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It is the culture of education that needs to be changed

MORE students coming to cheat in public examinations by copying and helping each other, as evident from official statistics that New Age reported on Sunday, is worrying. This is more so in view of the claim of education managers that copying in public examinations has significantly decreased. But the statistics available with the government contradict the claim. In the Higher Secondary Certificate and equivalent examinations, 976 students were expelled under the eight general, one madrasah and one technical education boards for adopting unfair means in examinations halls in 2017. The figure was 792 in 2016, 810 in 2015, 762 in 2014 and 831 in 2013. In the Secondary School Certificate and equivalent examinations under the 10 education boards, 1,143 students were expelled in 2017, 811 in 2016, 874 in 2015, 712 in 2014 and 692 in 2013. The figures do not show a sharp increase but they bring to the fore the fact that cheating in public examinations has been gradually increasing for some years. The education board officials who are themselves worried about the issue say that cheating in examinations is still widespread and in only a few of a large number of cases, students copying in the examinations are expelled.

Apart from all the rhetoric about a significant decrease in cheating in public examinations, the fact remains that adopting unfair means in examinations halls is still prevalent to a dismaying extent. Educationists and educationalists alike think that there are certain factors that prompt cheating in examinations. Poor classroom teaching is one among them. When students do not learn in classroom, they resort to unfair means to do well in public examinations, the results of which decide their course of education in the years to come. Some, however, believe that too many public examinations before higher education — Primary Education Completion, Junior School Certificate, Secondary School Certificate and Higher Secondary Certificate — in just eight academic years have a role to play in this situation. While a tendency of some guardians to bask in the false glory of examinations results has also come to be viewed as a factor, an unhealthy competition between educational institutions, in many cases prompted by associated education business, proves to be another factor. Instances are not rare that teachers have been sent to jail for helping students to adopt unfair means in examinations halls. The current academic culture convinces students that the stakes of failure are high and making the grade can be traded with integrity. Generally society and especially parents seem to be contributing towards this sacrifice of values of honesty, integrity and sincerity.

Unless the examinations system tests students for their ability to think and understand and until classroom teaching is improved, the situation is unlikely to change for the better. The government, under the circumstances, must get to the root causes, social, cultural, psychological and educational, that promote or prompt cheating in examinations and resolve them to stop cheating in examinations.

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