

Assessment Ethics in Vocational Technical Education for Attenuating Examination Malpractice among Vocational Education Students in Nigerian Universities

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ABSTRACT

This study sought to reinforce ethics in assessment by identifying the ethical standards in academic testing in vocational education. The study was carried out in the Department of Vocational Education, University of Uyo in AkwaIbom State, south-south Nigeria. The descriptive research design was employed for the study. The population of the study is 53 consisting of all the Lecturers in the Department. The 53 lecturers were used as the sample for the study. Purposive sampling was done since the number of lecturers was of a manageable size. The researcher developed instrument titled “Examiners Assessment Ethics Questionnaire” was used for data collection. The instrument was validated by three experts from the department of tests and measurement, University of Uyo. Validation was in two tiers: face and content validation. The researcher started the validation by constructing the questionnaire items based on the objectives of the study. The developed questionnaire was given to the experts in tests and measurement. They scrutinized and made recommendations on how the instrument could measure exactly the variables under study. All their corrections and suggestions were incorporated into the final form of the questionnaire. The instrument was tested for reliability. Findings of the study identified key skills, attitudes and ethical practices in testing which includes integrity, objectivity, fairness, public safety and confidentiality. The recommendations made among others is that a handbook on standards/ethics in assessment should be provided by the University administration for lecturers.

Keywords: Examiners Assessment Ethics Questionnaire, Vocational Technical Education, Visual Cryptography

I. INTRODUCTION

Historically, academic integrity has been a perennial concern of faculty and administrators in higher education (Whitley, 1998). Recent estimates of the prevalence of cheating on college campuses indicate that a majority of students cheat to some extent (Bolin, 2004; McCabe & Trevino, 1996; Rozycki, 2006). Examination malpractice has become a menace to the growth of

education in Nigeria. A lot of reasons have been given for the rise in examination malpractice cases in Nigeria. The researcher believes this is chiefly a consequence of students seeking higher grades to help them qualify for few jobs available in the labour market. Employers are looking for graduate-workers with high grades and performance scores, as they perceive high grades to be a function of good aptitude. This is accentuated by the work of Thurow (1975) which proposed a theory of job

competition which stipulates that based on attained schooling and grades on graduation, graduate-workers are ranked in order of trainability and the highest ranked worker is assigned to the highest ranked job. Leuven and Oosterbeek (2011) stated that the implication of this is that higher educational attainment raises the possibility of being employed. In other words, if you have high grades, you stand a better chance of being employed even if you do not have the skills, after all, the company will provide training. So, if one can cheat his/her way to get it, the end justifies the means.

Alternatively, the job-competition model of Thurow (1975) considers two queues: a job queue and a person queue. Each job in the job queue has its own skill requirements and productivity characteristics. Individuals competing for jobs also form a queue, their relative position in the queue is determined by a set of characteristics such as education and experience that suggest to the employer the cost of training them in the skills necessary to perform a given job. Thus, if a person can get higher scores in examinations, this will translate to higher grades, better academic performance and subsequently, higher academic qualifications which will see the person stand a better chance of getting employed.

This situation best describes the Nigerian society today. One of the major problems facing the Nigerian society is the superfluous emphases on higher grades and less emphasis on practical ability. Emphases today are on certification instead of functional education. Consequently, people today are over-schooled but undereducated. Some students will go to any length to get higher scores and this includes cheating during examinations, a trend that has become worrisome in Nigeria and its quest for educational development. However, cheating in examination has also been blamed on the examiners. Some of these reported cases of examination malpractice are in connivance with examiners. This calls to question, the issue of ethics in students' assessment.

All professional teachers and examiners have distinct ethical obligations to the public. These obligations include professional competency, integrity, honesty, confidentiality, objectivity, public safety, and fairness, all of which are intended to preserve and safeguard public confidence in the educational system.

Unfortunately, all too often there are reports in the media of examiners' misconduct and moral dilemmas, occasioned by unethical behaviour of professional examiners and Teachers. These reports naturally receive considerable attention by the public, whose confidence in the profession is undermined with each report. This has led to the undermining of the educational system in Nigeria, as cases of cheats and teachers aiding and abetting academic cheats has led to a crumbling standard of education in Nigeria. Students are now fooled into the idea of cheating through examinations and by extension the society. The problem is that most lecturers do not pay attention to the implementation of the examination ethics nor do they promote its existence. Most lecturers on their own part, are not committed to the practice of the ethics. Chula, Roger and Chris (2009) define Cheating as a transgression against academic integrity which entails taking an unfair advantage that results in a misrepresentation of a student's ability and grasp of knowledge. If examiners look the other way and allow students cheat, if examiners will continue to let their guards down and not practice the ethics of assessment, supervision and teaching, this will lead to falling educational values and by extension depletion of societal values and the production of student-workers that have a mind set of cheating through life. This will not be good for the educational system and indeed, Nigeria for the long run.

According to Ugoji (2008) teachers who are directly involved in assessment need to be guided by code of ethics if assessment has to be uniformly practiced across schools. Ethics therefore can simply be defined as laid down guidelines, rules and regulations, code or conduct or principles of behaviour based upon the ideals of morality to which a group or an organization agrees to regulate their behaviour. Schmeiser (1995) identified professional competency, integrity, honesty, confidentiality, objectivity, public safety, and fairness as ethics for assessment and supervision of examinations.

The main purpose of the study is to outline the assessment ethics/standards for compliance by lecturers in the department of Vocational Education, University of Uyo, Akwalbom State. Specifically, the study will seek to

1. Identify the integrity standards in assessment of students by vocational education lecturers in the University of Uyo, Akwa Ibom State.
2. Enumerate the objectivity standards in assessment of students by vocational education lecturers in the University of Uyo, Akwa Ibom State.
3. Specify the confidentiality standards in assessment of students by vocational education lecturers in the University of Uyo, Akwa Ibom State.
4. Outline the public safety standards in assessment of students by vocational education lecturers in the University of Uyo, Akwa Ibom State.
5. Categorize the fairness standards in assessment of students by vocational education lecturers in the University of Uyo, Akwa Ibom State.

II. METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out in the Department of Vocational Education, University of Uyo in Akwa Ibom State, South-South Nigeria. The ex-post facto research design was employed for the study. The population of the study is 53 consisting of all the Lecturers in the Department. The 53 lecturers were used as the sample for the study. Purposive sampling was done since the number of lecturers was of a manageable size. The researcher developed instrument titled "Examiners Assessment Ethics Questionnaire" was used for data collection. The instrument was validated by three experts from the Department of Tests and measurement, University of Uyo. Validation was in two tiers: face and content validation. The researcher started the validation by constructing the questionnaire items based on the objectives of the study. The developed questionnaire was given to the experts in tests and measurement. They scrutinized and made recommendations on how the instrument could measure exactly the variables under study. All their corrections and suggestions were incorporated into the final form of the questionnaire. The instrument was then administered to 30 lecturers in the Faculty of Education, Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike, who are not part of the Study population. Split half method was used to determine the reliability of the instrument. The reliability coefficient of the instrument was determined using Kuder-Richardson's formula 21 (KR-21). The coefficient index stood at .76. The research instrument was administered to all sample teachers in the Department of

Vocational Education, University of Uyo, Akwa Ibom state. Mean statistics was used to answer the research questions. On the decision level, a Mean of 2.5 and above was accepted while any mean below 2.5 is rejected. A template for examiners' compliance with the ethical codes was then developed and content validated.

III. Research Findings

Research Question1

Table 1: Template for Examiners' Compliance with Integrity in assessment

S/N	Category	Content	Code anchors
1	Report misconduct	Reference to issues of covering up cheats	Examiners bring up examination misconduct issues by students to the attention of the Supervisor during supervision of examination
2	Professionalism	Reference to integrity during assessment	Examiners practice Integrity in order to achieve targets during examination supervision
3	Focus in testing	Reference to interferences by other faculty members during testing	Examiners should not yield to pressure from principals and other examiners to engage in what is perceived to be an unethical behaviour that will make an examiner bulge during examination supervision
4	Responsibility in testing	Reference to responsibility and accountability of examiners	Examiners take responsibility for personal actions at the examination hall
5	Adherence to policy in testing	Reference to integrity standards in testing	Examiners ignore policies, guidelines and approval

Table 2: Template for Examiners' Compliance with Fairness in assessment

			processes to get the job when involved in examination supervision		Category	Content	Code anchors
6	Resisting the temptation to compromise	Reference to compromise during testing	Examiners exhibit courage and deal directly with controversial or unpopular issues during examination supervision	1	Empathic	Reference to empathy	Examiners make certain that their actions never intentionally harm another even to a small degree during supervision
7	Leading by example	Reference to proactive acts and emulative attitude towards examination testing	Examiners should do the right thing and encourage others to do the same during examination supervision	2	Risk avoidance	Reference to avoidance of risk during testing	Risks to another should tolerated, irrespective of how small the risks might be during examination supervision
8	Accountability	Reference to upholding the examiners' academic code of conduct and therefore must formally report all instances of cheating or dishonest behaviour during the final examination period.	The invigilator will ensure that all exam-related paperwork and processes (such as incident reports) are completed during and by the end of each shift. He/she ensures the security of examinations documents.	3	Testees' welfare	Reference to the welfare of testees	Examiners perform an action which might in any way threaten the dignity and welfare of another individual during examination supervision
				4	No favouritism during testing	Reference to equality of testees	Examiners treat everyone with equality during examination supervision
				5	impartiality in testing	Reference to equity	Examiners treat everyone with equity during examination supervision
				6	Avoidance of nepotism	Reference to no favouritism in testing	Examiners avoid nepotism during examination supervision
				7	Avoidance of bias during	Reference to prejudice	Examiners avoid bias during

Table 1 shows the summary of integrity standards in academic testing for Vocational education. The result identifies the integrity ethics to be practiced by examiners. This includes reporting misconduct; show professionalism; never yield to pressure that will lead to compromise; take responsibility; adhere to examination guidelines; do the right thing and encourage others to do the same.

Research Question 2

	testing	during testing of students	examination supervision				immediately and assist the candidates as per their needs.	
8	Avoiding excessive closeness to students during testing	Reference to friendliness with examinees during assessment	Examiners avoid friendliness with examinees during assessment	<p>Table 2 shows the summary of the fairness ethics/standards for vocational education. The result of analysis reveals that the items identified as the core anchors for fairness in assessment includes avoiding harm to others; avoidance of risk situations; uphold the dignity of testees; equality of all examinees; avoiding favouritism in assessment; avoiding bias of any kind and not allowing friendliness to influence assessment and use tests that are fair to all test takers.</p> <p>Research Question 3</p>				
9	Fair testing	Reference to tests that are fair to all irrespective of any variable	use tests that are fair to all test takers regardless of age, gender, disability, race, ethnicity etc					
10	Responsiveness	Reference to prompt response	Examiners must respond to queries from candidates					

Table 3: Template for Examiners' Compliance with Public Safety in assessment

	Category	Content	Code anchors
1	Avoidance of harm to others during testing	Reference to harm to others	The existence of potential harm to others is always wrong, irrespective of the benefits to be gained during examination supervision
2	Avoidance of physical confrontation	Reference to physical/psychological abuse to testees	Examiners should never psychologically or physically harm an examinee during examination supervision
3	Avoidance of unsafe acts	Reference to unsafe acts	If an action could harm an innocent other, then it should not be done by Examiners.
4	Maintenance of examinees' dignity	Reference to the dignity and welfare of examinees	The dignity and welfare of examinees should be the most important concern by examiner during examination supervision.
5	Periodic Monitoring and inspections during testing	Reference to Periodic Monitoring and inspections of examinees during testing	Monitoring and inspections should be periodic during examination supervision
6	1) Prompt reporting	Reference to incident reporting during testing	2) Incident reporting is to be done during the examination process
7	3) Safety to	Maintenance of safety during	4) Rescue equipment and safety measures ought to be in

	testees	testing	place during examinations
8	5) Venue preparation	Reference to Venue Checklist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure rooms have good lighting • ensure rooms are in a noise free area • confirm sufficient numbers of computers, tables and chairs at least one week prior to exam day • ensure that there is sufficient space between desks to allow the supervisor

Table 4 gives the summary of identified public safety standards in assessment of examinees in vocational education. The result identifies the following responses as ethics to be practiced in public safety during assessment- avoidance of harm to others; Avoidance of unsafe acts; Periodic Monitoring and inspections during testing and **Incident reporting**.

Research Question 4

Table 4: Template for Examiners' Compliance with confidentiality in assessment

	Category	Content	Code anchors
1	Inspection skills	Reference to venue inspection before and after tests	Examiners should check testing rooms prior to the beginning of test administration to ensure that all specific information is not displayed in the room during the test administration
2	Non disclosure of tests before assessment	Reference to confidentiality of test materials (question papers, checklists, materials, model answers etc)	Examiners should not disclose any secure test materials, including test questions and answers
3	Proper documentation	Reference to proper documentation/ reporting after testing	Examiners should return to the scoring site/ coordinator all secure test materials provided to or prepared by them
4	Confidentiality of tests	Reference to confidentiality of tests before, during and after testing	Examiners should not disclose the content of secure test materials, including test questions and answers, in any classroom or other activities. Examiners should not allow access to the test materials by any other person not so authorized
5	Confidentiality of tests	Reference to unused test materials	Examiners should retain any copies of any secure test materials, including scoring materials and notes

			pertaining to their contents.		during testing	neutrality during testing	neutrality during assessment
6	Marking and scoring	Reference to ethics on marking and scoring of tests	Examiners should not alter students' responses in any manner	4	Avoidance of bias in testing	Reference to equality of all testees	Examiners are to maintain total lack of bias to any examinee
7	Avoid unauthorized disclosures	Reference to test disclosure	Examiners should not disclose individual student test scores or test performance data to unauthorized persons	5	Objectivity in testing	Reference to prejudice during testing	Examiners are to maintain total lack of prejudice to any examinee
				6	Proper documentation	Reference to documentation after testing	Careful documentation of all procedures so that others can review methods for bias, whether methods are qualitative or quantitative.

Table 4 identifies how examiners in vocational education can maintain confidentiality in testing. The factors are examiners should inspect the venue of test administration; Non disclosure of tests before assessment; Proper documentation; Examiners should not alter students' responses in any manner; Examiners should not disclose individual student test scores or test performance data to unauthorized persons.

Research question 5

Table 5: Template for Examiners' Compliance with objectivity in assessment

	Category	Content	Code anchors
1	Stating guidelines of the examination to testees	Reference to examination guidelines	Examiners are supposed to ensure examination rules are passed down to all students
2	Avoidance of conversation with examinees during testing	Reference to undue conversations during testing	Examiners are to avoid engaging the candidates in discussions of any kind
3	Maintaining neutrality	Reference to objectivity and	Examiners are to maintain

					during testing	neutrality during testing	neutrality during assessment
				4	Avoidance of bias in testing	Reference to equality of all testees	Examiners are to maintain total lack of bias to any examinee
				5	Objectivity in testing	Reference to prejudice during testing	Examiners are to maintain total lack of prejudice to any examinee
				6	Proper documentation	Reference to documentation after testing	Careful documentation of all procedures so that others can review methods for bias, whether methods are qualitative or quantitative.
				7	Apply the same standards to all the testees	Reference to equality of testees	Examiners are to maintain uniformity of testing standards to all examinees
				8	Maintain objectivity in testing	Reference to avoiding all external influences during testing	Examiners must not offer, solicit, or accept any gift, benefit, compensation, or consideration that reasonably could be expected to compromise their own or another's independence and objectivity.
				9	Event reporting	Reference to written reports	reflect unbiased opinions and include this wording on all written reports

Table 1 shows the summary of objectivity standards in academic testing for Vocational education. The result

identifies the objectivity ethics to be practiced by examiners. This includes Stating guidelines of the examination to testees; Avoidance of conversation with examinees during testing; Maintaining neutrality during testing; avoidance of bias; Proper documentation and Applying the same standards to all the testees.

IV. Discussion of Findings

The finding of the study identifies the ethics/standards for academic testing in vocational education. The primary purpose of the exam invigilator is to ensure the integrity of the examination exercise as specified in the code of ethics. This is supported by McMahon, Mary, and Kristen (2014) which stated that examiners are required to ensure that all the exams are carried out according to the rules set out by the exam board which allows each candidate to sit for the examination under equal conditions as other candidates throughout the country.

Invigilators report instances of offences committed by students under the Academic Code of Conduct during an examination including cheating, falsification of documents or other dishonest behavior; distribute and collect exam documents; monitor the class while the exam is in session; accompany students who need to leave the classroom for any reason once the exam is underway, including accompanying students to the rest room; act as the point of first contact for students and faculty who may have a problem in the exam room and escalate issues as appropriate to the Supervisor. Specific duties are further outlined in the orientation/ training session. Some specific responsibilities that require integrity as identified as Rowan and Samuel (2002) are accountability; judgement and Working Conditions.

Exam supervisors are responsible for providing students with the opportunity to demonstrate their academic competence under fair and uniform testing conditions and to ensure the integrity of the examination process. This is corroborated by The Code of Fair Testing Practices in Education according to APA (2010) which identifies obligation to provide and use tests that are fair to all test takers regardless of age, gender, disability, race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, linguistic background, or other personal characteristics. Fairness is a primary consideration in all aspects of testing.

Examiners and invigilators must use reasonable care and judgment to achieve and maintain independence and objectivity in their professional activities. This is supported by Lawlor (2007), which stated that gifts and perks from colleagues or other entities that could be seeking to influence the actions of the examiners are seen as a direct challenge to independent and objective conduct and they are thus generally regarded as a potentially more serious violation. Gifts from students, by contrast, are seen as less likely to affect one's independence and objectivity.

V. Conclusion

This paper has been able to enumerate the ethical standards for Vocational technical teachers. The paper identified integrity, fairness, objectivity, public safety and confidentiality as essential standards for vocational teachers. Specifically, the study sought to design a template for teachers on the implementation of ethical standards. The standards as identified will hale the teachers in academic testing in vocational education. It is concluded that the codes of ethics are meant to guide teachers' behaviour and job performance. The ethics of teaching profession are the moral beliefs and rules about right and wrongs that influence teachers behaviour, attitude and ideals. The overall purposes of ethical standards are to clarify the ethics of the profession, to inspire the quality of behaviour which reflects the honour and dignity of the profession, to encourage and emphasize those positive attributes of professional conduct which characterize strong and effective teaching, and to enable the profession to declare itself publicly accountable.

VI. Recommendation

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made

1. A handbook on standards/ethics in assessment should be provided by the University administration for lecturers.
2. Orientation seminars should be held with students to reinforce the essence of ethics in examination testing and the broader consequences to society.

3. Lecturers should endeavour to practice the codes of examination assessment every time they are involved in assessment.

The proposed payment system combines the Iris recognition with the visual cryptography by which customer data privacy can be obtained and prevents theft through phishing attack [8]. This method provides best for legitimate user identification. This method can also be implemented in computers using external iris recognition devices.

VII. REFERENCES

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