

**CHECKING THE MENACE OF EXAMINATION MALPRACTICE:  
A CALL FOR MORE TEACHING AND LEARNING IN SCHOOLS**

*By*

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**Abstract**

*This paper outlines reasons for examination malpractices, the forms they take and the threat they pose to our educational system. Various efforts at combating the scourge of examination malpractice in different countries like China, Pakistan, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Sri Lanka, Uganda and Philippines were presented. It is argued that increasing the quality of teaching and learning in schools will go a long way to reduce the menace of examination malpractices. It is suggested that other remedies like punitive measures and public enlightenment campaigns can only be effective if students are well taught in schools.*

**Introduction**

Examination malpractice is any illegal act committed by a student single handedly 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 un-authorized 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 malpractice in Nigeria and indeed in many countries of the world is already a cankerworm. It has attained an alarming proportion and also endemic to educational systems all over the world. The problem is hydra-headed and has defied most recommended solutions. The categories of people involved

in examination malpractices are many and the forms of examination malpractices are almost without end. It takes place at all educational levels, it is a concern to all stakeholders in education and it takes place in both internal and external examinations. Children, youths and adults are involved.

Many reasons have been given for the prevalence of examination malpractice. These include inadequate funding of schools (Maduabum & Maduabum, 1998), laxity in prosecuting offenders (Uwadiae, 1997) inability of students to cope with school work, candidates' inadequate preparation and desire to pass at all costs, poor sitting arrangement, too much emphasis on paper qualification and non completion of syllabuses (Adamu, 1998; Obe, 1998, Onyechere, 1996). The causes are multi-dimensional while the society, the school and the students are involved. Any lasting solution to examination malpractice should therefore consider all these causes. The World Bank Group (2002) identified that a major reason for examination malpractices is high stakes of examination. This implies the long-term impact of examination results on a candidate's life and where teacher and school status depend on public examination results. Other reasons include students' personal factors, quota system, inadequate school resources, corruption in the society, location of examination centres and low salary level for teachers and examination officials.

### **Forms of Examination Malpractice**

Different forms of examination malpractice have been reported in literature. Common forms such as bringing in unauthorised materials, writing on currency notes and identity cards, spying of other candidates in examination hall, substitution of answer sheets and change of examination scores or grades (Adamu, 1998; Fagbemi 2001). Others include impersonation, leakage of questions to students before the examination, conniving with supervisors and school authorities to cheat, body writing or tattoo in which students especially females write on hidden parts of their bodies (Jacob & Lar, 2001).

There are some cases of examination malpractice that are almost unbelievable. In the 1997 University Matriculation Examination, the then Registrar of Joint Admission and Matriculation Board reported that there were cases of females attempting to impersonate males. There was widespread

cheating reported in that year's University Matriculation Examination (The Guardian 16th September, 1997). Examination malpractice is not a recent phenomenon, though the trend is increasing. In the 1973 May/June WAEC examination, there was the case of a candidate who armed herself with nitric acid and threatened to pour it on other candidates who refused to let her copy from their scripts. She successfully forced two or three other candidates (Jacob and Lar, 2001). Some students buy question papers with money while some others buy question papers with their bodies if they are females (Maduka, 1993). Radio transmitters concealed in pens, personal stereos loaded with pre-recorded tapes and programmable calculators packed with data have all been smuggled into examination halls in Britain as reported by Fagbemi (2001).

The World Bank Group (2002) also reported that examination malpractice may even include creation of ghost centres where candidates can sit for examinations with the support of helpers and without supervision. Also, deliberate award of certificates to candidates who did not even sit for examinations has been reported. In the past, it used to involve only examination officials, but in recent years, it included printers and candidates with high-level skills in technology. Examination malpractices technically tend to weaken the validity of any examination and the results become unreliable and worthless. When it happens, it is difficult to assess candidates' performance based on the certificate they hold.

Table 1: Comparison of Incidence of Examination Malpractices.  
(SSCE/WASSCE) MAY/JUNE 1998-2000

- i. Discourages good candidates from studying hard:** Good candidates are tempted to believe 'If you cannot beat them, join them' especially as they see other candidates get away with their corrupt behaviours. This behaviour may be contagious as more and more candidates tend to join in examination malpractice. They believe that even if they are caught, they will get away with it and the end will justify the means. Uhachukwu & Onunkwo (1999) sampled 5000 Nigerians from three professional groups (teachers, businessmen and civil servants) and found that 52.6% of the respondents did not see anything bad with cheating, while only 9.2% considered that cheating is bad.
- ii. Discredits certificates:** Employers of labour require certain skills from their employees based on the certificates they hold. These employers are disappointed when their employees perform grossly below expectation. The implication is that the employers will begin to rely more on their own tests and oral interviews than the certificates the applicants are holding in order to employ suitable hands. This is not only in job-seeking but even in admission processes. Some private universities in Nigeria conduct post-hoc examinations for students seeking admission instead of relying on whatever grades or scores they have in the University Matriculation Examination.
- iii. Denies innocent students opportunity for admission:** Many good students have been denied admission by the corrupt ones who through examination malpractices have better scores and grades. The best brains that could help in research and development are likely to be thrown out or frustrated while seeking admission. The corrupt ones admitted continue in their behaviours that won them admission and eventually wangle their ways through the programme.

**Decreases job efficiency:** This has a serious implication on the gross domestic product of the country. It also has effect on general quality and standard. Imagine the havoc a half-baked medical doctor could

wreck on human lives. What about teachers who cannot competently handle the subject they are trained to teach. Imagine the effect on the students. There is a chain effect of examination malpractices on the educational system and the society as a whole.

- iv. **Dominates examination planning and conduct procedures:** The procedures in development and administration of external examinations are many. These include stating the objectives, writing of items and production of drafts, validation and field trial, selection of final items and production paper. The result of this study also confirms the views of Soeze (2004) and Onyechere (2004). Soeze (2004) considered examination malpractice as illegal means which students use to pass examinations and Onyechere (2004) noted that it is almost a routine for students to cheat in examinations.

The threat of examination malpractices on the validity of examination has made some examination bodies to give excessive attention to checking examination malpractices even at the test development stage. Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) administers different question formats in which questions do not follow the same order. The alternatives under each question in a format do not also follow the same order. Examination bodies therefore make a lot of efforts both at the test development and administration stages to combat examination malpractices.

- v. **Delays the processing of examination scores and grades:** Every year, many students are caught for engaging in various examination malpractices which needs to be investigated before results are released. Though some results are withheld pending the determination of the cases, some are decided before results are released. This extends processing time.
- vi. **Dissatisfies candidates:** Candidates who possess certificates they cannot defend are dissatisfied. They have psychological problems arising from the way they acquired their certificates. In some instances, they will not be bold to present the certificates because they can be presented with tasks that will require them to defend the certificates.

## **Efforts at Combating the Scourge of Examination Malpractice**

Different examination bodies have put up efforts at combating the scourge of examination malpractices. It seems that candidates too are not relenting in frustrating and voiding all efforts by these bodies. Fagbemi(200 1) reported efforts adopted by West African Examinations Council (WAEC) to fight malpractices. These efforts are public enlightenment campaigns, information to students on rules and regulations guiding its examinations, punitive action on candidates and WAEC staff involved in malpractices and creation of a whole department headed by a deputy registrar to handle cases of malpractice. As a way of reducing examination malpractices, Continuous Assessment (CA) has been introduced in Nigeria. The scores in the CA could be inflated as the school teachers provide them. National Examinations Council (NECO) has devised a means called 'technical failure'. If candidate score 70/70 in their examination and less than 12(40% of 30) in CA or no CA at all, they have failed. To pass NECO examinations, a candidate must score at least 28(40% of 70) in the final examinations.

All over the world, examination malpractice is not a recent phenomenon. It is however getting worse with time and civilisation. According to the World Bank Group (2002), the issue of examination malpractice was so serious in China in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that the penalties for it included death, confiscation of properties and exile for corrupt examination officials. Part of the recommendations for checking malpractice in public examinations in the World Bank Group's report are presented below:

- Pay examination officials slightly higher salaries than personnel in comparable levels in the Ministry of Education (Uganda).
  
- Item writers set individual questions rather the complete paper (Uganda)
- Print examination papers outside the country (Kenya, Zimbabwe).
- Entrust typing of an entire question to one typist (Ethiopia).
- Hold key officials e.g. item writers (China), printers (Sri lanka and Philippines incommunicado until the examination has been administered.

- Withhold payment to printers and make them to forfeit it if leakage can be attributed to them (Philippines).
- Take out an insurance policy to cover the consequences of leaked tests
  - Provide secured packing (seal envelopes with metal or wooden boxes) and storage for papers.
- National and international examination boards and organizations should share information on new threats to examination security and procedures for counteracting malpractice.
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- Provide secured storage facilities for materials in transit (e.g army barracks, police stations and banks).
- Enlist the support of other government agencies to facilitate delivery and collection of materials (Kenya, Philippines).
- Insist that packages of sealed envelopes be opened and sealed in front of candidates (Nigeria).
- Recruit supervision staff (invigilators) from a school other than that in which examination is being held (Nigeria).
- Presentation of different versions of multiple-choice papers to candidates sitting close to each other (Nigeria, JAMB).
- Give magisterial powers (including right to arrest) to examination board officials (Pakistan)
- Conduct frequent and unannounced visits to centres (Common in Asian and African countries).

- Conduct a public awareness campaign to highlight the importance of integrity of the examination system (Cambodia, Pakistan, Nigeria)
- For common examinations conducted in a number of countries on the same day, administer the examination at the same GMT to counter the threat of the use of ICT
- Not writing names on answer scripts. Writing fictitious roll numbers that will be substituted later with the real candidate's number (Pakistan).
- Use of bar codes (Lithuania).
- Publicise evidence of wrongdoing and application of legal sanction.
- National and international examination board and organization should share information on new threats to examination security and procedures for counteracting malpractices.

Despite these various steps and efforts, the incidence of examination malpractice has been on the increase in many countries. In many countries, a method may work for a while but candidates are very smart at beating any effort directed at ebbing examination malpractices. Therefore examination bodies have to think many steps ahead on any effort they plan to introduce to curb the menace. If examination officials and printers are held incommunicado, this will only work for the first year. In the subsequent years, corrupt ones among them would have leaked the questions they are going to set before being held incommunicado. Providing secure storage facilities and presenting question formats to candidates are good and should be continued. All these efforts have however not been found to totally solve the problem of examination malpractice. Little wonder, Afigbo (1997) called examination malpractice the demon with a thousand faces.

To every problem, there must be a solution. If a problem does not have a solution yet, it is not because there is no solution, rather the solution has not been discovered. If what we call a solution is not working, let's look for another. Eventually, the problem will be solved. All over the world, it is generally believed that if citizens are empowered and enjoy good standard of living, crime rate will reduce. This is because many people have discovered that the root cause of

stealing and robbery is poverty. Though, some will still steal and rob even if they have the basic needs, it is logical to think that most people may not steal or rob if they are comfortable. In the same way, even if some candidates may still cheat when properly groomed for examinations, it is still logical to think that many students may not cheat if they are well prepared for an examination. Many good candidates do not even want any form of distraction when they are writing their papers.

Effective teaching and learning are no more taking place in many schools. Candidates are, too conscious of examinations and only want key points to pass rather than to learn. In an empirical study carried out by Uwadiae (1997) to find out how school factors predict examination malpractice in the Senior Secondary School Examinations (SSCE) Mathematics in Nigeria, he found that school factors accounted for as much as 66% of the variance in examination malpractice. The school factors considered are school ownership, school type, syllabus coverage, principal quality, principal's gender, examination facilities and school performance in SSCE. Fuller (1987) stressed the importance of school variables on students' achievement. The quality of teaching and learning can be improved if syllabuses are adequately covered before examinations, teachers teach with teaching aids, students who do not pass are not promoted to the next class, students are motivated to learn, past questions are used to revise with students especially when an examination is approaching, relevant books are provided in the school and public libraries and laboratories are well equipped to facilitate learning, students will then see examinations as mountains that can be climbed with determination and hard work. To this end, all the stakeholders in education, government at all levels, parents, community, school principals, teachers and students alike will have to put in all efforts to provide and use all necessary facilities to improve teaching and learning in schools. There is presently a dearth of qualified teachers in many schools in the world. In Nigeria, the national president of All Nigerian Conference of Principals of Secondary Schools (ANCOPSS) at its 42nd Annual Congress, Akure held in 1999 announced a shortfall of 115, 553 and 111,482 teachers in English and Mathematics respectively all over the country (Fagbemi, 2001). How can qualitative teaching take place under this condition? How would the students not resort to examination malpractice to make their papers? In Nigerian primary

schools where elementary science is one of the core subjects, Okebukola (1997) reported that less than 10% of the 444,000 public school teachers in Nigeria are specialists in primary science teaching.

Above (1999) also reported that over 45% of the primary school teachers had the Grade II Teacher's Certificate, 25% -30% NCE holders are mostly arts and social studies teachers who obtained certification through distance learning. In summary, we can only boast of a handful of professionally qualified elementary science teachers in over 41,000 primary schools in Nigeria. How do we then expect these pupils to do well without examination malpractice in their entrance examination to into secondary schools?

Afolabi (1998) noted while giving remedies to examination malpractices that even at the senior secondary school level, schools lack sufficient number of professionally competent teachers to help and support students. He therefore called for faithful implementation of the 6-3-3-4 system of education. If this system is faithfully implemented and there is all-round teaching and learning in schools, all subjects will be taught and many students who are less intellectually endowed will not end up in frustration or seek all means to pass examinations.

### **Conclusion**

The root cause of examination malpractice is that there is poor preparation as a result of decreasing level of quality teaching and learning in our schools. Proper preparation prevents poor performance. On the other hand, poor preparation promotes poor performance. There is gross inadequacy of qualified teachers in our schools. While all other remedies to curb examination malpractices like punitive measures, public enlightenment campaigns and printing of question papers outside the country should continue, we should try to emphasize qualitative teaching and learning in our schools. There are cost implications to improving the quality of teaching and learning. All the stakeholders in education should be ready to contribute to the funding of our schools. There should be proper monitoring and supervision to ensure that the end justifies the means.

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