

# **CURTAILING MALPRACTICE IN PUBLIC EXAMINATIONS: A HIGHER CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT SCORE OPTION**

*By*

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## *Abstract*

*This paper examines the problem of malpractices in public examinations in Nigeria. Specifically, the paper emphasizes the effects of examination malpractices on the results coming from public examination bodies in Nigeria. Three major categories of examination malpractices are highlighted as pre-examination, during examination, and post-examination malpractices. The causes of examination malpractices are linked to sociological and psychological factors. The paper noted that in order to achieve quality education, in Nigeria, it is necessary to curtail examination malpractices because of its grave consequences. The author therefore submits that if the current contribution of 30% continuous assessment to the final certification of secondary school students is changed to 70%, the desperation to pass public examinations at all costs will be curtailed. Implications of this higher continuous assessment score option were discussed. Finally it is concluded that if this option were properly implemented, malpractices in public examinations will become a thing of the past.*

## **Introduction**

Examination malpractices in Nigeria 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 (Samuel, 2003). It is very clear that the agents of examination malpractices are students, schoolteachers, invigilators, staff of examination bodies and parents. All these agents collude to fraudulently aid students to pass examinations. The manner in which examinations are swindled particularly during public examinations is very

sad for a nation that has recently been estimated to have more than half of its population as illiterates.

Abe (1997) opines that examination malpractices can take various such forms as question leakage, impersonation, copying from colleagues, smuggling prepared notes or answer scripts into examination halls, swapping of answer scripts, falsification of results, intimidation of supervisors and invigilators as well as aiding and abetting cheating when handling examination scripts. Some desperate candidates go to the extent of using walkie-talkie, mini-computers and mobile telephone sets to send information out and receive feedback in the examination halls. Hence, Umar (2004) asserts that examination malpractice had seriously impinged upon the credibility of the results coming from public examination bodies in Nigeria. The problem now is that the quality of certificate candidates obtain is doubtful. In fact, the situation has degenerated to the level of putting down academic certificates because the ability of its holders cannot be legitimately inferred from the test scores on which the certificate is based. In the paper titled "Combating Examination Malpractices", Onyechere (2003) divides the forms of malpractices observable in public examinations into pre — examination, during examination and post— examination malpractices. In the pre — examination category is the procurement of question papers prior to the date of examinations. This was said to be common in the 70s and 80s but it is no longer common as a result of tightened security. Malpractices during examination include cheating while the examination is in progress. These include impersonation, copying another candidate's answers with or without permission; collusion, intimidation, substitution of scripts and ghost centres. Others are bringing of unauthorized materials into the examination hall and external assistance by individuals (invigilators, supervisors and hired persons) who give unauthorized assistance to candidates during examinations.

Post — examination malpractices on the other hand are traceable to the staff of public examination boards. Candidates are aware of the fact that the result they get from public examinations provide the sole avenue for upward mobility and entry into tertiary institutions. In the end, the result is seen as the only avenue for the poor to join the elite middle class. Failure in such examinations keeps one on menial jobs with a hopeless and bleak future.

University education is about the only goal worth aspiring to in most families in Nigeria. Most people therefore attempt to get through the gate of tertiary institutions by hook or crook (Onyechere, 2003).

### **Causes of Examination Malpractices**

School teachers, principals, staff of public examination boards, security agents and even parents have been indicted for conniving with students to cheat in examinations (Bolarin, 2002). According to Fayombo (2004), causes of examination malpractices could be sociological or psychological. Sociologically, examination malpractices are a product of a society that nurtures cheats and mediocres and turn them to celebrities (Ekpu, 1991). Therefore, the desperation to pass examinations and obtain certificates in Nigeria stem from the fact that so much emphasis is placed on certificate as a measure of preparedness for several socio — economic and political positions. Fayombo (2004) asserts that the resultant survival instinct is accompanied by all forms of examination malpractices.

- Samuel (2003) blames parents and communities for aiding and abetting examination malpractices by “taking care” of the supervisors and other examination functionaries to enable their wards pass with ease. Some parents even force their children to study subjects that they have no ability to cope with in secondary schools so as to be in the professions they desire. ‘Many schools have a portion of the blame as they want their students to perform well in the school certificate examinations and so, rather than work through supervision of teaching and learning, they aid and abet examination malpractices. The situation in Nigerian schools today has set the stage for examination malpractices. Obemeata (1991) identified some cases that occur in the society that eventually lead to examination malpractices. The situation has to do with shortage of qualified teachers, supply of instructional materials such as audio — visual, materials, books, science equipments and, poor remuneration of teachers, supervisors and invigilators. Under this condition, the syllabus for subjects may not be thoroughly treated or completed. The option remaining is to help the students to cheat in order to pass. The teachers and other personnel, who are poorly remunerated, are also ready to assist the students to cheat in order to get money.

Psychologically, it is believed that everybody has a strong need to succeed and will succeed if they have positive concept and are exposed to the right environmental condition such as curriculum, facilities and methods necessary for a maximum development of that potential. However if such unique conditions are lacking for an individual, then failure sets in even if such individuals have the right self— concept . In order to be branded a success', people resort to cheating (Newty, 2001).

The behavioural psychologists believe that behaviours whether desirable or undesirable like cheating during examinations are mostly learned. Behaviours that bring satisfaction tend to be repeated whereas those that do not bring satisfaction tend to be discontinued (Lefrancois, 1972). Therefore when some students work hard and fail in examinations may be due to unfavourable environmental conditions, they may not want to go through that process again because it is not rewarding. Having seen how their mates performed better through cheating during examinations, they also learn the undesirable behaviour and thus get involved in examination malpractices.

Other causes of examination malpractices include over zealousness of some school heads to ensure that their schools have good results so as to boost their ego or image. Lack of security is another cause of examination malpractices. Questions are carelessly handled before examinations and the answer booklets are not always secured after examinations (Fayombo, 2004).

The consequences of examination malpractices are many and enormous as both the nation and the individual have direct share of them. The quality of a nation's manpower development is in direct proportion to the quality of its educational system. So a country with shaky and porous examination system will have very poor manpower, as the psychometric value of certificates obtained through malpractice in examinations will be worthless. Consequently, the country is the first loser of such a system. It is obvious that examination malpractices have bedeviled public examinations in Nigeria. The problem calls for an urgent solution. It is therefore necessary to arrest the situation in order to improve the quality of education in Nigeria.

## **Curtailing Malpractices in Public Examinations**

In order to achieve a good quality education in Nigeria, it is necessary to curtail examination malpractices particularly because of its grave consequences. Several measures have been suggested in the past. Ayoka (1997) suggested registration of security agents called "The Nigerian Examination Police" whose members will pretend to be candidates and sit to take examinations with other candidates.

The concept of continuous assessment was introduced into the Nigerian educational system by the National Policy on Education (1998). According to the Federal Ministry of Education (1985), the objective of continuous assessment is, among many others, to reduce examination malpractices. Continuous assessment may be viewed as a method of finding out what the pupils have gained from learning activities in terms of knowledge, thinking and reasoning, character development and industry. Various tools may be used for finding out the outcomes of these learning activities. These include tests, assignments, projects, observation, interviews and questionnaire. The obtained score of the pupil will then be used to aid further development. Besides, accurate record of such data are needed for further use and for the purpose of providing information to parents, guardians and others who can use them for the benefit of the pupil. The Section of the National Policy on Education (1998) captioned Philosophy of Education in paragraph 7(7) prescribes that *educational assessment and evaluation will be liberalized by basing them in whole or in part on continuous assessment of the progress of individual*. It is stated that at both junior and senior secondary school levels, continuous assessment of pupils takes 30% while the final examination takes 70% of overall performances.

It is here suggested that the score of 30% allocated to continuous assessment be upgraded to 70% and that of the final examination be reduced to 30%. The continuous assessment places value on evaluating the pupils' outcome not only of the cognitive but also the affective and psychomotor development, and the use of such evaluation for the proper tracing of the students. Nyang (1979) observed that continuous assessment would serve as a source of motivation for students who are made to be aware of their academic performance

at regular intervals would be motivated to maintain and improve upon their study habit. It also helps to monitor the learners' development. This, in essence, will not make the learner to be desperate when it is time to write the final examination, which carries only 30% of the over — all assessment.

Ojerinde and Falayajo (1983) and Obanya (1984) observed that the continuous assessment would enable the teachers to be flexible and innovative in their instruction. This means that the teachers, having used the right instructional techniques and having graded up to 70% of the learning outcomes will have no reason to aid and abet during the final examination which carries only 30%. Moreover Obanya (1984) stated that continuous assessment provides the basis for more effective guidance of the child. This, in effect, means that the pupils would have been properly guided against examination malpractice both at school level and public examination level.

Without any doubt, a higher continuous assessment score option has much implication and challenges for teachers and principals in particular. The reason is that these groups of people will now assume the functions of academic managers, administrators, counsellors and financial managers. Principals as academic managers should understand what continuous assessment is and what is involved. It is essential that teachers know how to construct and use various types of standardized tests (Ipaye, 1982; Okeke, 1983). Setting good tests is not easy and to ensure that continuous assessment programme is successful, the task must be made easier for teachers.

The additional load of work brought by continuous assessment will require more staff for adequate record keeping and processing of data. Therefore the staff/students ratio of 1:30 as recommended by NPE (1981) has to be reviewed. High quality teachers are essential for the successful implementation of this higher continuous assessment score option. Government should therefore ensure that only professionally qualified and well — motivated teachers are allowed to teach in all secondary schools.

The higher continuous assessment option requires adequate funding and prudent management of available resources. The principals and their teachers

should be able to project their budget appropriately and manage money judiciously. Teachers and Parents' Association philanthropic organizations and individuals could be of help.

### **Recommendation and Conclusion**

To curtail the rate of examination malpractices in public examinations in particular, there is need for attention to be shifted from high score of 70% in final examinations to making the continuous assessment in schools 70% because of its. Reducing the final examination to 30% will make candidates not to be desperate to pass and they would be properly developed at each stage of their schooling. This recommendation opposes the concept of a once for all assessment in the form of an end of course examination as is presently done. In the new dispensation of 70% continuous assessment in schools, it is expected that there will be a series of continuously updated measurements. These judgments will be based on weekly tests of the learners' performance in a variety of situations. The students' written and practical work and their contribution to the work of the class as a whole should be taken into account. This implies systematic testing at established points and a feedback into the system too. Moreover, the school ensures that everything the student does counts. In other words, there must be continuous updating of students' performance in the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains of behaviour. All these will ensure that cumulative judgements rather than the result of a single examination form the basis of the final assessment and evaluation of the students' capabilities. In conclusion, examination malpractices can be curtailed through the joint effort of the government, parents, school authorities, students and the general public. If everybody sees that the higher continuous assessment score option is properly implemented and everybody realizes that examination malpractice is an evil that should be checked, then it will be gradually curtailed. It is when this has been achieved that it can be said that there is quality assurance in public examinations in Nigeria.

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