

UNEB should fix examination supervision challenges

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In Summary

- There never seems to be an end to exam malpractice. Everytime national exam results are released, there is always a portion of results withheld because of malpractice and of course there are those cuprits that get away with the vice.

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By Dr Mesharch W. Katusiimeh

As we all know, the Uganda National Examinations Board (Uneb) is entrusted with the exercise of testing and measuring the quality and quantity of knowledge and skills by

individual learners usually upon successful completion of a given level of education cycle.

In spite of the challenges, which I and others have pointed out before, Uneb has admirably done commendable work.

In fact, let me congratulate Uneb for going through last year's national examinations successfully with minimal examination malpractices compared to the past years. The innovations that were introduced including random numbers to ensure no detection of the school EMIS number and registration ensured there is no bias in the marking system. The high level of vigilance ensured that exam papers would not leak.

Even with these visible and notable improvements, Uneb should not relax. There are still other areas of concern that can be fixed to ensure threats to the integrity of the examination system in Uganda are dealt with once and for all. The good thing is that Uneb is aware.

In fact, the Uneb chairperson Prof Mary Okwakol acknowledges the problem of scouts and other officials like invigilators being bribed by the head teachers and school directors so the candidates can receive external assistance from their teachers. But I wonder whether Uneb is prepared to tackle the problem by identifying the root cause? I think this problem majorly stems from the lack of transparency by Uneb in the appointment of scouts, invigilators and district monitors. This lack of transparency can even be seen from the Uneb website. For example, the Uneb website does not provide much information in regard to how it functions.

There is no exam supervision manual. There is hardly any information showing how district monitors, supervisors and invigilators are appointed. The website is also lacking when it comes to feedback loop or a testimonial section and therefore does not benefit from feedback from many visitors that could have helped in improvements of their systems and processes.

Exam supervision is a position of trust. A supervisor must possess the qualities of integrity and vigilance to conduct the examinations in exact accordance with the rules and regulations. The rules ensure each candidate who sits an exam sits under equal conditions as other candidates.

The purpose of exam supervision is to ensure that all candidates are under active surveillance for every moment of the examination. However, these have been established on paper and as already cited above, reports of bribing scouts and invigilators are common knowledge.

Several supervisors have been used in malpractices in national examinations across the country and unfortunately, the majority of these walk free without anybody raising a finger at them including Uneb, the national examination managers. There are also reports that invigilators defy the stipulated procedures; appearing at the examination centres late, reading newspapers/books during examination session or abandoning the exam room for conversation with other teachers.

This has tempted candidates to get involved in examination malpractice tendencies such as copying or reading from fellow candidates' scripts or from other unauthorised sources.

Over the past few years, Uneb has emphasised the importance of inspectors of schools as a key pillar in the fight against examination malpractice but facts on the ground indicate that it may not be working.

Some school inspectors are not recommending field officers of integrity to supervise exams. They are instead appointing their friends, relatives and those who bribe them. They don't inspect examination centres periodically and the stories generally about how distributors, supervisors and invigilators are recommended are sickening.

While Uneb recommends schools to have their gates open during the examination period, many schools don't. Teaching during the examination time is still going on. That is why there are reports of pupils answering in a funny way because the fake examinations that circulated apparently were taken seriously by some teachers who confused pupils.

At times these inspectors of schools are compromised by head teachers and school directors to post 'favourable' invigilators to allow exam cheating take place in broad light. This is probably why at times supervisors are deployed to an examination centre for more than two consecutive times.

Such occurrences culminate into the greatest threat to the validity and reliability of any examination which eventually undermines the goal of education of the country.

What should be done?

First, ensure transparency in the recruitment of district monitors, scouts and invigilators. This will ensure that well-experienced professionals (scouts) are hired to manage the Uneb examination system.

Second, there should be impromptu visits to examination centres by senior members of the Uneb to check if exams procedures are well-operationalised. I would like to see the minister of Education and Sports and her team of State ministers getting involved in these impromptu visits as well.

Third, rethink the role of the inspectors of schools in the Uneb examination management system – I propose a professional committee charged with recommending people of integrity to work as supervisors be put in place and the Inspector of Schools acting as secretary.

And fourth, Uneb could conduct an integrity test for those recommended to be district monitors, scouts and invigilators. An integrity test is a specific type of personality test designed to assess an applicant's tendency to be honest, trustworthy, and dependable.

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