

## Jumping the Gun: Relevance of Past Questions Paper

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(Received on 11.02.2023, Revised on 14.04.2023, Approved on 15.05.2023, Accepted on 24.05.2023, Published on 15.06.2023)

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**How to cite this article:** Umuerhi F.J. and Urhiewhu L.O. (2023). Jumping the Gun: Relevance of Past Questions Paper. *Library Progress International*, 43(1), 39-45.

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### ABSTRACT

*This study examined the use of past examination question papers (PEQPs) among students and their overall recall rate during examinations. It employed the descriptive survey research design and used all the 255 undergraduate students who visit the library in Private Universities such as Novena University Library Ogume, Western Delta University, Oghara, Michael and Cecilia Ibru University, Library, Agbrha -Otor James Hope University, Edwin Clak University Library, Kaigbodo; Sports University, Library Idumuje, Ugboko, Margaret Lawrence University, Umunede Library, and Admiralty University of Nigeria, Library Ibusa Ugwashi-Uku for PEQPs. Data for the study were collected in two phases over a period of two academic semesters with the first phase focusing on respondents' collection of PEQPs, and the second phase requiring them to complete a questionnaire designed to elicit information on why they use PEQPs, what they gain and the overall outcome of their reliance on same. The study found that fresher rely more on (PEQPs), and most students use PEQPs as study guides as against pretesting themselves before an examination, the respondents do not see reliance on PEQPs as a major factor leading to improved academic performance of undergraduate students and this affects their perception of the effect PEQPs on their overall academic outcome. The study therefore concludes that as important as PEQPs usage seems to be, improper usage of same could be detrimental to the undergraduate users.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Jumping, Gun, Students, Benefit, Past Question and Papers*

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### INTRODUCTION

Students, at any level of study will want to pass their examinations at all cost. This is because no student, no matter his/her level do not wants to be counted among those that failed to make it to the next level of academic pursuit or graduates especially after so much investment of time, finance and physical energy expended in their

study. Undergraduate students in recent times have encountered and come to term with the relentless pull of flashy life styles on campuses and this has caused serious distractions from their studies. This craze after uncontrolled living and materialism has led to in many cases, failure to prepare adequately for their examinations.

Inadequate study of course materials, irregular attendance of lectures and inability to carry out personal research to further expand their knowledge of relevant concepts in given courses have led to undergraduates devising several ways of preparation for examinations and these are often abrupt measures adopted to scale through in their next examinations or tests. Methods of preparing for examination varies from individual to individual just as there are variants in teaching techniques. All some undergraduate students need to sit for their examination is the attendance of class lectures, while others will have to go the extra miles by (in addition to receiving lectures) burning the candle all night, studying their notes and researching other related texts/materials extensively. Reviewing past examinations papers is often used to test and shore up their confidence (York University, n.d).

Most students in a bid to take a glimpse at the examiner's mind before the actual examination seek guidance from past examination question papers (PEQPs) of interest to them (Campus life & Du Boulay, 2009). This has become so common that candidates preparing for national examinations like the West African Examination Council (WAEC), Universities and Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) conducted by the Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) and even those preparing for most professional examinations search for and depends more on the past question papers for these exams. Even local/internal tests such as Post-UTMEs, organized by most universities and other tertiary institutions in Nigeria as well as session examinations involving various departments they (students) make effort to obtain copies of related PEQPs which they use as guides as they prepare for their examinations (Igbojinwaekwu & Nneji, 2012).

PEQPs are believed to be beneficial to students preparing for important examinations because they enable them to be: focused; practice actual exam-style questions; develop/improve time management skills; create a feel for tests or exams and refine answering skills (Hall, 2015). PEQPs are a way to check the level of the questions to be answered in an exam, thus, making them a great revision tool. They also

provide an idea of the marking schemes for most kind of exams (Pearson Education, n.d). These assumed benefits have made use of PEQPs so phenomenal that many undergraduate students now rely solely on them while preparing for their examinations. Is this trend (of using various forms of PEQPs) really beneficial to the academic pursuit of undergraduates in tertiary institutions or are they Jumping the Gun?

## STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In time past, undergraduate students rely on attending lectures, thorough study of course materials and conducting further research by reading related books/journals that enable them to learn more in their course of study, these days, the trends employed by most students preparing for examination are mainly dependent on lecture notes even when many of the students rarely attend lectures. These lecture notes in most cases are scanty because most lecturers give students the basics about essential concepts with the expectation that (students) will carry out further research on their own to find out more about such concepts. But the reverse is the case as most students fail to do so and now prefer to rely more on using past questions to prepare for examinations without previous attempt to study their notes or other textbooks.

Could this be a contributing factor to the fact that most university graduates being described as unprepared for adequate contributions or performance in the work environment? It is against this background that this study examined the use of past question papers among students and their overall recall rate during examinations.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

To this end, the following questions were answered in the study:

- What make undergraduate students rely on Past Exam Question Papers?
- What are the benefits of PEQPs to undergraduate students?
- What is the outcome of undergraduate students' reliance on PEQPs?

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This research work is set out to achieve the following:

- Find out why students rely on PEQPs;
- Reveal how use of PEQPs benefit undergraduate students;
- Identify the outcome of undergraduate students' reliance in PEQPs

## REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Use of PEQPs among students has become a fad of some sort among undergraduates in higher institutions especially universities. Wade (n.d) after examining pattern of use of PEQPs among his students concluded that they may be a great resource requiring careful consideration in their use. ACCA (2015) corroborated this point by noting that they (PEQPs) can be valuable revision tools – but used improperly, they can set you up for examination hall disaster. In their study, Igbojinwaekwu and Nneji (2012) established that though students are very much comfortable when they are exposed to solving problems from the mathematics textbooks in use or from past question papers. They (students) find it very difficult to solve the same questions from either the textbooks in use or PEQPs when they are restructured. The duo concluded that teachers using only PEQPs or review questions from the textbook in use should be discouraged from doing so, because it does not enhance academic achievement of students and also, does not instill confidence in students in solving mathematical problems. They went further to add that it is also devoid of instilling in the students the attributes of abstract thinking, logic and application in solving societal problems.

Supporting the use of PEQPs, Du Boulay (2009) stressed that the importance of using old examination papers in preparing for your exams cannot be over emphasized. As they are an essential part of preparing for actual exams because, on one hand, these papers provide a practical insight into the style and theme of typical examination papers, while on the other hand, PEQPs equip one with knowledge and examination techniques to help to handle future exams (Hall, 2015). Adding to this, York

University (n.d.) pointed out that effective preparation for examination should involve locating as many study aids, such as course notes in the library, PEQPs, or study guides as possible. By using PEQPs as part of preparation aids, one can find out what he/she already know (Campus life & Du Boulay, 2009).

Practicing under improvised examination conditions enables one to use PEQPs as a trial run and see if they know the answers under pressure. It will also create a feeling for the amount of time one can spend on each question and how much detail one can write in the time (Pearson Education, nd). One can also find out what they do not know well enough or do not know at all (Du Boulay, 2009). ACCA (2015) noted that the aim of using PEQPs is to create an atmosphere that is as close to examination conditions as possible, the effect of which may be at a subconscious level, but it will be there all right.

On the benefits of using PEQPs by students preparing for important examinations Hall (2015) presented the following: **a)** help students to focus on common examination themes; **b)** provide practice with actual exam-style questions; **c)** help develop/improve time management skills; **d)** help create a feel for sitting exams and **e)** help to refine answering skills. Adding to this, Pearson Education (n.d), noted that PEQPs are a handy way to check the level of the questions to be answered in an exam, thus, making them a great revision tool. They also provide an idea of the mark schemes for most kind of exams.

One of the major constraints in using PEQPs is that, even though it is sensible to see them as part of your examination practice, they would not help you predict the questions or topics that are likely to come up in the exam. However, you can use them to check whether you have learnt the material and identify gaps in your knowledge (Pearson Education, nd). Another common problem associated with their use is the mistake of not making effort to set up examination conditions such as complete silence when 'sitting' past papers, the task often requires using the library to avoid disturbance (ACCA, 2015).

## METHODOLOGY

This study employed the descriptive survey research design. The populations of the study are undergraduate students who are registered member (for two successive sessions 2020/2021 and 2021/2022) with the Private University libraries such as Novena University Library Ogume, Western Delta University, Oghara, Michael and Cecilia Ibru University, Library, Agbrha-OtorJames Hope University, Edwin Clak University Library, Kaigbodo; Sports University, Library Idumuje, Ugboko, Margaret Lawrence University, Umunede Library, and

Admiralty University of Nigeria, Library Ibusa Ugwashi-Uku that visits the library to request for PEQPs. Data for the study were collected in two phases over a period of two academic semesters. While in the first phase, the respondents were asked to fill a question paper collection slip requiring them to indicate their departments, level and number of PEQPs collected. They were required to fill a questionnaire which was designed to elicit information on why they use, what they gain and the overall outcome of their reliance on PEQPs (examination outcomes) in the second phase.

### Bio Data based on Department

**Table 1:** Collection of PEQPs based on level of undergraduates

Levels	100			200			300			400			
Dept.	No. of Stdts	%	No. Coll.	No. of Stdts	%	No. Coll.	No. of Stdts	%	No. Coll.	No. of Stdts	%	No. Coll.	Total Coll.
ACCT	4	4.5	32	12	15	73	4	8.3	20	3	7.7	17	147
Bs/ADMIN	5	5.7	27	1	1	7	4	8.3	28	2	5.1	15	77
ECO	6	6.8	19	7	8.8	43	3	6.3	21	3	7.7	15	98
EPS	8	9.1	48	7	8.8	33	5	10.4	25	1	2.6	1	107
ISS/SOC	16	18.2	81	8	10	45	8	16.7	46	5	12.8	20	192
MASS COM	8	9.1	51	10	12.5	82	3	6.3	18	1	2.6	6	157
MCB	6	6.8	24	7	8.8	55	2	4.2	10	2	5.1	17	106
PCH	10	11.4	25	9	11.3	56	5	10.4	55	8	20.5	41	177
POL SC	7	7.10	35	7	8.8	58	7	14.6	35	8	20.5	51	179
CHEM/BCH	7	7.10	41	4	5	36	2	4.2	6	4	10.3	10	83
COMP SC	11	12.5	82	8	10	71	5	10.4	47	2	5.1	7	197
<b>Total</b>	<b>88</b>		<b>462</b>	<b>80</b>		<b>559</b>	<b>48</b>		<b>311</b>	<b>39</b>		<b>200</b>	

(Note: No. of Stdts = number of students per level. No. Coll. = number of PEQPs collected)

Table 1 above shows the level of reliance on PEQPs by students in different level and departments of studies. of the 11 departments captured within the stipulated period, the highest number of collectors of past question papers is seen in the fresshers segment with 88 undergraduate students collecting a total of 462 PEQPs. Followed by, 80 students in 200 level

collecting 559 PEQPs. The number of collectors dropped to 48 among 300 levels (311 PEQPs) and 39 in 400 level (200 PEQPs). This finding indicates that freshers rely more on PEQPs because they are yet to understand their environment. As they progress to the next level the rate of dependence on PEQPs drops with the realization that more is at stake.

## RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

**Table 2:** Use of by Students on Past Examination Question Papers

Use of PEQPs while preparing for examinations	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	398	96.8 %
No	13	3.2 %
Total	411	100 %

The above table shows that majority (96.8%) of the respondents stated that they depend on PEQPs while preparing for examinations and 72.5% use PEQPs before seating for an exam

while only 24.1% prefer to use PEQPs whenever studying, only 3.4% consider using PEQPs when preparing for their Continuing Assessment (CA).

**Table 3:** Why students rely on PEQPs

Conditions that prompt use of PEQPs	F	%
To get a fore knowledge of exam questions	56	75.9 %
To see if I have not read enough	43	10.5%
I use them as study guides	312	6.3 %
Total	411	100 %

Ironically, only 10.5% of the respondents use PEQPs to test their level of preparedness for exams. Majority of them 75.9% merely use them

to get a glimpse of the kind of questions to expect while 6.3% see them as study guides (Hall, 2015; Du Boulay (2009).

**Table 4:** Benefit of the use of Past Examination Question Papers

Benefits	Sometimes		Always		Not-Sure	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
PEQPs help you to study ahead of the teacher	45	10.9%	67	16.3%	299	72.7%
PEQPs improve your performance in class	29	7.1%	58	14.1%	324	78.8%
PEQPs make it easier for you to follow the teacher	109	26.5%	49	11.9%	253	61.6%
They make it easier for me to revise for exam	55	13.4%	6	1.5%	352	85.6%
Reveal that some examination questions are repeated	2	0.5%	393	95.6%	16	3.9%
Serves as study guides during for exams	41	10%	342	83.2%	28	6.8%

On benefits of using PEQPs, the respondents also revealed that PEQPs help you to study ahead of the teacher 16.3, those who are not sure are more (72.7%) PEQPs improve your performance in class 14.1% those who are not sure are more (78.8%). makes it easier for you to follow the teacher 11.9%, those who are not sure are more (61.6%). They make it easier for me to revise for exam always: 1.15%. Those who are not sure are more 85.6%. Reveal that some examination questions are repeated 95.6% noted always only 3.5% are not sure while, while 0.2% indicated sometimes. Serves as study guides

during for exams 83.2%, not sure 6.8% and sometimes 10%. This finding shows that most students merely use past questions as study guides during examinations and not necessarily to test their state of preparedness for exam. It is surprising that majority of the respondents indicated that they are not sure whether PEQPs improves their overall performance in examinations. This finding supports the view of Igbojinwaekwu and Nneji (2012) that does not enhance academic achievement of students and also, does not instill confidence in students in solving mathematical problems.

**Table 5:** Outcomes of using PEQPs

Outcomes of relying on PEQPs	Confident/prepared		Fairly prepared		Not sure	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
How do you (usually) feel moments before the examination after relying on past examination question papers?	112	27.3%	58	14.1%	141	34.3%
How do you (usually) feel when you see the actual examination papers after using past examination question papers to prepare?	<b>Satisfied</b>		<b>disappointed</b>		<b>Not Sure</b>	
	148	36%	128	31.1%	132	32.1%
How would you rate your performance after using past question papers to prepare for examinations?	<b>Satisfactory</b>		<b>Fair</b>		<b>Below satisfactory</b>	
	88	21.4%	118	28.7%	205	48.9%
would you advice students to use past question papers before exams?	<b>Yes</b>		<b>No</b>		<b>Undecided</b>	
	205	49.9%	206	50.1%	-	-

On the outcome of students reliance on PEQPs, students were asked to indicate confident and prepared, fairly prepared or not sure for the item on how they usually feel moment before their exams, 27% feel confident and prepared, 14.1% think they are fairly prepared while 34.3% are not sure. On how they feel after the exam, 36% usually feel satisfied, 31.1% are disappointed and 32.1% are not even sure of how they performed after relying on PEQPs. When the respondents were asked to rate their performance based on past examination overall outcome only 21.4% could say they were satisfied, 28.7% think they did fairly well while those think they performed poorly are 48.9%. This shows that most students, despite their heavy reliance on the use of PEQPs do not really derive much gain from their use. When the respondents were asked whether they would recommend the use of PEQPs to other students the response seems to be 50/50 as 49.9% indicated Yes and 50.1% said No (ACCA, 2015).

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Granted, PEQPs could be very important to all category of students' preparing for important examinations. This study has shown that when used improperly, they could be counterproductive in the long run. That most students prefer to jump the gun rather than embrace and use proper study skills could largely be blamed for the quality of graduates

produced in the universities and other higher institutions in Nigeria today. The undergraduates should be taught to study appropriate course related materials first, before testing themselves for a forthcoming examination and not otherwise as there is no shortcut to genuine success in academics.

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