



COUNSELLING STRATEGIES FOR CURTAILING EXAMINATION MALPRACTICE IN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN NIGERIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR PROMOTING ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

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Abstract

Examination malpractice has remained one of the most persistent challenges confronting tertiary education in Nigeria. The phenomenon undermines the credibility of academic qualifications, weakens the quality of graduates, encourages corruption, and threatens national development. Despite government regulations and institutional disciplinary measures, the prevalence of examination malpractice continues to rise due to poor value orientation, fear of failure, inadequate preparation, peer pressure, financial difficulties, and the increasing misuse of digital technologies. Counselling has emerged as one of the most sustainable preventive strategies because it addresses the psychological, emotional, behavioural, and social factors that predispose students to dishonest examination practices. This paper reviewed counselling strategies that can effectively curtail examination malpractice in Nigerian tertiary institutions. Specifically, the paper discusses value re-orientation counselling, individual counselling, group counselling, cognitive behavioural counselling, study skills counselling, career counselling, stress and examination anxiety management, peer counselling, parental involvement counselling, and orientation programmes for fresh students. The review adopted a narrative literature review approach through the analysis of empirical studies, theoretical literature, and policy documents on counselling and examination malpractice. The paper concludes that counselling interventions should complement institutional disciplinary measures to achieve sustainable academic integrity. It recommends strengthening counselling centres in tertiary institutions, employing qualified professional counsellors, integrating counselling into students' orientation programmes, and promoting continuous ethical education across Nigerian higher institutions.

Keywords: *Examination malpractice; Counselling strategies; Academic integrity; Tertiary institutions; Nigeria; Guidance and counselling; Student behaviour; Academic ethics.*



1.0 Introduction

Examinations constitute one of the most reliable instruments for assessing students' learning outcomes, determining academic achievement, and evaluating the effectiveness of educational programmes. The credibility of certificates awarded by tertiary institutions depends largely on the integrity of the examination process. Unfortunately, examination malpractice has become a major challenge confronting higher education in Nigeria. The increasing incidence of cheating during examinations has raised concerns among educational planners, policymakers, employers, and the general public because it undermines the quality of university graduates and reduces confidence in Nigerian educational qualifications. Examination malpractice refers to any deliberate act of wrongdoing before, during, or after an examination with the intention of obtaining unfair academic advantage. Such practices include impersonation, collusion, bringing unauthorized materials into examination halls, electronic cheating, leakage of examination questions, exchange of answer scripts, bribery of examination officials, and manipulation of examination scores. These unethical behaviours violate institutional regulations and compromise educational standards.

Several factors contribute to examination malpractice in Nigerian tertiary institutions. These include poor study habits, fear of failure, inadequate preparation, societal emphasis on certificates rather than competence, parental pressure, poor moral upbringing, ineffective supervision during examinations, overcrowded examination halls, financial challenges, and the misuse of information and communication technologies. These factors demonstrate that examination malpractice is not merely an academic problem but also a behavioural, psychological, and social problem requiring comprehensive counselling interventions.

Guidance and counselling play a strategic role in addressing examination malpractice because counselling focuses on behavioural change, value clarification, emotional adjustment, decision-making, and character development. Rather than relying solely on punitive measures, counselling addresses the underlying causes of dishonest behaviours by helping students develop positive attitudes towards learning, academic self-confidence, ethical values, and responsible decision-making. Studies have consistently shown that counselling interventions significantly reduce students' tendency to engage in examination malpractice when properly implemented. In recognition of the growing importance of counselling, educational scholars advocate strengthening counselling services within tertiary institutions as an integral component of quality assurance and academic integrity promotion. Professional counsellors are expected to collaborate with lecturers, administrators, parents, student associations, and other stakeholders to create an institutional culture that discourages examination malpractice while promoting honesty, diligence, and excellence.



2.0 Conceptual Terms

2.1 Concept of Tertiary Institutions

Tertiary institutions is an organized social institution made up with stakeholders like the students, lecturers (academic staff), non-academic staff and researcher whose responsibilities are lecturing, organization of instructional resources, assessment of students, marking of students' scripts and projects supervision (Ogunode, & Adamu, 2021). Tertiary institutions are post-secondary educational establishments that provide advanced academic, professional, and vocational training. These include universities, polytechnics, and colleges of education. They are central to national development, producing skilled manpower, promoting research and innovation, and serving as models for sustainable practices, including energy management and environmental stewardship (Okafor & Nwosu, 2021). Tertiary education, also called post-secondary education, is any level of education pursued beyond high school, including undergraduate and graduate credentials. These credentials encompass certificates, diplomas or academic degrees. Tertiary education refers to specialized education in a specific field, taken on after finishing high school.

Tertiary education is non-compulsory and provided in a specialist institution, usually a college, polytechnic or university. This form of education may be delivered virtually or at a distance (Top-hat, 2023). Tertiary education offers a broad range of academic disciplines and professional programs, including bachelor's degrees, master's degrees, doctoral degrees, and professional certifications. It focuses on in-depth exploration of subject areas, critical thinking, research skills, and the development of specialized expertise (Proctoredu 2023). Tertiary education according to Ogunode (2025) is an organized educational system that is consciously designed for manpower production, in-service training and national development. Tertiary education is an education that advances teaching, research and community services for national development. Tertiary education is an education industry that is meant for the production of manpower and national development via implementation of teaching, research and provision of community services. The objectives of tertiary education includes; to provide higher education opportunities via effective teaching, researching and provision community services; to develop produce students with specialized knowledge and skills for solving personal problem and national problem; to prepare student for national workforce and to contribute to societal and community development; to provide academic program of various disciplines; to provide quality instruction in field of studies and to conduct researches to generate new knowledge for national development and to solve complex problems.

Tertiary institutions are classified into faith based, public and private, tertiary institutions. Private tertiary institutions in Nigeria includes; faith-based tertiary institutions, Colleges of Education, Monotechnics, Polytechnics, and other specialized institutions such as Colleges of Agriculture, Schools of Health and Technology and Teachers' Institutes (TI) that are owned by the private



individual or institutions. These private tertiary institutions are contributing positively to national development in Nigeria (Ogunode, 2025).

2.1 Concept of examination malpractice

Scholars have defined examination malpractice from different perspectives, but they all agree that it involves any deliberate violation of examination rules to obtain an unfair academic advantage. Onokerhoraye (1993) defined examination malpractice as "an improper practice carried out before, during or after any examination by an examinee or any other person with a view to obtaining good results." This definition emphasizes that malpractice can occur at any stage of the examination process. Maduabum (2001) described examination malpractice as any improper conduct before, during, or after an examination intended to secure undue advantage or higher grades than deserved. This definition highlights the intentional nature of examination fraud. Olowe (2004) defined examination malpractice as any infringement of examination rules and procedures beginning from the setting of examination questions through printing, storage, distribution, writing, marking, grading, and the release of results. This broad definition recognizes that malpractice may involve candidates, examination officials, or other stakeholders. Ajayi (2004) defined examination malpractice as any act that compromises the integrity, fairness, and credibility of the examination process, thereby preventing a true assessment of candidates' abilities and achievements. Onuka and

Durowoju (2013) defined examination malpractice as any dishonest or unauthorized act committed by a student alone or in collaboration with parents, teachers, examination officials, supervisors, invigilators, or other persons before, during, or after an examination in order to obtain undeserved marks or grades. Counselling is a professional helping relationship through which a trained counsellor assists an individual to understand personal, educational, vocational, emotional, and social problems and develop appropriate solutions. It is aimed at promoting self-understanding, behavioural change, sound decision-making, and personal adjustment. According to Carl Rogers (1961), counselling is a helping relationship in which the counsellor creates a supportive environment that enables clients to understand themselves and make constructive decisions for personal growth. Similarly, Olusakin (1997) explained that counselling is a process of interaction between the counsellor and the client through which the client is assisted to understand himself or herself, recognize personal challenges, and develop positive behavioural changes. In educational institutions, counselling helps students develop effective study habits, cope with examination anxiety, improve interpersonal relationships, make informed career decisions, and resist behaviours such as examination malpractice.

The Examination Malpractice Act (1999) explains examination malpractice as any act of omission or commission by a person who in anticipation of, before, 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 regulations to the extent of undermining the validity, reliability,



authenticity of the examination and ultimately the integrity of the certificates issued. Examination malpractice according to Akaranga & Ongong, (2013) is commonly defined as a deliberate wrong doing contrary to official examination rules designed to place a candidate at an unfair advantage or disadvantage.). Onuka & Durowoju (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 and anybody or group of people before, during or after examination in order to obtain undeserved marks or grades. Also, Jimoh (2009) viewed examination malpractice as any irregular behaviour 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.

2.2 Counselling Strategies

Counselling strategies are systematic techniques, approaches, and intervention methods employed by professional counsellors to help individuals solve problems, modify undesirable behaviours, develop positive attitudes, and achieve personal, educational, and vocational goals. Counselling strategies are designed to address the psychological, emotional, social, behavioural, and academic factors affecting individuals' functioning. In tertiary institutions, these strategies are used to prevent examination malpractice by promoting academic integrity, ethical values, self-confidence, effective study habits, and responsible decision-making.

Common counselling strategies include: Value re-orientation counselling, Individual counselling, Group counselling, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), Study skills counselling, Career counselling, Examination anxiety management, Peer counselling, Family and parental counselling, Orientation and academic integrity programmes. Research has shown that the effective implementation of these counselling strategies significantly reduces students' involvement in examination malpractice by addressing its root psychological and behavioural causes.

3.0 Result and Discussion on Counselling Strategies for Curtailing Examination Malpractice in Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria

Value Re-orientation Counselling

Value re-orientation counselling is one of the most effective preventive strategies for reducing examination malpractice in tertiary institutions. It focuses on helping students develop positive moral values, honesty, integrity, self-discipline, responsibility, and respect for institutional rules. Many students engage in examination malpractice because they prioritize academic certificates over knowledge and competence. Professional counsellors therefore assist students in clarifying their personal values and understanding that genuine academic success is achieved through diligence rather than dishonest practices. Value re-orientation counselling is usually implemented



through seminars, workshops, orientation programmes, moral education campaigns, and individual counselling sessions. Counsellors educate students on the long-term consequences of examination malpractice, including expulsion, loss of employment opportunities, damaged reputation, and reduced self-esteem. They also encourage students to develop intrinsic motivation for learning rather than seeking shortcuts to academic success. In the Nigerian context, the increasing emphasis on material success and certificate acquisition has contributed significantly to examination malpractice. Counsellors are therefore expected to challenge these unhealthy societal values by promoting integrity, accountability, and ethical leadership among students. According to Anthonia Chinonyelum Egbo (2015), guidance and counselling facilitate behavioural change through value clarification, moral education, and character development, enabling learners to adopt socially acceptable behaviours and reject unethical practices. Similarly, recent studies indicate that continuous ethical counselling significantly improves students' attitudes towards academic honesty and reduces their willingness to participate in examination malpractice. Students who internalize positive moral values are more likely to rely on hard work and honest preparation than dishonest examination practices.

Individual Counselling

Individual counselling provides confidential, one-on-one interaction between the counsellor and the student. It enables counsellors to identify the personal, emotional, academic, financial, or psychological problems that predispose students to examination malpractice. Many students who cheat experience fear of failure, low academic self-confidence, poor study habits, family pressure, depression, or inadequate preparation. Through individual counselling, counsellors assess students' needs, identify irrational beliefs, and assist them in developing healthy coping strategies. Counselling sessions also help students improve decision-making skills, self-esteem, self-control, and personal responsibility. Students are encouraged to establish realistic academic goals, prepare adequately for examinations, and seek academic assistance whenever necessary instead of engaging in dishonest behaviours. Individual counselling is particularly beneficial because the causes of examination malpractice differ among students. While one student may cheat because of poor academic preparation, another may do so because of parental expectations or financial stress. Tailoring interventions to individual needs therefore increases the effectiveness of counselling programmes. Research has shown that individualized counselling interventions significantly reduce maladaptive behaviours among students by promoting self-awareness, emotional stability, and responsible decision-making. Professional counsellors are therefore indispensable members of tertiary institutions' quality assurance mechanisms. Individual counselling addresses the root psychological causes of examination malpractice rather than merely punishing offenders.



Group Counselling

Group counselling involves bringing together students experiencing similar academic or behavioural challenges to discuss their concerns under the guidance of a professional counsellor. This counselling strategy promotes peer learning, emotional support, mutual encouragement, and collective problem-solving. Students often participate in examination malpractice because of peer influence. Group counselling provides opportunities for students to challenge negative peer norms while promoting positive academic behaviours. During counselling sessions, participants discuss examination anxiety, poor study habits, time management challenges, and ethical issues surrounding academic dishonesty. Through these interactions, students learn constructive ways of coping with academic pressures. Group counselling also enables counsellors to reach many students simultaneously, making it cost-effective for institutions with limited counselling personnel. Role-playing, discussions, case studies, and peer feedback are commonly employed to strengthen students' commitment to academic integrity. Research indicates that group counselling improves interpersonal relationships, reduces anxiety, strengthens self-confidence, and encourages responsible academic behaviour. Students also benefit from observing positive behavioural changes among their peers. Positive peer interaction developed through group counselling weakens the influence of peers who encourage examination malpractice.

Cognitive Behavioural Counselling (Cognitive Behavioural Therapy)

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) is one of the most effective counselling approaches for addressing examination malpractice because it focuses on changing irrational beliefs and negative thought patterns that influence behaviour. Students who engage in examination malpractice often hold dysfunctional beliefs such as "I cannot pass without cheating," "Everyone cheats," or "Failure means my life is over." CBT helps students identify these irrational thoughts, evaluate their accuracy, and replace them with realistic and constructive beliefs. Counsellors also teach behavioural techniques such as positive self-talk, goal setting, relaxation training, problem-solving skills, and self-monitoring. As students begin to think differently, they become more confident in their academic abilities and less likely to resort to dishonest practices. The effectiveness of CBT has been widely documented in reducing anxiety, improving self-efficacy, and promoting adaptive behaviours among students. Within tertiary institutions, CBT can be integrated into counselling services, examination preparation workshops, and academic support programmes. CBT addresses the cognitive distortions that often justify examination malpractice and equips students with healthier ways of responding to academic challenges.

Study Skills Counselling

Poor study habits remain one of the leading causes of examination malpractice in Nigerian tertiary institutions. Many students postpone studying until examinations are imminent, resulting in panic,



inadequate preparation, and temptation to cheat. Study skills counselling equips students with effective learning techniques that improve academic performance. Counsellors train students in time management, note-taking, concentration skills, memory improvement techniques, examination preparation strategies, reading comprehension, and effective revision methods. Students are also taught how to develop realistic study timetables and maintain consistent learning habits throughout the semester. Study skills counselling reduces examination anxiety by increasing students' confidence in their academic preparation. It also promotes independent learning and lifelong study habits that extend beyond tertiary education. Empirical studies consistently show that students who possess effective study skills perform better academically and are less likely to engage in examination malpractice because they feel adequately prepared for examinations. Effective study skills counselling reduces dependence on cheating by improving students' academic competence and confidence.

Career Counselling

Career counselling is an essential strategy for reducing examination malpractice because it helps students understand the relationship between their present academic performance and future career aspirations. Many students engage in examination malpractice because they place excessive emphasis on obtaining certificates rather than acquiring the knowledge, competencies, and skills required for professional success. Career counsellors assist students in appreciating that employers increasingly value practical skills, integrity, and competence in addition to academic qualifications. Through career counselling, students are guided to identify their interests, abilities, values, and career goals. Counsellors also expose students to the ethical standards required in different professions such as medicine, engineering, law, education, accounting, and nursing. Students are made to understand that dishonest academic practices may eventually translate into professional incompetence, which could endanger lives, damage organizational reputation, and undermine national development. This awareness motivates students to prepare adequately for examinations and rely on their own abilities rather than cheating. Career counselling also helps students develop realistic career expectations, improve decision-making skills, and strengthen their commitment to lifelong learning. According to Donald E. Super, career development is a lifelong process in which individuals implement their self-concepts through work and educational experiences. Consequently, students who develop positive career aspirations are more likely to uphold academic integrity because they recognize that genuine competence is indispensable for career success. Career counselling promotes competence, professionalism, and ethical responsibility, thereby reducing students' inclination towards examination malpractice.

Examination Anxiety Management Counselling

Examination anxiety is one of the major psychological factors responsible for examination malpractice among tertiary institution students. Students experiencing intense anxiety often



believe they cannot succeed without external assistance, prompting them to engage in dishonest examination practices. Counsellors assist students in recognizing the symptoms of examination anxiety, including fear, panic, excessive worry, poor concentration, insomnia, and emotional instability. They employ various therapeutic techniques such as relaxation training, deep breathing exercises, cognitive restructuring, mindfulness, systematic desensitization, and positive self-talk to reduce anxiety and improve students' confidence. Counsellors also organize examination preparation seminars where students receive guidance on effective revision techniques, examination strategies, time management, and emotional regulation. Such interventions help students approach examinations with confidence rather than fear. Research has consistently demonstrated that counselling interventions significantly reduce examination anxiety and improve academic performance. Students who effectively manage examination anxiety are less likely to participate in examination malpractice because they become more confident in their academic preparation and ability to succeed through honest effort. Anxiety management counselling eliminates one of the strongest psychological motivations for examination malpractice.

Peer Counselling

Peer counselling is another effective strategy for preventing examination malpractice in tertiary institutions. It involves training selected students to provide basic counselling support, academic encouragement, and moral guidance to their fellow students under the supervision of professional counsellors. Since students often communicate more freely with their peers than with lecturers or administrators, peer counselling can have a strong positive influence on attitudes and behaviour. Peer counsellors serve as role models by promoting honesty, discipline, academic excellence, and responsible conduct. They organize awareness campaigns, facilitate discussions on academic integrity, discourage cheating, and encourage fellow students to seek legitimate academic support whenever they encounter learning difficulties. Peer counsellors also help identify students experiencing stress, anxiety, or academic challenges and refer them to professional counsellors for specialized assistance. Studies indicate that peer-led interventions improve students' self-confidence, strengthen social support systems, and reduce negative peer pressure that often encourages examination malpractice. Institutions should therefore establish peer counselling clubs and provide continuous training for peer counsellors to sustain positive behavioural change. Positive peer influence helps replace the culture of cheating with a culture of honesty and academic excellence.

Family and Parental Counselling

Parents and families play a significant role in shaping students' attitudes toward academic achievement. In some cases, excessive parental expectations, pressure for outstanding grades, and undue emphasis on certificates contribute to students' involvement in examination malpractice. Family counselling therefore becomes an important strategy for addressing these external



influences. Counsellors organize parent education programmes to enlighten families on the importance of supporting students emotionally rather than exerting unrealistic academic pressure. Parents are encouraged to emphasize honesty, hard work, perseverance, and character development instead of focusing solely on grades and certificates. Counsellors according to Ijaiya, (2004) also educate parents on recognizing signs of academic stress and providing appropriate encouragement during examination periods. Collaboration between counsellors, parents, and institutional authorities strengthens students' moral development and creates a supportive environment that discourages dishonest academic behaviour. Family counselling further reinforces the values taught within the institution, thereby promoting consistency in students' ethical development. Positive parental support reduces external pressures that may drive students toward examination malpractice.

Orientation Programmes and Academic Integrity Awareness Campaigns

Comprehensive orientation programmes for newly admitted students provide an excellent opportunity to educate students about institutional rules, examination regulations, ethical conduct, and the consequences of examination malpractice. Counsellors should play leading roles during orientation by introducing students to the principles of academic integrity, responsible scholarship, and ethical decision-making. Academic integrity campaigns should continue throughout students' academic programmes through seminars, workshops, public lectures, posters, social media platforms, student handbooks, and integrity clubs. These programmes should clearly explain different forms of examination malpractice, institutional disciplinary procedures, and the benefits of honest academic work. Counsellors should collaborate with lecturers, student unions, religious organizations, and administrators to sustain these awareness programmes. Continuous sensitization helps establish a campus culture where honesty, diligence, and personal responsibility become shared institutional values. Evidence from higher education by Ige, (2014) suggests that institutions with consistent academic integrity education record lower incidences of examination malpractice because students become fully aware of institutional expectations and ethical responsibilities. Continuous orientation and awareness programmes strengthen students' commitment to academic honesty and reduce the incidence of examination malpractice.

4.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

Examination malpractice remains one of the greatest threats to the quality, credibility, and global competitiveness of tertiary education in Nigeria. The persistent occurrence of various forms of academic dishonesty has undermined confidence in university certificates, weakened students' commitment to learning, reduced graduates' competence, and negatively affected national development. Although punitive measures such as suspension, expulsion, cancellation of examination results, and prosecution are necessary deterrents, evidence suggests that punishment alone cannot permanently eliminate examination malpractice because it does not address the



underlying psychological, behavioural, emotional, and social factors that predispose students to dishonest practices.

Counselling therefore provides a more sustainable and preventive approach to combating examination malpractice. Through value re-orientation counselling, individual counselling, group counselling, cognitive behavioural counselling, study skills counselling, career counselling, examination anxiety management, peer counselling, parental counselling, and continuous orientation programmes, counsellors assist students in developing honesty, integrity, self-confidence, emotional stability, effective study habits, and responsible decision-making. These interventions promote intrinsic motivation for learning and strengthen students' commitment to academic excellence.

Based on the findings, the study recommends the following:

1. Tertiary institutions should recruit adequate numbers of professionally trained counsellors to provide comprehensive counselling services to students.
2. Value re-orientation and academic integrity education should be incorporated into the orientation programmes for all newly admitted students.
3. Counselling centres should organize regular seminars and workshops on examination ethics, study skills, stress management, and responsible academic behaviour.
4. Institutions should establish peer counselling programmes to promote positive peer influence and discourage examination malpractice.
5. Counsellors should provide regular individual and group counselling sessions for students experiencing academic difficulties, examination anxiety, and emotional challenges.
6. Parents should collaborate with counsellors by encouraging hard work, honesty, and realistic academic expectations rather than placing excessive pressure on students to obtain high grades.
7. Academic staff, counsellors, and administrators should work together to create an institutional culture that promotes academic integrity, fairness, and accountability.
8. Government and institutional management should provide adequate funding for counselling centres to enable them to implement preventive programmes against examination malpractice.



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