained in most universities in other countries of the world. However, of the many issues bedeviling and engaging the serious thoughts of educators is the conduct of examinations. According to Mindlogicx (2018) ^[8] when the sanctity of examination is breached and undeserving students earn credits and grab opportunities, the masses suffer as the whole system crumbles.

In recent years, there have been complaints about the perpetual neglect of duty when it comes to invigilation by some academic staff (Galadima, Sama, Manir & Tsafe: 2018:1) ^[4]. The behavior according to the report of the Examination Monitoring and Invigilation Committee 'has resulted in subjecting the Faculty to serious examination challenges'. It is against this background that the writer decided to look at the salient issues threatening the sanctity of examinations in the Faculty of Education and Extension Services with a view to curtailing their menace for a more strengthened system.

Conceptual Framework

According to Salawu (2016) ^[11] education is the tool with which values, knowledge and skills are acquired and the proper application of these acquisitions in the process of nation building paves way for national development. Examinations are evaluative measures through which the abilities and qualities of learners are weighed. Bello, Kalajo and Uduh (2010) ^[2] described examination as the process of finding out how much of the objective of specific learning tasks a learner has learnt. It means that various processes ranging from oral, written, project to practical forms etc are utilized for an appraisal of a student's achievement. Results of examinations are used by examiners for appropriate grading, withdrawal and certification of students in universities. Various reasons for conducting examinations have been advanced by scholars over the years, for instance Melissa (2017) ^[7] identifies the following as some of the bases for

school examinations:

1. To assess what students have learned.
2. To identify students' strengths and weaknesses.
3. To measure effectiveness of an educational programme.
4. To determine recipients of awards and recognition.
5. To determine whether to promote or demote students etc.

Furthermore, invigilation can be regarded as the process of keeping an eye or a watch over students for maintaining the smooth conduct of examination in accordance with the examination regulations. This is done to prevent candidates from cheating. Salient issues on the other hand are focal points that are central to any activity for consideration. Issues like invigilation, adequate preparation, result processing etc are considered prominent within the premise of this paper. It is imperative to examine how examinations are conducted in an ideal situation.

Conduct of Examination

Examinations are conducted periodically by departments, faculties and by extension the universities for quality control. The task of conducting formal assessment entails tedious processes and stages ranging from the setting up of questions through to marking of the scripts. Questions are set by the course tutors which are in turn typed, printed and photocopied in accordance with the expected number of students to sit for the examination. Before their final production, the questions must have been moderated to ensure both their reliability and validity. The final year's examinations are moderated by the external examiner while others are moderated within. This must be done under tight security because any slight leakage could mar the success and credibility of such examinations. Time-tables are accurately drawn with regards to the number of courses, the size of the class as well as appropriate venues for the examinations. This should carefully commensurate with the dates and time specified for each course or subject. Time-tables are then displayed strategically on notice boards at least 2 weeks before the commencement of the

examinations for all stakeholders to make the necessary preparations. The venues for the examinations must be adequate, well ventilated lighted and spacious to cater for the number of candidates that would be allocated there. The venues must be inspected by both the Faculty Examination Officer(s) along with departmental examination officers for smooth conduct of the examination. Moreover, members of staff are assigned for invigilation during the conduct of the examinations. One of the responsibilities of an invigilator is to ensure the signing in and out of the attendance register by the students. In fact it is clearly spelt out in the Students Handbook 2014/2015 ^[9] that:

A student shall sign the attendance list/register at the commencement of examination and at the end while submitting his scripts. In the event of any dispute arising as to whether or not a student sat for the examination and/ or submitted his answer scripts the signature on the attendance list/register shall be conducive proof thereof.

In addition, an equitable ratio must be maintained such that the number of students would be effectively handled by the invigilators otherwise more staff should be involved. According to Harriet (2007) ^[5] a minimum of one invigilator should be assigned for each 50 students. It is however, desirable to have more than one invigilator in a venue to cater for unforeseen emergencies. This is in line with international best practices for the conduct of examinations. The use of overseers otherwise known as supervisors plays significant roles in facilitating and safeguarding the academic integrity of the administration of examination.

Conduct of Undergraduate Examination in the Faculty of Education and Extension Services: Salient Issues

Faculty of Education and Extension Services is one of the twelve faculties in Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto. It is the second largest faculty in terms of number of registered students as could be seen in Table 1.

Table 1: Undergraduate Students for the 2013/2014 – 2017/2018 Sessions (UDUS)

S. No.	Faculty	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	Total
1	Arts & Islamic Studies	549	340	506	458	335	2188
2	Sciences	1234	1338	1958	3015	1633	9178
3	Management Sciences	525	290	421	455	406	2097
4	Education & Ext. Serv	1187	972	1356	1963	941	6419
5	Agriculture	206	349	412	865	503	2335
6	Medical Sciences	92	114	99	149	156	610
7	Engineering	0	0	0	0	46	46
8	Clinical Science	178	221	97	291	247	1034
9	Social Science	441	252	469	509	495	2166
10	Law	121	78	121	111	107	538
11	Pharmacy	35	106	94	136	101	472
12	Veterinary Medicine	149	124	121	206	73	67
	Total	4717	4184	5654	8158	5043	27756

Source: M.I.S. UDUS 2018

The Faculty is composed of four departments, namely Department of Curriculum Studies and Educational Technology (CSET), Department of Educational Foundations, Department of Science and Vocational Education (SVE) and Department of Adult Education and Extension Services. Each of these departments has an examination officer saddled with

the responsibility of handling examination issues; conduct of examinations inclusive. These are coordinated by a Faculty Examination Officer who carries out certain examination functions like the preparation of examination time-table for the faculty in line with the University regulations. There are over 138 courses cutting across the four departments

on which students are yearly examined. These courses are spread across the four departments of the Faculty and the two semesters in the academic calendar of the University. However, it is worthy to note, that courses can be categorized into general and specific. The clear distinction between the two is that while general courses are for all the students of the Faculty, specific ones are peculiar to departments. For instance almost all courses from AEES are peculiar to students of the department while courses like EDU 101, 102, 205, 306, 307, 402 etc are general in nature or Faculty based.

The primacy of examinations to schooling and to the overall educational programme cannot be overestimated. Therefore in order to ensure its credibility, all members of staff of the faculty are involved in the exercise at one stage or the other. The Dean, Heads of department, Professors as well as senior and junior staff are not left out for a fair and transparent examination process. They painstakingly go through the tremendous process of handling, safeguarding, invigilating, marking and processing examinations results. It is not unusual however, to find some irregularities in the conduct of examinations in the Faculty as in the University in general. No single Faculty can claim perfection, but the rate at which this ugly trend keeps reoccurring cannot be over looked. Kalgo (2014) ^[6] argued that “the way the departments handled examination scripts before, during and after examination leave much to be desired. The spaces in the venue, the seating arrangements, inadequate invigilation during examination, inadequate preparation, examination misconduct etc are undoubtedly serious threats to its sanctity. These are salient issues that would be discussed under the following sub-headings.

Examination Preparation

Planning ahead of time ensures the success of almost any venture. Adequate preparation must be made ranging from effective lecturing, completion of topics in courses by lecturers, setting and moderation of questions to printing and production of the required number of question papers. There should be enough answer booklets as well as stationeries that might be used. Current happenings in the Faculty depict a lack of preparedness in this regard. Often times inadequate questions papers are produced which would be grossly inadequate for the number of candidates that would sit for a given examination. This would require a reproduction of many copies amounting to a waste of crucial time and a loss of key examination points on the part of the students going by their study habits. In some occasion inadequate number of answer booklets is provided while on several occasions attendance sheets are not supplied. These are key materials for the smooth conduct of a standard examination.

Inadequate Invigilation

As the Faculty grows in size in terms of number of registered candidates and numerous courses, conducting formal assessment becomes laborious and cost intensive. Approximately the number of examinations in any one semester in the Faculty exceeds sixty (60). Administration of the examinations therefore becomes tasking and tedious on the part of invigilators. When inadequate number of invigilators is assigned to a venue; when invigilators for whatever reasons

come late or refuse to turn up at examination venue; when invigilators engage in chatting, browsing with phones, move out unnecessarily at the expense of proper invigilation, the effort to safeguard the conduct of examination becomes futile. When some senior colleagues usually assigned as overseers do not show up for the exercise; when invigilators who refused to turn up are not questioned; when staff that discharge their responsibilities diligently are not recognized, rooms are opened for a lackadaisical attitude to duties for all.

In an ideal situation, an invigilator must be at the examination venue at least 30 minutes before the commencement of the examination. This is to enable him/her inspect the space to ascertain the conduciveness of the venue and for screening of students. Familiarity with the venue by the invigilators is another factor to be considered before the examination date. It is pertinent for a supervisor to familiarize him/herself with the venue to ascertain its capacity, its facilities (toilets, lights ventilation) its seating arrangement etc so that adequate measures could be taken to ensure its effectiveness for the examination. Familiarity with the venue also saves the invigilation from having to run from one venue to another in search of the appropriate one on the date of the examination thereby creating anxiety in the minds of the students.

It can be observed that during examinations, students of the Faculty in most cases only sign in for sitting for the examination. They do not sign out at the point of submission of their scripts to the invigilators. This gives room for students to make false claims of sitting for certain examinations putting the lecturer in question or the examination officer at a fix.

Examination Malpractice

One of the salient issues challenging the integrity of examinations not only in the Faculty but in schools and institutions of learning; not only in Nigeria but the world over is examination malpractice. Wilayat (2009) ^[12] believes examination misconduct is any illegal act committed by a student single handedly or in collaboration with others during or after examination in order to obtain undeserved mark or grades. It has assumed an alarming proportion with culprits becoming sophisticated by the day. These take different forms ranging from impersonation; ‘giraffing’, exchange of scripts, copying, conversing, use of signals and sign language to writing key points on handkerchiefs, laps, palms, etc.

It is disheartening to note that the trend is not only exhibited by students who are unserious with their studies but the vile practices are often orchestrated by staff. In an analysis of the trends of examination malpractice in Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto from 2nd semester 2007/2008 session - 2nd semester 2010/2011 session, Kalgo (2014) ^[6] reports that ‘students from Faculty of Education and Extension Services, more than any other students from other faculties commit examination misconduct. He added that about 32.68% of the cases analyzed involved students from the faculty’. This scenario suggests that there are loose ends and gaps that the faculty needs to tighten and fix with a view to curtailing the menace to save its integrity. When students frequently engage in examination malpractice, the integrity of its stakeholders is challenged. Conscious of the nature and the large number of students admitted yearly by the university to study education courses coupled with the fact that “about 60-70% of the

admitted students were given education against their wish” (kalgo, 2014) ^[6], one would appreciate the amount of work vis-a-vis the number of staff of the Faculty. It is an understatement to maintain that the Faculty has a huge task not only in terms of effective lecture delivery but also in terms of ensuring a valid and reliable assessment system. This becomes gloomy when the students so admitted are by far academically weaker than their counterparts in other faculties. Weak students more often resort to examination malpractice which can adversely jeopardize the results and by extension the certificates.

Processing of Results

Conducting examinations implies an effective evaluation process for improving students learning. Prompt marking and processing of examination results would encourage and motivate learners to study harder to ensure success in their academic endeavours. The practice in the Faculty is such that results are delayed, omissions are made and missing grades are recorded. Issues of misplacement of scripts, poor compilation procedure and record of results abound. Several corrections for a single course can be observed suggestive of high rate of irregularity in processing of results. This could be associated with the large number of courses and students which the Faculty is battling with. No matter how lofty, how enviable, how laudable, how gigantic the education goals are, how relevant the school curriculum is organized, if no provision is made for accurate evaluation and reportage of learning progress, all these efforts will amount to a wasteful venture (Duze, 2011) ^[3].

In addition, it is not uncommon to find that both the examination officer and the course lecturer find it unnecessary to ascertain the number of answer booklets at the point of collection and return of the documents. The students themselves sometimes contribute immensely to their woes by late submission of scripts and/or not indicating their admission numbers or department on the booklets thereby becoming vulnerable to omission. In spite of whoever is at fault it is the students who suffer the most being at the receiving end.

Conclusion

Examination has come to play a central role in the affairs of any school and institutions of learning. Life in itself is a big examination. One would obviously appreciate the enormity of tasks, responsibilities and schedules on the part of the staff of the Faculty in comparison to other faculties of the University. Conducting undergraduate examinations in the Faculty is seriously challenged by a number of issues which often time mar the continued hard work, diligence, perseverance and commitment of the staff of the Faculty. Conscious of the fact that it is rather difficult to have a full-proof technique for a smooth examination conduct and of the various factors leading to the above painted picture, it is the position of the paper that concerted efforts must be taken and fast too, to improve the system.

Suggestions for Improvement

Going by the salient issues discussed, the paper proffers some suggestions which if used could pave way for an improved conduct of undergraduate examinations in the Faculty.

- 1 The use of technological gadgets like CCTV could go a long way in bringing perpetrators of examinations malpractice to justice especially during examinations
- 2 An examination preparation team should be set up by the Faculty to ensure adequate preparation is made in due course.
- 3 An assistant examination officer for both the departments and the Faculty should be assigned to enhance service delivery in this direction.
- 4 A register should be opened by all departmental examination officers to ascertain the number of booklets collected and returned by course tutors.
- 5 More infrastructures in the form of examination halls should be constructed by the University management to reduce congestions during examinations.
- 6 The University should employ more lecturers to the Faculty to reduce the lecturer-student and invigilator-student ratio index.
- 7 In line with 5 and 6 above, invigilators should ensure that students sign in and out of examination.
- 8 The Dean, the Heads of Department as well as the Admission Officers should strive to ensure that only students who showed interest in and are qualified to read education courses are admitted to the Faculty. This could lower the rate of examination malpractice.
- 9 Departmental and Faculty Board meetings should be held prior to and after examinations for proper orientation and sensitization of staff on the position of examination as the life line of the University. There should be an assessment and evaluation of the progress made, lessons learnt and measures to take to strengthen the system.
- 10 Students should be given an orientation at the beginning of a semester to inculcate in them the spirit and value of hard work and to avail them with the necessary information and consequences of partaking in examination malpractice.

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