

# **Examination Malpractice: A Stigma on School Effectiveness in Nigeria**

**By**

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## ***Abstract***

*The paper opens with the meaning of school effectiveness and the need for examination as a method of assessment of students who have gone through one level of education or the other. It discusses the incidence of examination malpractice in Nigeria, as well as its prevalence and forms. The paper concludes with a discussion of efforts made so far in curbing examination malpractice in Nigeria and the examination malpractices decree 33 of 1999.*

## ***Introduction***

The National Policy on Education (FGN, 2004) stipulates that there is need for functional education for the promotion of a progressive and united Nigeria. To this end, school programmes need to be relevant, practical and comprehensive; while interest and ability should determine individual direction in education (section 1 paragraph 4b). If the school system is able to determine individual's direction in education, then we can say that the school is effective. Scheerens (1992) categorized school effectiveness into four; one is having high achievement among all student groups; secondly, having high student and staff attendance; thirdly, having high staff and students' satisfaction, and fourthly, having high public confidence in schools. In order to have high achievement among all student groups and high public confidence in schools, there must be an acceptable method of measuring the achievement of students which in turn would promote public confidence in the school.

The search for a measure of students' achievement has led to the adoption of examination among other measures. Examination, therefore, is the series of questions asked in order to determine whether or not the students have mastered what they are supposed to know or acquire. Although, students'

performance in examinations may not be the true reflection of their ability, however, it is the closest indicator of the extent of the students' achievement in a given skill. Hence, examination becomes a tool we can adopt in determining the level of students' ability. We can therefore use examinations to categorize students into high and low ability. Those with high ability are given preference above those with low ability. Of course, those with low ability would want the same preferential treatment and in the bid to demonstrate high ability, they go into all kinds of vices. One of such vices is examination malpractice.

Examination malpractice as used by Nwahunanya (2004) is the act of omission or commission intended to make a student pass examination without relying absolutely on his/her independent ability or resources. Nwana (2000), while discussing aberrations on the Nigerian educational system stated that examination malpractice as the massive and unprecedented abuse of rules and regulations pertaining to internal and public examinations, beginning from the setting of such examinations through the taking of the examinations, their marking and grading, to the release of the results and the issuance of certificates. Odongbo, (2002) says that examination malpractice refers to an act of wrong doing carried out by a candidate or groups of candidates or any other person with the intention to cheat & gain unfair advantage in an examination. Awanbor, (2004) opines that examination malpractice is the application of unusual means to obtain a score or set of scores that is normally beyond the mental capability or the state of preparedness of a candidate for that examination. In summary, Makoju, Adewale, Nwangwu and Shuaibu (2004) say that whenever rules and regulations governing the conduct of any examination are not adhered to by parties involved (i.e. candidates and any other person involved in the conduct of examinations from setting the question to the release of result), then we can conclude that examination malpractice has occurred.

## Causes of Examination Malpractice

The study of Makoju et al (2004) reported the responses of parents of secondary school students when asked the *factors they think encourage examination malpractices in Nigeria?* Many parents (1375 out of 3289, representing 41.8 percent) indicated that questions are not related to the syllabus and as a result, examination malpractice is encouraged. There are two types of syllabi, one developed by an examination body referred to as examination syllabus and the one developed by Nigeria Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) known as teaching syllabus. Although these two syllabi should be common in scope, the report has always been that JAMB syllabus is overloaded and difficult for candidates, so candidates often times find it difficult to cope. This promotes examination malpractice. About 28 percent of the parents were of the opinion that insufficient time for writing papers encouraged examination malpractice. Insufficient time is not likely to pose a serious threat to candidates to warrant examination malpractice because if candidates know what they should write, they are not likely to have time for cheating, as they will be pre-occupied with trying to beat the time. Some parents were of the opinion that objective questions encourage examination malpractices. This is because many students have developed different skills in using their fingers to pass information to their colleagues on the “correct options” in objective tests. In the same study by Makoju et al (2004), secondary school teachers were to indicate their views on factors responsible for examination malpractice? Out of 1685 teachers, 879 (52.17%) said that students are not ready to learn. In most public schools, students are seen roaming the streets in twos and threes, some with video cassettes and some playing football. Since they are not ready to learn, the next thing they can do when examination is coming is to engage in examination malpractice. Other factors responsible for examination malpractice such as emphasis on paper qualification; parents desire for their children to pass at all cost; and corrupt supervisors and custodians of examination papers are reflections of the wider society. Apart from those two potent factors, another strong reason for examination malpractice is the emphasis on paper qualification. Until less emphasis is laid on paper qualification and we place emphasis on the skills acquired in order to function well in the *society*, the *issue of examination malpractice* will continue to persist. The craze for paper qualification is the off-

shoot of the poor implementation of our national policy on education. Emphasis is gradually being removed from proper acquisition of demonstrable skills and academic excellence to possession of paper qualification not backed up with practical experience to show for it. One social menace the governments in Nigeria have fought from one regime to another checking exam malpractice. It is a part of the on-going struggle to sanitize society.

### **Incidence and Forms of Examination Malpractice**

There had been one form of examination malpractice or the other before 1977. Since in the early 70s when mass cheating was first perpetrated in WAEC examination, it has become a national problem starting from primary schools to tertiary institutions. However, 1977 marked a watershed in the history of examination malpractice as there was an outcry on the credibility of public examinations in Nigeria by the then almighty West African Examinations Council (WAEC) which was the only organ saddled with the responsibility of conducting public examinations at that level in Nigeria. That was why a Judicial Commission of inquiry was set up headed by Justice Sogbetun to look into the affairs of the WAEC in relation to the problem of efficient conduct of examinations and prompt release of results. Among other things, the tribunal acknowledged the excessive workload of WAEC and recommended, among other things, that the workload of WAEC should be reduced by establishing some more examination bodies which could take over five of its numerous examinations (NABTEB, 1992). There are different forms of examination malpractice as categorised by WAEC. They include bringing in foreign materials to exam halls irregular activities inside and outside examination hall; collusion; impersonation; leakage; mass cheating and insult/assault on supervisors. Others include assistance of candidates by invigilators to answer or have clue to difficult concepts. Some invigilators also go to the extent of answering some parts of the question for candidates. The definition of examination malpractice does not suggest that it is limited to the time and place examination is taking place. There are malpractices we can call pre-examination, examination and post examination malpractices. In pre-examination malpractices, candidates knowing their ability offer to give something (cash or kind) to somebody (examiner, messenger, typist, examination officer, invigilator, or head of department) so that examination materials could be released to them

before hand (leakage), they then study the materials with the view to memorise answers to the questions raised in the examination question they had access to. A more important aspect of pre-examination malpractice is in the process of registering candidates for examinations. According to Ojerinde (2004), one of the commonest forms is the registration of non-school candidates for school examinations. In spite of instructions against this practice, the principals of schools continue to perpetuate this practice every year. What they do is to register candidates who are not in SS 3(the final years). Most of these candidate are no more in school and they are referred to as private candidates. Many are from urban areas, who prefer to register in less urban centres where monitoring is not likely to be strict. Since these candidates are not bonafide members of the school, they do not have any record of continuous assessment, which is compulsory for SSCE certification. The principals falsify continuous assessment results for them depending on how much money the candidates are able to pay.

Registration of too many candidates over and above the facilities available in a school is another vice some school principals employ to perpetuate examination malpractice. With limited facilities and unlimited candidates, supervision becomes extremely question difficult as many candidates are crammed into a hall. A situation was reported where 200 candidates registered in a school which equally has a hall that could accommodate them, but the candidates were scattered over 5 classrooms with 40 candidates in each. The arrangement was such that when the supervisor was in one of the classes that were so wide apart, dictation would be going on in the remaining 4 classrooms (Ojerinde, 2004). The registrar of that body whose examination was being written then ordered that all of them should be accommodated in one hall. Protest from the candidates made the registrar to understand that cooperation fees of N300.00 had been paid by each of the candidates in that school.

Registration to allow for impersonation is another type of pre-examination malpractice. There are two types of impersonation. In the first form, a candidate registers with his/her names but submits the photograph of another person, the mercenary, with whom arrangement has been made to take the examination on his/her behalf. In this arrangement, the candidate may enter another arrangement with the invigilator to replace the mercenary's photographs with

his/her own or the mercenary submits a poorly taken photograph which will fade within a few months of production. When they fade and replacement is demanded, those of the original candidate are then submitted. The second aspect of impersonation is a situation where a candidate pays for two examination registration forms, he/she completes one and his/her mercenary completes the other, both go for the examination, the mercenary writes in the name of the one who hired while the original candidate may not bother to submit anything. Another aspect of pre-examination activities resulting into examination malpractice is the fact that some principals inflate the continuous assessment results of their candidates which is likely to increase the number of passes in the school and thereby present a false information about the school as one of the best schools in order to be in the good book of the ministry of education of their state. This is an extract of a registrar's report

*In the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate (ULES), a policeman detected a signal in his walkie-talkie. He traced the signal to a man inside a vehicle, the man was apprehended and it was discovered that there was a candidate in the examination hail with a Plastic of Paris (POP) around his left arm. In the POP was embedded a transmitter. The father was receiving questions from the boy and he was sending answer to him in the hail.*

During examinations, materials which candidates feel could assist them answer the questions could be brought in. This form of examination malpractice involves copying something in a small sheet of paper like the size of a complementary card which could be tucked into shoes or mathematical sets, the information could be written on unexposed parts of the body like tattoo on girls' thighs. Materials could also be written on palms, his and other parts of the body. Super print is copying information on pieces of cloth like, brassieres, inner lining of shirts, jackets blouses and underskirts (Okwonko, 2002). Another method of bringing in foreign materials which has been prepared by 'mercinery' into the examination hail is through courier or contractor. The courier or contractor may be junior students, examination assistants or even policemen that

are charged with the responsibility of ensuring order in the examination hall. Walkie-talkie or mobile phones are used by examination malpractice perpetrators. This is done in text form so as not to attract much attention. If a candidate is able to smuggle out a question paper especially the objective test, the 'mercenary' outside of the examination hall could text the correct options to the candidate inside the examination hall. Candidates could also collude by discussing or passing materials among themselves with a view of copying from each other. There are two types of copying, a candidate copying from his neighbour without the knowledge of the neighbour (giraffe) and the other type has something to do with mutual agreement of the two parties. Where both of them are copying each other (two-way traffic), we also have what Ojo (1999) referred to as 'ECOWAS,' a symbiotic relationship between or among two or more candidates. Other forms of examination malpractice during examination could be impersonation where somebody writes an examination for another. Another form of examination malpractice is when un-cooperating supervisors / invigilators are assaulted / insulted. There are cases of candidates insulting un-cooperating supervisors / invigilators, some go to the extent of intimidating them with weapons like gun or acid. Other types of insult could be verbal attack and threat to invigilators. Apart from insult and intimidation, some candidates go as far as pouring acid on invigilators. A case of an invigilator who was thrown down from a 2 storey building was reported by some eye — witnesses at Ijebu— Ode in Ogun State because all attempts to bribe the said invigilator proved abortive. Mass cheating is another form of examination malpractice that takes place during examinations. This could involve a teacher dictating solutions to questions, writing on the chalkboard for candidates to copy or use of courier to import materials that could be distributed to the candidates. This could be detected if all the candidates in a particular centre make the same mistake, for example spelling mistake. This is a pointer to the fact that there is a mass cheating in that centre or school.

Post examination malpractice includes such activities after examination as a supervisor leaving the envelope containing examination scripts open on previous arrangement, so that submission of script(s) written outside the hall could be included in the envelope before sealing and submitting it to the examination body. Substitution is another method of post examination

malpractice. In this case, a candidate submits his/her script and later, another script (already prepared for him/her is brought in under special arrangement and the supervisor is supposed to remove the first one submitted and substitute the one brought in from outside. In some cases, the supervisor may forget and that implies that a candidate has two scripts against his number but with different handwritings. Another form of post examination malpractice has to do with officials in the computer department of an examination body changing a candidate's result on a computer storage facility, or illegally issuing certificates or statements of result to candidates to enable them gain admission into tertiary institutions or gain appointment.

Other forms of post examination malpractice include candidates tracing their paper to the marking centre. There was a story of a candidate who traced his paper from Enugu to Kano and another from Kano traced his to Ibadan as reported by Ojerinde (2004). Some examiners also could trace the candidate if they know how influential the parents of such a candidate are. Some candidates especially girls enclose money and photographs (especially girls) describing how they could be traced in case their papers happen to be handled by men considered to moral perverts. In higher institutions, post-examination malpractice could take the form of lobbying the examiners by begging and sending close friends and senior colleagues to the examiner to be lenient while marking. Some lecturers who are charged with the responsibility of computing scores for reasons best known to them could also change marks.

### **Prevalence of Examination Malpractice**

There was a time in Nigeria when teachers knew their students not only by names but to their family. Teachers at that time served the functions of both teachers in the school and *in loco parentes* to the students. There was a strong link between the home and the school. The parents were also in support of whatever the teacher said about a child. The home, society and school cooperated to raise the children properly. There came the history of Universal Primary Education (UPE) in Nigeria where there was an explosion of students enrolment in schools without adequate preparation in terms of staffing and classroom accommodation. The limited number of teachers remaining in the

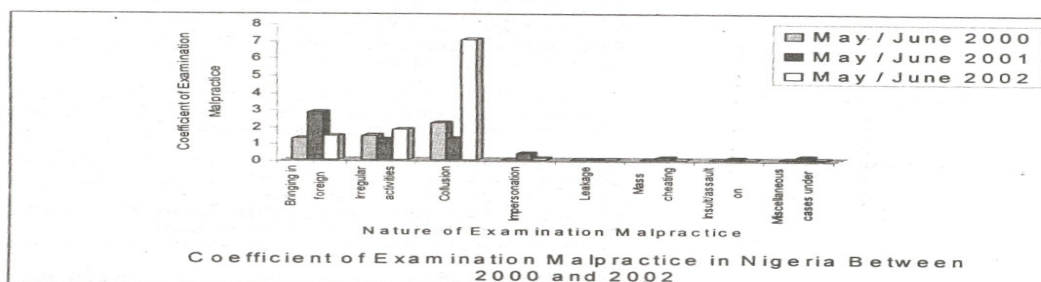
schools could no longer cope with their functions as teachers and parents. Apart from the fact that moral standards declined, teaching and learning deteriorated. Since the emphasis shifted from what one could do to what paper qualifications a person has, many students resulted to what is referred to as examination malpractice. In order that the teachers could be praised for teaching their students well, they in turn were caught in the web of aiding and abetting examination fraud.

Students now devise different methods of examination malpractice ranging from crude methods of giraffing to such sophisticated ones as the use of electronic calculators capable of storing information and the cell phones. Some of the information we have from WAEC indicated that as many as 54,579 out of 850,479 (i.e. 6.22 percent) were involved in examination malpractice of one sort or the other in the November/December examination. Table I reveals the nature of examination malpractice recorded by WAEC for 2000, 2001 and 2002 May/June Examinations.

Table I Examination Malpractice Recorded by WAEC SSCE Examinations (2000 and 2002)

Type of Examination Malpractice	2000		2001		2002	
	No of Candidate involved	% of total registered candidates	No of candidate involved	% of total registered candidates	No of candidate involved	% of total registered Candidates
Bringing in foreign materials	1 3064	1.274	244864	2.83	13014	1.430
Irregular activities inside and examination hall	14898	1.453	10909	1.24	16479	1.811
Leakage	-	-	-	-	-	-
Mass cheating	-	-	1568	0.18	-	-
Insult/assault on supervision	359	0.035	1049	0.12	263	0.028
Miscellaneous cases under rule (B)	445	0.082	1676	0.19	700	0.076

Source: Test Development Division WAEC 2002



Collusion appears to be one of the most rampant forms of examination malpractice as many of the candidates in May/ June 2001 and 2002 were reported to be involved in it. We can see that WAEC is intensifying efforts to ensure that its papers are not allowed to leak as leakage for the 3 years is nil.

### **Efforts so far in Curbing Examination Malpractice**

There are different approaches adopted by different examination bodies, federal, state and local governments, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and concerned individuals. A good example is the just concluded head count in Oyo State, where the commissioner for education led a team to schools to ascertain the number of students in each school in Oyo state in a bid to forestall examination malpractices. WAEC also has embarked on public campaign on the effects of examination malpractices and the punishments attached to each offence using handbills, posters, jingles, seminars and workshops. NECO also conducted workshops, seminars and public enlightenment campaigns. An NGO known as Exam Ethics Project has worked tirelessly on examination malpractices. Concerned individuals like Jegede (2003) and Nwahunanya (2004) have made effort to check this vice. The federal government in the bid to curb examination malpractice enacted Act. 33 of 1999.

Existing Policy Analysis :One of last decrees issued before the exit of the military government in 1999 is known as Act 33 of 1999. The decree spelt out the types of examination malpractices and the punishment. The following is an extract from the decree in terms of offence and punishment. There are so many offences and associated punishments but a selected few key cases are presented below.

S/N                    **Offences and their Punishment**

1. Cheating at Examination **Candidate:** Under 18 years, a fine of N 100,000 or imprisonment for a term not exceeding 3 years or to both such fine and imprisonment. **Principal, Teacher, Invigilator, Examiner, agent or employee of the examination body:** Imprisonment for term of 4 years without option of fine. **Any other offender.** Imprisonment for a term of 4 years without the option of a fine.
  
2. Stealing of question paper A fine of N100,000 or imprisonment for a term not exceeding or another candidate's 3 years or to both such fine and imprisonment, answer script.
  
3. Impersonation **Candidate:** Under 18 years, a fine of N100,000 or imprisonment for a term not exceeding 3 years or to both such fine and imprisonment. **Principal, Teacher, Invigilator, Examiner, agent or employee of the examination body:** Imprisonment for a term of 4 years without the option of fine. **Any other offender** Imprisonment for a term of 4 years without the option of fine.
  
4. Alteration or tempering **Candidate: Under 18 years, a fine of N100,000 or imprison-** with a document issued meant for a term not exceeding 3 years or to both such fine to a candidate in relation and imprisonment, to examination Principal, Teacher, Invigilator, Examiner, agent or employee of the examination body: imprisonment for a term of 4 years without the option of fine. **Any offender: imprisonment for a term of 4 years without the option of a fine.**
  
5. Disturbance at examinations **Candidate: Under 18 years, a fine of N100,000 or - use of offensive weapon, acting imprisonment for a term not exceeding 3 years or to both or inciting other persons to act such fine and imprisonment. in a disorderly manner. Principal, Teacher, Invigilator, Examiner, agent or employee of the examination body: Imprisonment for a term of 4 years without**

the option of fine. Any other offender. Imprisonment for term of 4 years without the option of a fine.

One of the problems of executing Act 33 of 1999 is the fact that it is often difficult to catch candidates who engage in examination malpractice because of the lack of judicial evidences. Those who may be asked to witness may not want to own up and that complicates the enforcement of the punishment on defaulters.

## **Conclusion**

Examination malpractice is one of the bottlenecks associated with the conduct of examinations in Nigeria. Although examination malpractice started before the early 70s, the situation became worse in 1977 when people began to question the credibility of examinations conducted by the West African Examinations Council which was the only organ saddled with the responsibility of conducting public examinations in Nigeria then. The forms of examination malpractice that have been identified include bringing in foreign materials; irregular activities inside and outside examination hall; collusion; impersonation; leakage; mass cheating; insult/assault on supervisors and others. If less emphasis is placed on paper qualification, it is likely that many of our students would not engage in examination malpractice. It is the believe of some educators that if continuous assessment practice is encouraged and is done and the problem of comparability of standard is addressed, each school can then administer its examination which can serve as entry requirement for students who are seeking admission and certification for those who are finishing from such schools.

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