

Curbing Examination Malpractices in West African Senior School Certificate Examinations in Nigeria

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Abstract - Examination occupies a very strategic position in our lives both in education and in industries. Teachers and counsellors rely on them for a comprehensive evaluation of their students and clients. To decide whether a student merits being promoted to another level. In industries, experts in human relations and employment bureau utilize tests in reaching a decision as to the employment of an individual. Despite the strategic importance of examination or test taking for diagnostic placement, classification and quality control in Nigerian institutions, the integrity and credibility of public examinations have been greatly eroded and corrupted with increasing incidence of examination malpractice, trends in examination malpractice in Nigeria, forms of examination malpractice, causes of examination malpractice, efforts made to eradicate examination malpractice and some recommendations were made. The paper concluded by pointing out the following as curbing strategies, appointment of renowned clergies as invigilators and supervisors, empowerment of teachers, less emphasis on certificates and paper qualification, moral upbringing of children, creation of learning friendly environment in schools, employment of qualified teachers at all levels of education and planting of secret cameras in the examination halls.

Key words- Examination Malpractice, Qualified Teachers, Examination, and Paper Qualification.

Introduction

In Nigeria, achievements at any level of education are crowned with certification for those who successfully completed the course of study with good academic records. Thus, at the end of secondary school education, students are expected to sit for public examinations such as the West African Senior School Certificate Examinations (WASSCE), conducted by West African Examination Council (WAEC), Senior School Certificate (SSCE), conducted by National Examination Council (NECO), the National Technical and Business Certificate Examinations (NTCE/NBCE), also conducted by the National Business and Technical Examinations Board (NABTEB).

In addition, there are various certificate examinations conducted by the Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) for admission into Universities, Polytechnics and Colleges of Education. Professional bodies also have their professional examinations conducted for purposes of accreditation, professionalism and licensing of their membership. Such professional examinations conducted in Nigeria are: the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Nigeria (ICAN), Chartered Institute of Bankers of Nigeria (CIBN), Nigeria Institute of Public Relations (NIPR) among others.

Examinations occupy a very strategic position in our lives (educational and industrial) today. Teachers and counsellors rely on them for a comprehensive evaluation of their students and clients. To decide whether a student merits being promoted to another class, a series of achievement tests that will eventually culminate in a well - founded decision has to be given. In industrial setting, experts in human relations and employment bureaux utilise tests in reaching a decision as to the employability of an individual applicant.

Despite the strategic importance of examination or test taking for diagnostic, placement, classification and quality control in Nigerian institutions, the integrity and credibility of public examinations have been greatly eroded and corrupted with increasing incidence of examination malpractice. Olagboye (2004) lamented that, the situation appears so bad that many Nigerians and interested stakeholders including employers of labour have almost lost confidence in the values of examinations

and their results. In a study conducted by Arijesuyi (2010), he warned that Government and major stakeholders should feel sufficiently concerned because of the threat of examination malpractice to the educational system and national development. He further noted that, the preponderance, scope and sophistication of examination malpractice in the country, has rendered the products, and credentials of the schools suspect.

Each year billions of Naira is lost by parents and governments when examination bodies cancelled hundreds of thousands of results as a result of examination irregularities. Describing the trend which examination malpractice has taken since the last decade, Arijesuyo (2010) observed that Examination malpractice had become a well organized business in which supervisors/invigilators of examination subject teachers and even school authorities and their host communities have played prominent roles. It is no longer news that invigilators are often beaten up by desperate students who accuse such invigilators of standing in their way to cheat. Ukoha (2007) reported that some host communities in Nigeria have chased away invigilators considered to be uncooperative during examinations all in the name of securing key to success for their wards.

From the foregoing therefore, one may conclude that various group of people partakes in encouraging examination malpractices. Most of the time, the family, the school and the society serve as reinforcers that promote anti-social behaviours of examination malpractice. This paper therefore examines the concept of examination malpractice, trends in examination malpractices in Nigeria, forms of examination malpractice, causes of examination malpractice and efforts made to eradicate examination malpractice.

Meaning of Examination Malpractice

Examination malpractice is any illegal act committed by a student single handed or in collaboration with others like fellow students, parents, teachers, supervisors, invigilators, printers and anybody or group of people before, during or after examinations in order to obtain undeserved marks or grades. The means of perpetrating this illegal act may range from bringing in unauthorized materials to the examination hall, disrupting the conduct of examinations, buying examination papers, changing of grades after examination and impersonation to using money or

candidate's body to earn marks. Examination malpractices constitute one of the greatest problems that have generated a lot of discussions among Nigerians because it threatens the very foundation of the educational system.

Examination as an instrument for decision-making, is always prone to fear and anxiety. Many examinees would want to pass the examination by all means. Also, many school authorities and parents would want to explore means of getting good grades for their students and children. Hence, they resort to different forms of malpractices before, during and after examinations. According to Adesira (2005), examination malpractices include leaking out questions to students, girraffing and smuggling of material into examination hall. Others are deliberate extension of time by supervisors and invigilators, change of scores, buying and selling of examination grades, question papers and prepared answers, and trading sex for question papers, marks and grades. Also, Ekukugho (2011), identified impersonation, collusion between candidates, collusion between candidates and officials, assault and intimidation, mass cheating, teacher-student affair, bribery, spying, submission of multiple scripts, use of coded or sign language, multiple entry for the same examination among others, as different forms of malpractices in Nigeria.

Trends in Examination Malpractices in Nigeria

The phenomenon of examination malpractice is not new in Nigeria and indeed all over the world. In Nigeria, the history of examination malpractices could be traced back to the colonial days when the "Nigerian Chronicle" of January 9, 1912 widely reported how the questions of Senior Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate leaked (Fasasi, 2008). After independence, there was hardly any year when there was no examination malpractice recorded by the leading examining bodies in Nigeria. Adesina (2005) reported incidences of examinations leakages in West African Examination Council (WAEC) papers in 1963, 1967, 1971, 1977 and 1981 as a result of which administrative panels of enquiry were set up. The Federal Government panel of enquiry was set up to investigate the 1977 examination leakage; the panel recommended inter alia; "sanctions for WAEC officials who were involved in the malpractice, introduction and use of continuous assessment as a factor for award of certificate and shedding of WAEC workload and the establishment of new examination bodies" (Adesina, 2005).

Consequently, new examination bodies were established. These were Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) established in 1978 now renamed Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) in 2010 to conduct matriculation examinations for admission into universities, polytechnics and colleges of education; National Business and Technical Examination Board (NABTEB) established in 1992 to conduct business and technical examinations; National Board for Educational Measurement (NBEM) established in 1992 and changed to National Examination Council (NECO) in 1999 to conduct school certificate examination (Arijesuyo, 2010).

As a result of the alarming and worrisome trends in the figures and statistics of examination fraud given by the leading examination bodies in respect of post- primary public exit examinations in recent years, and the attendance crises on the country's educational system, a number of legislative and administrative promulgation were enacted by the Federal government between 1984 and 2000. The Federal Government's promulgation of Decree 20 in 1984, which stipulated a 21-year

jail term for those found guilty of examination malpractice. Also, there was decree 33 of 1999 stipulating imprisonment for a term up to five years or fine of N50, 000.00 to N100,000.00 for any person convicted of examination malpractice (Arijesuyo; 2010). In spite of these measures, the menace continued to occur in virtually all public and institutionally organized examinations and the situation appears to have defied recommended solutions.

In the same vein, WAEC in its complementary effort, to ensure equity, fairness and integrity in its public examinations also carried out research activities, organizes seminars, subject workshops and item-writing workshops. These efforts were targeted towards promoting the overall quality assurance of public-exit examinations conducted by the examining body. WAEC's research, among others, includes monitoring and appraising Council's goals and processes as well as examining educational problems relating to the management of testing and educational measurement. (Uwadiae & Oke, 2006). These authors reported that between 1990 and 2006 WAEC conducted a total of one hundred and three (103) research studies. A good percentage (34.0%) of the studies conducted focused on performance of candidates in examinations. Others areas focused were on improving the quality of examination items, gender related matters, aptitude test development and testing, equivalence of certificates, and examination malpractice related issues and so on. These studies were embarked upon as a result of the need to promote qualitative and ethical integrity of public examinations through empirical studies on the conduct and management of examinations. It is pertinent to note that all the findings from the various studies were being incorporated into the assessment procedures of WAEC to promote equity in testing techniques and as a means of preventing examination malpractice. Despite all these efforts by government examining bodies and other major stakeholders in the nation's educational industry at curbing the problem of examination malpractices, it has remained persistent and intractable.

In a response to the challenges posed by the problem of examination malpractice which has almost assumed a state of national emergency in the country, the House of Representatives in conjunction with the National Universities Commission (NUC) and other major stakeholders organized a two-day summit tagged: Confronting the scourge of examination malpractice: Threat to the Nigerian Educational system, between 21st and 22nd of August 2006. The report of the summit as published by THE NATION Newspapers revealed that, the Deputy Vice-chancellor of the University of Ilorin Nigeria, was quoted in his paper that, between 1996 and 2006 WAEC cancelled an average of 10% of post-primary exit examinations on the basis of examination malpractices. Similarly, WAEC annual statistical report of examination malpractice for the WAEC/SSCE post-primary exit examinations between 2000 and 2010 indicated that 781, 019 (8.25%) of 9,465,978 candidates who sat for WASSCE were either withheld or cancelled during the period as a result of examination malpractice. The report further showed that the national Examination Malpractice Index (EMI) has remained persistently high ranging between 5.47 and 12.87 during the period surveyed. This means that of every 100 students who wrote WAEC between the period of 2000 and 2010 in Nigeria, at least 8 of them were involved in examination malpractice.

Arising from the above considerations and coupled with the commitment of Federal Government to implement the decisions reached at the earlier summit on: Confronting the scourge of

examination malpractice: Threat to the Nigerian Educational system, held between 21st and 22nd of August 2006, the Federal Ministry of Education in 2007 blacklisted and derecognized 324 secondary schools across the nation as centres for conducting public examinations from 2007 to 2010. The statistical distribution of the number of schools blacklisted on account of examination malpractices across the six geo-political zones of the country revealed that the South-South zone has the highest number of schools involved in examination fraud which accounted for 116, (36%), followed by South-West zone with 86 (26.5%). While the North-East zone has the least with 8 schools representing 2.5% of the perpetrators.

From the report above, it could be concluded that this national problem which started as a mustard seed in form of mere cheating in early 60's to collusion in the 70's, smuggling in of scripts into the hall in the 80's and later metamorphosed to impersonation, and hiring of contractors in the 90's has today grown to become an organised crime among the stakeholders. It is now like a fig tree. And the problem is still pending in the Nigerian society.

Forms of Examination Malpractice

1. **Impersonation:** Entails the hiring of touts to write examination by appearing in the halls as the genuine candidates. Atonka (2010), stated that male candidates sitting in for girls and vice versa in some sensitive papers, twins writing examinations for each other in connivance with the school examination officers/invigilators or supervisors and other examination officials.
2. **Collusion:** Arises when an assigned invigilator or supervisor receiving or giving assistance to candidates in the examination hall for gratification.
3. **Examination leakages:** A situation where question papers are seen by candidates prior to the writing of the examinations and are traceable to the printing press or persons connected with the custody of the question papers.
4. **Mass cheating:** Is traceable to large scale organized cheating involving school authorities, examination officials and candidates through the answering of the questions on the chalkboard for the candidates to copy.
5. **Smuggling of answer scripts:** Involves candidates having external assistance to take to and from the examination hall answer scripts duly prepared by syndicates in connivance with invigilators and/or supervisors and other examination officials.
6. **Dubbing:** An arrangement involving the invigilators or supervisors whereby candidates are allowed to copy from each other in the hall.
7. **Insult/Assault on Supervisors! Invigilators/Inspectors by candidates:** Takes the form of beating of examination officials, destruction of examination officials' cars and manhandling of examination officials and/or using indecent language on supervisors and invigilators who fail to cooperate with them.
8. **Bringing foreign materials into the examination hall:** Such as textbooks, cribs, past questions papers either containing copious notes or used as disguise for current ones that have been smuggled out, photocopies of prepared answers.

9. **Procurement of answer booklets:** This is one of the ways the syndicate operates; whereby they have enough current answer booklets through the assistance of the examination body personnel. They tactically exchange written answer booklets with their candidates before stoppage time and/or in connivance with the school examination officer and the assigned supervisor.
10. **Enrolling syndicate and self:** This happens during the enrolment, the syndicate will be enrolled alongside with the candidate using fake names. In the examination hall, the syndicate will be doing the writing and at the end exchange answer booklet with the candidate.
11. **Late submissions of parcels by the Supervisor:** The custodian in agreement with some assigned supervisors submits their arrangement gives the supervisors and touts enough time writings and rearrangement of the scripts. The custodian is settled after receiving the parcels.
12. **Inscription:** Students have now advanced to the level of inscribing materials or information on anything like parts of their body, for example palms, thighs, baby pampers; dresses, handkerchiefs, rulers, purses, chairs, tables, walls of examination halls and so on. Some student even code points and synthesize their notes in such a way that they will be the only one that could understand and use them for cheating.
13. **Personality Connection:** There are cases where some influential students make use of godfathers in politics, economic high towers, parents, and cult members to influence the outcome of examinations.

Causes of Examination Malpractice

The following are some of the causes of examination malpractices in schools:

Immorality in the wider society: The high corruption in the Nigerian society has given rise to unprecedented things to happen without questioning. Young boys and girls offer money and/or themselves for sex in order to pass examinations. They often used ungodly maxims join them if you cannot beat them and at such use what you have to get what you need.

Inadequate supervision of teachers by inspectors: Due to the poor remuneration of teachers and nonchalant attitudes of the civil servants, programs of supervisions on every term are not religiously followed and teachers capitalize on these lapses to avoid classes. Also, the schedule of their inspections are made known to the teachers who prepared lesson notes ahead of their visits both on topics taught and not.

High enrolment fees: There have been increases in examination fees on yearly basis and parents and students alike do all they could to avoid re-enrolment.

Tying of promotion of teachers to success of candidates in public

examinations: This practice has give rise to every subject teachers to be actively involved in the conduct of their subject paper during examinations in order not to jeopardize their promotion.

The desire of the students and parents for success at all cost: When parents determined courses for their children while undermining their intellectuality and the advice of a Guidance and Counselor, such parent spend money to see their children qualified for their choice of course.

Poor teaching in schools: There have been brain drain in the country due to poor remuneration and misplacement of teaching profession in our society, the aftermath is shortages of qualified teachers. The available teachers were made to teach subjects outside their areas of specialization.

Non-completion of syllabus before examination: Teachers are prepared to teach but students refuses to attend classes and thus led to the abandonment of teaching and non completion of examination syllabus because of the students' perception about examinations.

Lack of confidence on the part of teachers and students: Due to shortages of qualified teachers, most students believed on the external assistance they will receive during the examination. While the teachers not too sure on the ability of the students to discharge what they have been taught, offered to assist in order to have credible numbers of passes in his/her subject.

Absence of guidance and counseling services in schools: This has been a bane to the growth and development of our educational system. Due to the prospect or high pay in the Petroleum Industries, every student want to be involved in petroleum related courses whether bright or dull academically because of the absence guidance and counseling officers in schools.

Constant closure of schools: This has weakened academic excellence in schools because of disruption of academic calendars due to strikes.

Over-emphasis on examinations and certificate: This emphasis has given rise to examination malpractices because academic excellence, skills and competency are sacrificed on the altar of certificate.

Poor living condition: Poor remuneration of supervisors and other examination officials by the examination bodies give rise to examination malpractice.

Overcrowding in the school: For example 1 teacher to 83-100 students.

Parental contributions: For example, some parents pay for live papers and hire people to sit for their wards.

Fear of students' drift by the public school: The headships of public schools are afraid of losing their students to the private schools and so connivance with the school examination officer and teachers to assist the students to cheat during examinations.

Efforts made to Eradicate Examination Malpractices

1. **By the Government:** Examination malpractice is a cankerworm that has eaten into the heart of Nigerian students and the embarrassing frequent WAEC examination papers leakages, forced the Federal Government to take a decisive actions to curb examination malpractices. The promulgation of decree 27 of 1973, Miscellaneous Decree 20 of 1984 and Act No. 33 of May, 1999 titled 'Examination Malpractice Decree' reversed the decree but stipulated punishment ranging from a fine of N50,000 to N100,000 and imprisonment for a term of 3-4 years with or without option of fine.

- **Blacklist students, schools:** The Federal Government decried the rate of examination malpractice among students at various levels that both teachers and students had been affected. The Presidency has inaugurated a task force on education that will also examine all laws militating against the delivery of qualitative education and purpose necessary changes. Conclusively, it is noted that government has also

resolved to blacklist any student or schools involved in examination malpractice (Ekukugho, 2011).

2. **By the examination bodies:** Prior to the establishment of National Examinations Council (NECO) by the Federal Government for Nigerians, West African Examination council (WAEC) has been a lonely voice in the struggle against examination malpractices/irregularities. Some of the strategies introduced by the body to arrest examination malpractice are as follows:
 - Embossment of certificates: The frequent incidence of examination malpractices of which one of the factors was impersonation, only WAEC has introduced passport photograph embossment on certificates issued to successful candidates.
 - Candidate forms: The examination bodies make available in book form and on its website to intending candidates for examination the rules and regulations and the punishment thereof different offences.
 - Public awareness: The examination bodies have launched several campaigns to sensitize the public of the danger in examination malpractices. The campaign according to Atonka (2010), gave rise to Examination Ethics.
 - Security bags: As a precautionary measure, the bodies also introduced the use of security bags by all assigned supervisors with the School Authority and WAEC/NECO staff at the custodian point in possession of the keys only. The essence is to prevent the tampering with the question papers and answer booklets while in-transit.
 - Sanctions: The bodies sanction candidates involved in examination malpractices by withholding their results, staff of the examination bodies involved are dismissed while teachers and other examination officials are reported to their employers for appropriate measure. In the 49th NEC meeting of WAEC held in Ibadan, the council resolved to publish list of indicted supervisors and invigilators involved in examination malpractices (Ekudugho 2011)
 - Examination materials: The examination bodies ensure that examination question papers are delivered to the custodian point daily for onward distributions to examination centers through the appointed supervisors.
 - Appointment of examination supervisors: To enhance discipline and compliance with directives, examination centre supervisors are recommended by the Ministry of Education and when appointed, the bodies ensure that they are swapped on daily basis to avoid undue influence by the schools.
3. **Religious bodies:** Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) held education summit asking the government to tackle examination malpractice through special court (Atonka, 2010). The essence is to enhance speedy dispensation of justice and avoidance of miscarriage of justice.

Recommendations

There is no one who can claim to have all the solutions to the eradication of examination malpractice. The following recommendations are proffer to help in curbing the ugly trend that is plaguing the nation's educational foundation. Since previous approaches aimed at curbing this hydra-headed problem seem to have yield no dividends, the writer advocates the following strategies for curbing the problem:

1. **Official remuneration:** An attractive remuneration to examination officials and centre supervisors will motivate them to discharge their duties creditably well. The current allowance payable to a centre supervisor for a period of one month that the examination will last is currently below six digits, plus other expenses (transportation to and fro Custodian Point and to and fro assigned examination centers and feeding is less than N40,00.00) is too meager and thus creates rooms for corrupt practices by officials. The amount should be reviewed upward.
2. **Transportation:** The idea of allowing the centre supervisors and other examination officials to foot their transportation bills throughout the days of the examination makes room for compromise. Cost of transportation and feeding should be worked out and made available to centre supervisors and other examination officials on daily basis to forestall undue influence and compromise.
3. **Discontinuation of every school as centers:** The idea of using every school as examination centre has to a large extent hampered effective monitoring of external examinations by the appointed monitoring teams/staff of the examination bodies. Some local government areas have over 25 public secondary schools outside privately owned. Therefore, monitoring teams spent less than 15 minutes in a centre in order to cover many schools within the time allocated to such subject, thereafter their illegal business continues. Centers should be created randomly in local government areas and the bodies prepared schedules schools to be covered by each centers within the local government with daily monitoring team posted to such centers.
4. **Restricted website:** The examination bodies should ensure that they have a restricted website inaccessible to the public to avoid examination paper leakages as access to their website during examinations.
5. **Printing press:** The examination bodies should endeavor to have their own printing press to handle the printing of question papers/answer booklets to prevent examination paper leakages. Also, the staff should be searched daily in the course of printing question papers and all waste sheets of papers shredded.

In addition to the above, the following curbing strategies as outlined could be adopted:

1. Appointment of renowned clergies as invigilators.
2. Sincere Implementation of Legislation by Government and Other Agencies. It is here advocated that since the enacted laws are not enforceable due to Nigerian factor, a special commission be created namely 'Examination Malpractice Commission' to enhance speed dispensation of justice.
3. Empowerment of Teachers.
4. Less Emphasis on Certificates and Paper Qualification
5. Improved Funding of the Education Sector
6. Campaigns and Seminars on the Dangers of Examination Malpractice
7. Special Welfare Package for Examination Officials
8. The number of invigilators and supervisors should be increased in the exam halls.
9. Apart from photographs, finger prints on certificates should be used for identification
10. Planting of secret cameras in the examination halls.
11. Moral Upbringing of Children.
12. Public Enlightenment Advocacy by the Media.

13. Re-orientation in our Tertiary Institutions and Better Funding.
14. Integrity Watch for Business, Community and Political Leaders.
15. Job Creation and Good Governance.
16. Creation of learning-friendly environment in schools;
17. Provision of necessary school infrastructure and revamping of decay ones;
18. Adequately equipping school libraries and laboratories,
19. Employment of qualified teachers at all levels of education;
20. Training and retraining of teachers to equip them for the challenges posed by a technology - driven world;
21. Appropriate recognition and remuneration of teachers;
22. Societal re-engineering and re-orientation to revamp moral values;

Conclusion

Examination malpractice, which started in Nigeria as a minor misdemeanour has not only assumed a frightening dimension, it seems to have become a permanent feature of Nigeria education system. Efforts by governments, examining bodies, institutions, individuals and concerned groups towards eradicating it have not yielded meaningful results. Rather, the situation has become worse in recent times. The new trend involves an organized system of the supervisors, invigilators, teachers, and in some cases heads of schools. There is therefore the need for a team effort to stem this social malaise that has become inimical to educational development in the country.

Examination malpractice is a social problem that has wrecked unimaginable havoc to the entire fabric of Nigeria. It is a hydra headed problem that requires a multidimensional approach to its resolution. Any effort aimed at resolving this problem must be collaborative, that is, involving all stakeholders in the education sector, if not, such efforts will end up being an exercise in futility.

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