

Education

Assessment

Technology

Technology encouraging exam malpractices

By John Agaba

With the fast-spreading Internet penetration and new technologies, experts yesterday projected an increase in examination malpractices in Africa, unless assessment bodies employ sophisticated wireless detecting devices and cameras to counter them.

"With new gadgets, such as wireless smart earphones, wearable smart cameras capable of real-time remote use (point-to-point cloud) with telephone, tablets, computers and wireless WiFi mini hidden network cloud IP pen type cameras and recorders, education assessors have to equally employ smart 'anti-cheating' tools," Prof. Celestino Obua, the vice-chancellor of Mbarara University of Science and Technology, has said.

ICT expert Gilbert Byamukama said assessors did not have to point far at the more complicated technologies (that could breed e-cheating). Even simple ones, such as WhatsApp posed challenges.

"Assuming an examination paper is opened at school X at 8:00am and somehow it leaks. With the app, the leaked paper can be spread countrywide in seconds," he said.

The concerns were raised during the 35th conference of the Association for Educational Assessment in Africa (AEAA), which opened in Kampala on Monday.

Participants included examination board chief executive members from all over Africa and other curriculum developers and assessment experts and practitioners from the globe.

The conference at Munyonyo Commonwealth Resort, Kampala, sought to examine how the assessors could enhance efficiency and effectiveness in educational assessment in a fast-evolving era, accelerated by technology.

A study by Zeenath Reza Khan, published in the *Journal of Academic and Business Ethics*, also highlights that the world-wide tech-boom potentially biased students' attitudes towards e-cheating and it could spell disaster for educational assessments when not "really countered".

Prof. Obua said assessors could employ some of the smart technologies, including radio transmission detectors, hand-held bug sensors and other devices for detecting wireless audio and video devices to counter e-cheating.

"There are other measures to counter electronic transmission in examination halls, such as the mounting steel mesh or chicken wire around examination rooms," Obua who delivered the conference's keynote address, said.

"This would effectively block incoming or outgoing cellphone transmissions.

THE CHALLENGE

A study by Zeenath Reza Khan, published in *Journal of Academic and Business Ethics*, also highlights that the world-wide tech-boom potentially biased students' attitudes towards e-cheating and it could spell disaster for educational assessments when not "really countered".



Mrs Museveni (third-left), chairperson of Uganda National Examinations Board Mary Okwakol (second-left), Odongo (right) and delegates during the 35th conference of Association For Educational Assessment in Africa at Speke Resort Munyonyo on Monday. Photo by Roderick Ahimbazwe

However, they do not come cheap, especially in developing Africa."

Daniel Odongo, the UNEB executive secretary, said setting up cameras in examination rooms, for instance, would be a good idea, but would only work for universities and other institutions of higher learning that have some disposable income, not lower education schools.

Emphasising their dilemma, he said there were 8,000 examination centres for primary schools, 3,600 for senior four and 2,100 for Senior Six, which makes it difficult for the board to employ any such interventions.

The First Lady and Minister of Education and Sports, Mrs Janet Museveni, raised the same concern and called for improvement in the quality of assessment.

Mrs Museveni added that the country was grappling with "issues of quality of education and assessment".

"Since the beginning of the millennium, the focus had been on ensuring 'Education for All', with emphasis on access, relevance, equity and quality," she said.

She observed that the country had made significant progress in providing universal education at both primary and post-primary levels. Universal Primary Education (UPE), which was launched in 1997, saw enrolment in primary schools rise from 2.5 million that year to 9 million

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in 2016. Similarly, implementation of UPPET and USE in 2007, increased enrolment in secondary schools from 728,393 that year to 1,391,250 in 2014 and enrolment in Business Technical Vocational Education and Training (BTVET) institutions from 25,514 in 2006 to 58,798 in 2013.

But still, some problems were not solved — partly because education assessments are not 'spot on'.

"As we all know, educational assessment is an integral part of the teaching and learning process," Mrs Museveni said.

"An efficient and effective assessment practice that is responsive to the rapid changes in the teaching and learning environment, especially in the field of ICT can make a big contribution to meeting the learning challenges we face as a continent," she said.

"Assessment should not just be

about tests, examinations, collecting data on learners' achievement, but must contribute to continuous improvement of the teaching and learning process," she added.

The minister tasked the over 370 educationists in attendance with addressing a few more questions, including: How assessments can contribute to relevant and quality education, how the experts can enhance efficiency and effectiveness in educational assessment and to determine how the present assessment systems contributed to the low quality of education on the continent.

"It is an undeniable fact that assessment influences classroom practice because teachers tend to fashion their teaching to meet the requirements of the examinations that you, members of examination bodies, set," Mrs Museveni explained.

The minister also asked the experts to examine how assessments and examinations can "discourage rote learning and encourage critical thinking, logical reasoning, problem solving and other generic skills", which are important to learners and Africa's future generation.

"We believe that every child matters and every child can achieve when taught in a conducive environment and assessed the right way," she said.

The president of AEAA and chief executive officer of the Zimbabwe schools examination council, Esau Nhandara, said: "The world today is characterised by rapid changes and we have to follow suit. We have to embrace the changes and adapt."

"We have to carry out research and promote development of educational assessment to ensure quality education in Africa," he said.

THE SOLUTION

Prof. Celestino Obua, the vice-chancellor of Mbarara University of Science and Technology, said assessors could employ some of the smart technologies, including radio transmission detectors, hand-held bug sensors and other devices for detecting wireless audio and video devices to counter e-cheating.