**Cheating in exams**

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With the outset of exam season in Pakistan, reports are making way to the print and electronic media that cheating in board exams, especially in Sindh, is continuing as usual. Papers are leaked before time; students use WhatsApp and other apps to get so-called help with solving papers. So this has become a process in which every year, students use unfair means to get through the exams.
It is sad to say that our intelligentsia pays little heed to this issue. Our well-known columnists, writers and intellectuals don’t bother to raise this issue as much as this deserves to be. Perhaps, they don’t see this as a problem in the first place, or at least believe, that it is of secondary importance. So, this issue hardly figures in renowned publications.
However, this menace cannot be ignored any longer. The authorities concerned have to be frank and talk about this elephant in the room. Exam malpractice is no longer a secret. It exists almost everywhere. Even our top ranking institutions are not immune to this completely. However, it is hardly admitted. Even though it is a known secret that most students who get good grades and distinctions in public schools have used unfair means while taking exams, they are hardly taken to task. Despite having clear knowledge of exam malpractice, authorities look the other way. So, before this issue is tackled, it is essential that it should be admitted, because acknowledging is indispensable to finding a solution to any issue.
While it is pertinent to ask why students resort to cheating, few can debate the fact that authorities can eliminate exam malpractice completely provided they take some necessary measures. For starters, they can force schools, colleges, and other educational institutions to keep a strict vigilance on students who sit for exams. If they do so, the issue can be resolved, though it will lead to some unpleasant repercussions like high failure rate, or lower marks. However, these issues can also be resolved if, in post-cheating era, examiners give some leniency in setting papers and, after exams, in assessing papers.
At present, our exam system is not up to the mark either. Students are made to take papers which are mostly based on rote-learning and are so difficult that even their teachers cannot solve them without help from books or Internet. For example, this year English paper of tenth class issued by Larkana board read to this effect: on what page is lesson three? So why exactly do the examiners set such papers? Can they not set papers which are based on rationality and which test the intelligence level of students rather than testing their memorisation capacity? Can they not set papers which students can solve easily and on their own?
The current annual exam pattern has also strengthened the copy culture. The students learn several textbooks for 11 months and then are required to take exam from them and pass it to join the next grade. This system has inherent drawbacks. Since students do not remain motivated all year long, they evade or procrastinate their work until the eleventh hour. When exams fall on their heads, it becomes virtually impossible for them to take papers by themselves. Thus they fall prey to malpractice.
This system of annual exams must be thought over. Would not it be better if the semester system or its equivalent were introduced in its place? The semester system is used in universities throughout the world and has proven a lot more effective than annual one. Hence this should be given due thought. Maybe, the authorities can come up with a better equivalent, provided that they seek suggestions from educationists.
Having said that, this all depends on the authorities’ willingness and sincerity to resolve this. I believe these recommendations are not new as they must have been put to the authorities from time to time. Right now what is lacking is the genuine willingness and the drive to put an end to this menace through proper policies. Let’s see if the authorities concerned break with the past and take corrective action.