

Examination Malpractices and Students' Poor Performance in Senior Secondary School Certificate Examinations in Nigeria

Boris, O. O.

*Department of Curriculum and Instruction
College of Education, Ikere - Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria
E-mail: funkeboris@yahoo.com*

Awodun, A. .O

*Physics Department, College of Education, Ikere -Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria
E-mail: bisawoideas@yahoo.com*

ABSTRACT

This study adopts the theoretical research design to review issues in examination malpractices as they influence students' poor performance in Senior Secondary School Certificate Examinations in Nigeria. The result of the study reveals among others that Examination malpractices have long graduated from the normal 'giraffe' at neighbours' work, using key points notes, textbooks, copying on sheets of papers referred to as 'micro-chips', or copying on desks also known as 'desktop publishing', to a more advanced and more organized system of buying question papers from examination bodies or corrupt bank officials entrusted with the safe-keeping of the examination question papers. Examination malpractices in Nigeria have attained a frightening proportion, they are sophisticated and institutionalized. Efforts by government administrations and stakeholders in the educational sector to curtail the ugly trend have not yielded any good result. As a tool of discipline to curtail the ugly trend of examination malpractices among others, the penalties for culprits should be made to cover all categories of offenders, be it the candidate, teacher, lecturer, school administrator, parents or guardian. In addition, the remuneration for examination supervisors and invigilators should be reviewed upwards and such remuneration should be promptly paid to prevent them from being tempted to get involved in the rather lucrative 'business' of examination malpractices.

Keywords: *Examination malpractices, Education, Technological advancement, students.*

INTRODUCTION

The aspiration for quality, goal-oriented education and technological advancement in Nigeria prompted this study. This is because advancement of a nation is a measure of the standard of quality of education provided for its citizens. Unfortunately, qualitative education in Nigeria today is wallowing within the valleys of numerous problems one of which is examination malpractice. The idea of using tests to assess performance in schools began with the Chinese. China was the first country to appoint civil servants on the basis of their performance in competitive achievement tests (Alonge, 2003). By 115BC, civil service examinations were in place and were used to select candidates for employment in the Chinese Imperial Service. According to Alonge (2003), the Han Dynasty 206 BC-AD 220 used written examinations on Confucian classics to select civil servants for

promotion. These examinations were quite strict and aimed at controlling the learners' ideology and supervising their learning. They included both oral and written tests. From the brief history of examinations, the purposes of examinations include appointing people to gainful employment, controlling the learners' ideology and supervising their learning, raising and standardizing the performance of candidates. Socrates 400 BC also used oral and written questions to know how much his listeners knew and to provide the basis upon which the individual's knowledge and understanding could be clarified, strengthened and broadened. Since about fifty years ago in Nigeria, some examination bodies have been established to replace the activities of the colonial examination bodies. For example, the West African Examination Council (WAEC), the National Teachers Institute (NTI), the National Board for Technical Education Measurement (NBEM) the National Board of Technical Education (NBTE), and National Examinations Council (NECO) replaced examination bodies like the University of Cambridge Local Examination Syndicate (UCLE) and the University of London Matriculation Examination (ULME).

The major duties of these examining bodies are the examination of the standard of candidates' performance and issuance of certificates to qualify them for certain jobs or admissions to higher institutions of learning. One major proof of the downward slide in the education sector is the growing cases of examination malpractices. Examination Malpractices have their tentacles in both formative and summative forms of evaluation and cut across Kindergarten to University levels of Education in which the perpetrators have no age or status limit. Examination malpractices are not a recent phenomenon in Nigeria or in any part of the world. It is as old as examination itself and no part of the world could be exempted. It includes any other illegal act which in the opinion of the authorities constitutes cheating. What perhaps seems new is the phenomenal increase in examination malpractices at all levels of the educational system and complex dimension it has assumed (Oluyeba, 1998). Examination malpractice has grown from a mere stretching of the neck (giraffing) to see what another candidate is writing during examination or consulting unauthorized notes or books inside or outside the examination hall to such sophisticated methods as the use of micro-computer, mobile phones and gun(s) to intimidate those concerned with the administration of the examination (Ivor, 2008). It is saddening that examination bodies, government functionaries, school authorities, invigilators, parents and students all participate in the iniquitous examination malpractice. The analysis of National Examinations Council (NECO) SSCE November/December 2009 results released by the body and published in the Nation Newspaper of 15th April 2010, puts the number of examination malpractice cases at 236,613 of the candidates that sat for the examination (table 1). This study is therefore structured to assess the influence of examination malpractices on students' poor performance in Senior Secondary School Certificate Examinations in Nigeria.

Examination Malpractices and their Causes

According to Hornby (2005), malpractice refers to careless, wrong or illegal behaviour while in a professional undesirable behaviour during and after examinations. It is regarded as the national tragedy for education in Nigeria. Examination malpractice is construed as

irregularities, violation of, or infringements on examinations rules and regulations ...before, during or after the conduct of examination (Ivor, 2008). The first publicly reported case of examination malpractice in Nigeria occurred in 1914 when there was a leakage of question papers in the Senior Cambridge Local Examination (Oluyeba, 1998). This was about 38 years before WAEC came into existence and since then, cases of examination malpractices have grown in leaps and bounds (Oluyeba, 1998). Oluyeba (1998) posits that in West African Examinations Council (WAEC) Examinations, examination malpractices which drew bitter criticism from the public occurred in 1963, 1967, 1970, 1973, 1974, 1977, 1979, 1981, 1987 and 1991. The leakages of 1967 and 1977 led the Federal Government of Nigeria to set up Judicial Tribunals to look into causes of examination malpractice and proffer remedies against their reoccurrence (Makanjuola, 2004).

However, incidences of malpractices are not limited to WAEC-conducted examinations only: other Examination bodies have had their bitter experiences; apparently appalled by the spate of examination malpractices, the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) in 2001 introduced variations in question numerations for candidates sitting for the same matriculation examination. That year, candidates' performance in JAMB examination was very poor. But it did not take long for the syndicates to devise another means to beat JAMB's innovation and that, without gainsaying, was with the effective collaboration and connivance of JAMB officials (Aliyu, 2009). Also, syndicates have been able to arrange 'special' centres for the 'special' candidates they enroll for the exams with the connivance of examination bodies for the easy flow of malpractices. These “miracle centres” enjoy the support of some corrupt school administrators and examination officers. Examination malpractices or cheating manifest themselves in many different forms such as: Expo, Life, Bullet, Micro "Tintin", Micro-chips, Dubbing, Micro "Gbangba", Giraffe, Ostrich, SMS, Mercenary, Contractor, Slot-In, Deal and Super-print. All these and much more are against examination ethics and the penalties though not often implemented are absolutely very embarrassing.

Causes of Examination Malpractice in Nigeria

Several factors cause or push candidates to cheat. In the case of examination malpractices, the causes could be viewed from two broad dimensions. The first dimension is in respect of examination officials, teachers, and school administrators. The second dimension is that of the students. While the cause of examination malpractice for the latter is practically that of inadequate preparation and self confidence, the former is characterised by greed and trade of integrity. On a general note, other causes of examination malpractices include:

- (i) Lack of adequate facilities for meaningful and effective teaching and learning processes.
- (ii) Lack of moral strength and courage to resist the temptation of resorting to an immoral and illegal means to pass examinations.
- (iii) Too much emphasis on paper qualification which society regards and sees as the end of a formal school system.
- (iv) The high premium placed on acquired social status and personal achievement and the acquisition of certificates.

- (v) The get-rich-quick syndrome.
- (vi) Poverty
- (vii) Poor management of the examinations by invigilators and supervisors.
- (viii) Improper preparation of students for the examinations by subject teachers.
- (ix) The incessant strike actions by the teachers' union.
- (x) Overcrowding in the examination hall.
- (xi) The urge to pass the examinations at all costs.
- (xii) Corruption
- (xiii) The absence of good guidance and counseling in schools
- (xiv) Parental influence on a child's career choice.

Table 1 shows various cases of examination malpractices for the SSCE November/December, 2009 and their frequencies. It has been observed that a total of 236,613 candidates were involved in various cases of examination malpractices in the year under review. The cases involved Aiding and abetting, Seeking and receiving help from non-candidates (AAA), Mass Cheating (MOH), Impersonation (IMP), Irregular activities inside or outside the examination hall (IRR), Cheating detected at marking venues (Double Scripts) (CDS); Bringing of Foreign Materials (BFM), Collective Insult/Assault and Violent Behaviour (ASC), Absent but has Answer Script(s) (ABS), and Collusion (COL). Others include: Use of Electronic Communication Gadget brought into the Hall (UEG), Cheating Detected at the Marking Venues (Copying Foreign Materials) (CDM), Bringing into the examination Hall Electronic Communication Gadget (BEC), Unruly Behaviour in the Examination Halls (URE); Individual Insult/Assault and Violent Behaviour (ASI), Bringing dangerous weapons into the hall /Precincts of the Examination (DWE), Leakages (Individual) (LKI) and Leakages (Collective) (LKC). Of the 236,613 cases of examination malpractices in the examinations conducted by National Examinations Council in November/December, 2009, AAA has the highest frequency of 82,674 followed by MOH and IMP with frequency of 65,348 and 40,876 respectively. While Leakage (Individual) (LKI) had the least frequency, Leakages (Collective) (LKC) registered 0 case.

On stemming the menace of Examination malpractices in Nigeria, the examination bodies have adopted certain decisions as penalties on perpetrators, which stakeholders regarded to benefit the candidates (table 2). As a result of people involvement in examination malpractices, students do not pass through the necessary rudiments of the profession. Nigeria has succeeded in having proliferation of certificated but not qualified or competent personnel in virtually all professions like architecture, engineering, surveying, computer science, teaching, medicine, town and regional planning, etc. A careful appraisal of table 2 reveals that the penalties stipulated are mainly for candidates. No mention of what the exact punishment for others such as the invigilators would be. The statement that "in the case of paid invigilators/supervisors, the board shall take appropriate action" is grossly inadequate. There should be an implementable penalty for the examination officials who contravene the rules.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Examination malpractices are a national shame that requires the involvement of all stakeholders to eradicate. Only qualitative education that brings out the best in pupils and students is good enough for Nigeria (This Day, 2010 cited Ivor 2008). One can extrapolate to some extent from the present trend that examination malpractices will utterly destroy the quality of education in Nigeria if decisive steps are not taken to checkmate the trend. The intractable nature of examination malpractices have resulted in high turnover of half-baked graduates by institutions of higher learning. The first solution to examination malpractices is to reverse the conditions under which examination malpractices flourish. According to Igwe (2002), those conditions which make people want to acquire certificates at all cost should as much as possible, be reasonably de-emphasized. That is to say that, the unnecessary priority placed on paper qualification without taking into consideration what somebody is able to perform should be jettisoned.

All the agents of socialization must participate actively in stemming the ugly scenario. The home front must deliberately discourage their children/wards from further participation in the acts by stopping the financing of examination malpractices for their wards. Encourage the children/ward to study harder. They should allow God to decide the future of their children based on their innate aptitude. Students should cultivate good reading habits, shun indolence and desist from passing examinations at all costs. The penalties for culprits should be made to cover all categories of offenders, be it the candidates, teachers, lecturers, school administrators, parents/guardian. Any culprit, irrespective of social status should be made to face the full weight of the law. The penalties or punishment should not in practice exclude the rich or the highly placed. Teachers/Lecturers should uphold the ethics of their profession to be good role models to the students. School authorities should provide adequate sitting arrangement for the conduct of every examination to forestall overcrowding. Also, candidates should not be allowed to go into the examination centres with electronic and communication gadget and should be properly searched before examinations commence. Invigilators, school authorities, police personnel and other exam officials should be put under surveillance as they are major stakeholders in the business of examination malpractices.

Remuneration for examination supervisors and invigilators should be reviewed upwards and such remuneration should be promptly paid to prevent them from being tempted to get involved in the rather lucrative "business" of examination malpractices. Education authorities should review its Education Curriculum to reflect some subjects/courses that preach morality e.g. "Moral Instruction" and "Civic Education" as it were in the 80s. Government and its agencies should henceforth stop handling cases of examination malpractices with kid gloves. The law should not recognize sacred cows. Anyone caught cheating should be made to face the law irrespective of status or connections. The over-reliance and dependence on paper qualification should be de-emphasised while vocational and entrepreneurial training should be encouraged. Religious leaders should preach against examination malpractices among other vices at all time, at their various worship centres. Examination bodies like NECO, WAEC, NABTEB, UTMB etc. must totally dissociate

themselves form activities of malpractice syndicates and stop concessional postings. They should break the vicious circle of exam malpractices by centralizing posting of candidates to exam centres and putting appropriate sanctions or punishment on offenders without fear of intimidation or favour. Private School owners should desist from allowing some unscrupulous people from making their schools "miracle centres" where all manners of examination malpractices are carried out. If any candidate is suspected to be involved in any of the acts of examination malpractices listed above, a detailed written report must be submitted by the invigilator immediately he or she is apprehended. Failure to make a report shall be regarded as more serious offence on the part of the invigilator. Above all, the Federal government examination malpractices Act No. 33 of 10th May, 1999 which provides penalties such as: imprisonment, fine or both for persons and bodies found guilty of involvement in aiding, abetting, negligence or dereliction in the conduct of examinations need to be activated. Perhaps, seeing the law in action may stem the tide.

Table 1: Analysis of Malpractice Cases by Type SSCE Nov/Dec 2009

S/N	Code	Malpractice Types	Frequency
1.	AAA	Aiding and abetting, Seeking and receiving help from non-candidates	82,674
2.	MOH	Mass Cheating	65,348
3.	IMP	Impersonation	40,876
4.	IRR	Irregular activities inside or outside the examination hall	12,728
5.	CDS	Cheating detected at marking venue (Double Script)	12,502
6.	BFM	Bringing of Foreign Materials	6,212
7.	ASC	Collective Insult/Assault and Violent Behaviour	4,618
8.	ABS	Absent but has Answer Script(s)	4,299
9.	COL	Collusion	1,761
10.	UEG	Use of Electronic Communication Gadgets brought into the Hall	1,436
11.	CDM	Cheating Detected at the Marking Venue (Copying Foreign Materials)	1,279
12.	BEC	Bringing into the examination Hall Electronic Communication Gadgets	1,049
13.	URE	Unruly Behaviour in the Examination Hall	977
14.	ASI	Individual Insult/Assault and Violent Behaviour	567
15.	DWE	Bringing dangerous weapons into the hall /Precincts of the Examination	152
16.	LKI	Leakage (Individual)	135
17.	LKC	Leakage (Collective)	0
	Total		236,613

Source: The Nation Newspaper, Thursday, April 15th, 2010.

Table 2: Offences and Penalties for Examination Malpractices in Nigeria

1	Impersonation: For both the impersonated and impersonator (where both are candidates of the the examination).	Cancellation of the entire result of both parties
2	Leakage with adequate prove	Cancellation of the entire result of affected parties
3	Widespread cheating/collusion properly established in a centre	Outrightly cancellation of the results of the all the candidates in the centre
4	Insult/assault on Supervisor/Invigilators	Cancellation of the entire results of the candidate(s) involved
5	Bringing of foreign materials	Cancellation of the entire results of the candidate(s) involved
6	Irregular activities inside or outside the examination hall such as leaving the examination hall/premises without permission from the invigilator, substituting worked script during and after examination, leaving examination hall with question paper among others.	Cancellation of the entire result of affected candidate.

Source: JAMB Brouchure, 2011/2012 Session

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