

## EXAMINATION MALPRACTICE IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN NIGERIA: WHAT SUSTAINS IT?

Jimoh, Basil Olatunbosun

E-mail address for correspondence : jimohbasil\_2009@rocketmail.com

Dept Of Educational Foundations And Management  
Faculty Of Education  
Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma

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**Abstract :** *In Nigeria, the last two decades have witnessed an alarming rate of increase in incidents of examination misconduct especially at secondary school level. Evidences abound of increasing incidents of examination malpractice by students, teachers and parents. Examination malpractice has become so widespread that there is virtually no examination anywhere at all levels and even outside the formal school system that there is no one form of sharp practice or the other. Every examination season witnesses the emergence of new and ingenious ways of cheating. This paper addresses the problem of examination malpractice in secondary schools in Nigeria, what sustains it, the consequences of examination malpractice and the ways through which examination malpractice could be curbed in order to give credibility to the examination process in the country.*

**Keywords:** *Examination malpractice; sustain; anomie*

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### INTRODUCTION

The value and functionality of any educational system lie in its ability to actualize the goals of education. In educational systems, world over, the examination process makes the difference. The goals of national educational systems and indeed national development become like mirage if examination ethics is not encouraged and instituted (Nwadiani, 2005). Till date, examinations still remain the best tool for an objective assessment and evaluation of what learners have achieved after a period of schooling. Hence, any action that undermines examinations poses a great threat to the validity and reliability of examination results and certification.

Unfortunately, the process of examination in Nigeria secondary schools has become a “contemporary shame” (Nwadiani, 2005). This is because of the phenomenon of examination malpractice that has become endemic in the educational system. The Examination Malpractice Act (1999) explains examination malpractice as any act of omission or commission by a person who in anticipation of, before, during or after any examination fraudulently secure any unfair advantage for himself or any other person in such a manner that contravenes the rules and regulations to the extent of undermining the validity, reliability, authenticity of the examination and ultimately the integrity of the certificates issued. Oluyeba and Daramola (cited in Alutu & Aluede, 2006) remarked that examination malpractice is any irregular behaviour exhibited by a candidate or anybody charged with the conduct of examination before, during or after the examination that contravenes the rules and regulations governing the conduct of such examination.

In Nigeria, the last two decades have witnessed an alarming rate of increase in incidents of examination misconduct. Evidences abound of increasing involvement in examination malpractice by students, teachers and parents (Vanguard, 2005; Weekend Pointer, 2005; Daily Independent, 2004). The incidence of examination malpractice has become so widespread that there is virtually no examination anywhere at all levels and outside the formal school system that there is no one form of sharp practice or the other. The incidences of examination malpractice are common everywhere and every examination season witnesses the emergence of new and ingenious ways of cheating.

Though examination malpractice is neither a recent phenomenon nor is it peculiar to Nigeria or Africa (Awanbor, 2005), the alarming rate of increase is a global issue. The alarming rate of increase in examination malpractice in secondary schools in Nigeria calls for concern from all stakeholders in the education sector. It has been widely reported that parents and teachers aid and abet examination malpractice directly or indirectly. (Vanguard, 2005; Weekend Pointer, 2005; Daily Independent, 2004 Nigerian Tribune, 2009). Parents go to the extent of bribing their way through to ensure that their wards get unearned grades while teachers encourage examination malpractice because they lack the zeal to work but want to be praised for job not done (Alutu & Aluede, 2006). According to Omoluabi and Uzoka (cited in Alutu & Aluede, 2006), the value system in Nigeria has broken down completely and so adults and youths alike act without moral scruples. This is the reason why examination malpractice still thrives despite its grave consequences on the social political and economic structures of the nation.

Examination Malpractice Act No. 33 of 1999 stipulates a minimum punishment of fifty thousand naira (#50,000.00) and a maximum of five years imprisonment, without option of fine, for violators of the offences stipulated in the Act. The offences are: cheating at examinations, stealing of question papers, impersonation, disturbances at examination, obstruction of supervision, forgery of result slip, breach of duty, conspiracy and aiding, etc. Government, examination bodies, and other concerned citizens have made a lot of efforts to forestall the incidences of examination malpractice and the problems associated with the conduct of examinations in Nigeria. Although the efforts seem to be yielding some results, yet incidences of examination malpractice still feature prominently in the school system. In 2006, the Federal Ministry of Education blacklisted and derecognized 324 secondary schools across the nation as centres for conducting public examinations from 2007 to 2010. The distribution of the schools that were found guilty of examination malpractice is shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: Examination Malpractice in Nigerian Secondary Schools**

Zone	No of schools involved	%
North-Central	54	16.6
North-East	08	2.5
North-West	12	3.6
South-East	48	14.8
South-South	116	36.0
South-West	86	26.5
Total	324	100.0

Source: Week End Times, 17th & 18th February, 2007, p. 4

Table 1 shows the prevalence of examination malpractice in secondary schools in Nigeria. It occurs in all geo-political zones in the country. The South-South zone has 116 schools, followed by South-West zone with 86 schools. The North-East zone has 8 schools which is the least in the six zones.

The phenomenon of examination malpractice seems to be aggravated by the large scale and shameful involvement of dishonest and greedy teachers, school heads, parents and all those who take part in examination administration (Ijaiya, 1998). The prominence assumed by this malady in the school system has become a source of concern to stakeholders in the education industry. Every examination season witnesses new and ingenious methods of cheating. The examination process has become endangered to the extent that certification has almost lost its credibility in the country. Certificates no longer seem to reflect skill and competence. Accusing fingers have been pointed at teachers, school heads, parents, students, examination officials and even security agents as those responsible for examination malpractice in the school system. It is against this background that this paper discusses the conditions that sustain examination malpractice in Nigeria and the ways through which this problem can be resolved.

**Conditions that Sustain Examination Malpractice in Nigeria**

The phenomenon of examination malpractice is influenced by many factors. According to Ivowi (1997), lack of confidence as a result of inadequate preparation, peer influence, societal influence, parental support and poor facilities in schools are some of the factors responsible for examination malpractices. Writing in the same vein, Badmus (2006), Awanbor (2005), Nwandiani (2005), Okafor (2006), Ayua (2006), Azare (2006) and Aminu (2006) identified school programmes, teaching learning environment, the teacher, the student, over value of certificates, decadence in the

Nigerian society and parental support as some factors responsible for examination malpractice in the Nigerian educational system. As to what sustains examination malpractice in the country, the writer holds the opinion that societal apathy, which is summed up in the term “anomie” is what sustains examination malpractice in Nigeria.

### **Anomie and Examination Malpractice**

Anomie is conceived as a breakdown in the cultural structure due to disjunction between the cultural norms and goals and the socially structured capacities of members of the group to act in accord with them (Merton, 1968). In this conception, cultural values may help to produce behaviour that is at odds with the mandates of the values themselves. Anomie gives birth to aberrant behaviour and non-conformity, which is a symptom of dissociation between culturally prescribed goals and socially prescribed means for realizing these goals. A society that places exceptionally strong emphasis on goal achievement without a corresponding emphasis on institutionalized means of achieving these goals is bound to exert pressures on some members of the society that may eventually resort to the use of any technically expedient means in achieving these goals irrespective of whether the means employed is legitimate or not. The process whereby exaltation of the end generates a de-institutionalization of the means to the end occurs in many societies where the two components of the social structure are not highly integrated.

Contemporary Nigerian society places great emphasis on success goals without equivalent emphasis on institutional means of attaining these goals. The society is characterized by a heavy emphasis on success and wealth without a corresponding emphasis on legitimate means and avenues to be used in achieving success. Everything in Nigeria these days is driven by the desire for success irrespective of the means used in achieving success. The country has become a commercial venture and no longer a place for selfless service. Everyone is out to make quick money and patriotism is endangered. There is a disjunction between the culturally acclaimed goals and the institutional procedures for achieving these goals. The attenuation of this over time is the anomie that now characterizes the Nigerian society. The society, as it is constituted today, is founded on faulty/fragile education, political, economic, physical and social environment that cannot produce a better tomorrow (Ojeikere, 2004). The country is bedeviled with social and economic ills such as cultism, moral decadence, embezzlement, social injustice, corruption, and so on. It has become a society where the custom is to decorate miscreants, knaves, scam artists and violators of national trust with national honours and appoint them to exalted public offices (Ndibe, cited in Ojeikere, 2004).

The social vices bedeviling the society have permeated the entire segments of the education sector. The manifestations are moral decadence, loss of family values, cultism and examination malpractice that has become endemic the education system of the country. The societal emphasis on success-goals, irrespective of the means employed in achieving these goals, has pressurized some participants in the education industry to strain toward anomie. Such participants have resorted to the use of illegitimate procedures in achieving success in examinations. The disjunction between culturally acclaimed goals and the institutionalized means of achieving these goals coupled with the cultural context of great emphasis on success-goals without equivalent emphasis upon institutional means of attaining these goals have created an environment that predisposes some students, teachers, parents and others to examination malpractice. Students are involved because they want to achieve success; parents are involved because they want good grades for their wards; teachers and others are involved because of the financial, material and other intangible gains derivable from involvement in examination malpractice.

Examination malpractice, a variety of corruption is sustained by whatever sustains corruption in the country. Capitalism has eroded the moral values of the Nigerian society. Social, economic, political, religious and educational vices are celebrated and rewarded in the country while virtue is punished. How can students, teachers and others shun examination malpractice when they “see criminals being set free through legalisms and court room gymnastics or worse, through wretched and criminal influence peddling?” (Aminu, 2006).

Closely related to the moral decadence in the society is the greed for money. The monetary rewards accruing to participants of examination malpractice is enormous and unimaginable. If the police can openly accept bribe on the highways, why would those involved in the conduct of examinations not accept monetary incentives to subvert the conduct of examinations? Parents and guardians are ready to give encouragement and pay costs because they desperately want their children and wards to acquire certificates.

Furthermore, there is the issue of over-value of certificates. The problem of over value of certificates could be traced to the colonial past when the colonial masters issued certificates as testimonials to the natives who had undergone some

form of instruction in administration. Such administrative certificates instantly catapulted the holders from life ordinary and transformed them into local economic and social superiors. Certificates or similar credentials became instant means of considerable social and economic leverage and opportunities for future political power. Ever since, the value system had placed emphasis on certificates because of their assumed transformational power. This inherited notion has dominated and suffused the Nigerian school system so much so that the product of the system preferred to flaunt certificates and credentials rather than knowledge, skill and competence. Consequently, students engage in short-cut means of acquiring these certificates during examinations. In the same vein, parental indiscipline and abuse of wealth sustain the phenomenon of examination malpractice. Many parents believe that with their wealth they can catapult their children to any heights in the society even if it involves buying question papers and bribing teachers and invigilators to ensure that their children pass examinations.

The introduction of the Global System of Mobile Telephones (GSM) in the country has revolutionized examination malpractice in the school system. The emergence of technological devices has spawned new and more sophisticated approaches to dishonest conduct during examinations. A lot of academic information is stored in handsets for direct use in examination halls or for onward transfer via SMS to other students any where in the country. Students with personal digital assistants or cell phones can beam or call data silently from across a classroom, or with a cell phone from anywhere off the school environment. The society does not have control over its communication system.

### **Dangers and Consequences of Examination Malpractice**

Examination malpractice is a social evil that can damage society to the extent of possibly leading to a failed state. It has very serious economic, political and social consequences. In the last ten years alone, the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) had to cancel the results of 814, 699 candidates in its May/June Examinations (Aminu, 2006). Considering the cost of buying examination forms alone, this amounts to a waste of about 2.5 billion naira. Apart from direct wastage of money, there is also wastage in the form of opportunity costs to the nation and society.

Examination malpractices render the goals of education invalid. The actualization of the goals of education will continue to be a mirage if the scourge of examination malpractice is not eradicated from the system. The country will end up producing graduates who lack the knowledge, skill and competence to exploit the resources of the nation. Besides, the graduates will lack the right type of values and attitude needed for survival in a globalized economy.

Malpractice leads to irreversible loss of credibility. A country that becomes noted for examination malpractice loses international credibility. The implication is that documents emanating from such country will be treated with suspicion. Consequently, certificates awarded by such country's educational institutions are disbelieved. Such country's educational institutions are as good as dead as far as international cooperation in education is concerned.

The fight against corruption cannot succeed if examination malpractice continues to be endemic in the educational system. As leaders of tomorrow who have gone through a school system characterized by academic fraud and dishonesty, the youths of the country will sow and nurture this fraudulent behaviour in any organization they find themselves. They will be destined to a life of crime, fraud and corrupt practices. The consequences of examination malpractice are grave as elaborated above. What is the way out of this educational quagmire?

### **The Way Forward**

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. Since previous approaches aimed at curbing this hydra-headed problem seem to have yielded no dividends, the writer advocates the following strategies for curbing the problem:

### **Sincere Implementation of Legislation by Government and Other Agencies**

In the past and even recently, decrees, laws, edicts (Decree No. 27 of 1973, Special Tribunal (Miscellaneous Offences) Act Cap 410, Examination Malpractice Act No. 33 of 1999) have been promulgated and enacted with sanctions and penalties spelt out for offenders and participants in examination malpractice. But these penalties have not been effectively enforced by the authorities and bodies initiating them because of the *Nigerian factor*. In addition, these laws lack institutional framework for the implementation of their provisions (Orbih, 2006). Since earlier approaches have not curbed examination malpractices, the writer is of the view that a more pragmatic approach to the problem should be adopted. Experience in the fight against corruption in Nigeria has shown that only the creation of a special commission (such as ICPC and EFCC) can address adequately this crisis facing the education sector. To this end, an Examination Malpractice Commission should be created to address this social malaise. According to Orbhi (2006), such a body should be independent and empowered to have its team of investigators and prosecutors. In order to facilitate its quick dispensation of justice, a schedule of rules should be made to side tract the prevailing procedural rules that often lead to inordinate delays. In addition, such a body should be independent, devoid of government interference, and provision for its funding backed by law.

### **Empowerment of Teachers**

Teachers cannot provide experience and activities that guide students' progress towards understanding of ideas if they themselves do not know what these ideas are; neither can they provide experiences that challenge students understanding if they themselves share the same misunderstanding. The implication of this is that greater emphasis should now be placed on teacher professional development within a whole school development or improvement strategy alongside a greater focus on curriculum, instruction and performance standard of pupils (Badmus, 2006). Such programmes should be funded by government agencies and mounted by suitable learning units/centres. Teachers continuing education programme must be linked to curriculum change and practices that can influence learners' achievement. Teacher empowerment should not be limited to professional development alone; it should cover his reward system and job environment. A special welfare scheme should be introduced for teachers at all levels. In fact, teachers should have a robust salary structure. In addition to this, his job environment should be enlarged and enriched to make his job interesting and worthwhile. These put together will enhance the teacher's image and commitment to his job.

### **Less Emphasis on Certificates and Paper Qualification**

Nigeria's education system is largely certificate oriented. So much value and emphasis are placed on certificates instead of knowledge, skills and competence. According to Nwandiani (2005), the market place value and reward for the level and face value quality of certificates promote tendencies for and acts of cheating in the process of certification. Many school leavers and dropouts have certificates without knowledge and skills. Most of the social maladies like manufacture and sale of fake drugs by pharmacists, collapse of buildings, massive fraud in banks and miscarriage of justice are consequences of over emphasis and value on certificates. And if this trend is allowed to continue, the country will end up with doctors who cannot differentiate between vein and artery, lawyers who cannot differentiate between an accused person and the complainant and teachers who may not be able to spell the names of their schools correctly (Orbih, 2006). It is high time the nation took certificates no more as passports to jobs or higher education; more emphasis should be placed on the competence and skill acquisition. The implication of this is that assessment of students should no longer be based on one almighty examination; rather, it should be continuous, from the very first day at school to the very last day. Continuous Assessment should be properly implemented. In addition, there should be re-orientation in the value system of the country.

### **Improved Funding of the Education Sector**

The education sector in Nigeria is grossly under funded. The inadequate funding of the public school system is the cause of other problems that have undermined quality in the sector. Nigeria's funding efforts of education is low, and its budgetary priority for the education sector is even lower. In 2003, out of a national budget of 765.1 billion naira, only 13.9 billion was allocated to education, representing, 1.83% (Post Express, 2003) as against UNESCO's 26%

recommendation. Studies have shown that space facilities and equipment are in short supply at all levels of education (NAE, 2004; Omoifo et al, 2002 and Okobia, 2006). The Nigerian Academy of Education Report (2004) showed that teacher commitment was severely affected by their level of job satisfaction. Teachers were most dissatisfied by their workload, school facilities and services, professional development and reward system. In the same vein, graduates and other professionals from tertiary institutions reported poor study conditions in their institutions (Omoifo, et al cited in Badmus (2006)). One of the consequences of this is involvement in academic fraud to cover the deficiency of under funding. With space facilities in short supply, examination halls will always be over crowded. An improvement on the current funding efforts will provide conducive teaching and learning environment devoid of academic fraud and other sharp practices associated with the assessment process in the school system.

### **Campaigns and Seminars on the Dangers of Examination Malpractice**

To be able to curb examination malpractices, there should be continuous grassroots campaigns and seminars organized by all stakeholders in the education sector on the dangers associated with examination malpractices. This will help to sensitize and conscientize the people. These campaigns will help the people to internalize the true values of life, and over time shed the vices associated with their existence. As the attitudes of the people change, external misbehaviours will also be positively affected. The examination Ethics Project (a non-governmental organization) will make large scale and far reaching impact in this regard. In addition, these seminars and campaigns will help restore the lost cherished moral values of honesty, hardwork, dedication and uprightness that hitherto characterized the Nigerian society.

### **Special Welfare Package for Examination Officials**

In addition to the above measures, a special welfare package should be put in place for examination officials to discourage them from financial and material inducements from students, parents and others who may want to subvert examination process. These examination officials include teachers who invigilate examinations, supervisors who oversee the conduct of examinations in schools, officers of examination bodies who monitor the conduct of examinations and law enforcement agents who in charge of security in examination centres.

### **Conclusion**

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 effort will end up being an exercise in futility.

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