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# EXAMINATION MALPRACTICE, A RECURRENT VICE IN NIGERIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM: FORMS, CAUSES, EFFECTS AND PROFFERED SOLUTIONS

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By

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## **Abstract**

*Examination malpractice is a canker worm that has eaten deep into the fabrics of Nigerian education system. It is an off-shoot of the Nigerian civil war. This was initially called “Expo 1970” and has developed from simple cheating of peeping into/copying from the next person’s/candidate’s answers or asking silently (with fear) for assistance in the examination hall etc to the advanced complex use of electronic gadgets while the supposed examination is on-going, through Short Message Service (SMS) text messages. Examinations conducting bodies such as the West African Examination Council (W.A.E.C), National Examination Council (NECO), National Board for Technical Education (NABTEC), Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (J.A.M.B) etc have from time to time black-listed schools and examination centres that compromise integrity to succumb to such “sharp practices”, but that did not deter them. Employers of labour and Admission Boards find it extremely difficult now to discern genuine results/certificates because of fakes. It is against this back drop that this paper x-rays examination malpractices in Nigerian education system and its effects on the wider society which extend its impact on regards to the global image of the country. This paper finally proffers some solutions for an improved Nigeria; to be in consonance with her stand in the National Policy on Education which views education in Nigeria as an Instrument “par excellence” (NPOE:4)*

Examination malpractice has become a bane of Nigerian education system. It is a canker worm that has eaten deep into the fabrics of Nigerian education system. It is an off-shoot or after-math of the Nigerian civil war. This was initially called “expo 1970” and has developed from simple cheating of peeping into/copying from the next person’s/candidate’s answer scripts, asking silently (with fear) for assistance in examination hall etc to the advanced/complex electronic gadgets assisted forms operated from inside, outside the examination hall and even from outside the shores of the country while the supposed examination is on-going, through Short Message Service (SMS) text messages.

**Examination:** Examination is the focal point, the pivot around which the whole system of education revolves for certification. The success or failure of any education system depends, to a large extent, on the credibility or other wise of its system of examination. Examination, therefore is a vital instrument that should be handled with utmost care. It is against this back drop that it becomes necessary to take a hard look on examination system in Nigeria in order to inject some sanity into it for it to actually serve the purposes it purports to serve. In the main, every examination worth its name must have validity and reliability to sustain the education system at all levels.

**Examination Malpractice:** Examination malpractice could be defined as act of deliberate wrong doings contrary to official examination rules and regulations designed to place some candidates at unfair advantages or disadvantages. Examination malpractice could be seen as any illegal act committed by a student single handedly or in collaboration with others like fellow students, teachers, invigilators, supervisors, parents, printers etc. before, during or after an examination in order to obtain unmerited scores or grades. Examination malpractice could also correctly be seen as academic dishonesty, and defined as “any act of omission and commission which invalidates the reliability of examination and compromises the code of honour, truth and integrity and which the search for and transfer of knowledge revolve” (Excel African, 2012 :11). In the views of Onyechere (2011:98.), “Examination malpractice is any act of omission or commission which compromises the validity, reliability and integrity of any examination”

### **Forms of Examination Malpractice**

Some known forms of examination malpractice in Nigeria include: Inter-alia:

1. Impersonation
2. Allotment of choice examination centres
3. Appointment of choice invigilators/supervisors
4. Divulging/leaking questions by syndicates/setters
5. Sorting/sale of scores and grades
6. Changing/swapping of answer booklets
7. Smuggling out, the question papers
8. Smuggling in pre-prepared answers/answer booklets
9. Addition to answer booklets after examinations
10. Using text messages (SMS) to send out and in questions/answers from examination halls
11. Storing answers and formulae in the phones for use in the examination halls.
12. Misconduct, carrying offensive weapons.
13. Refusing/resisting the lawful orders of supervisory staff, threatening or assaulting the invigilating staff
14. Admission racket

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15. Handouts syndrome
16. Missing scripts scam
17. Project fee scam
18. Clearance fees scam

Of the above-enumerated malpractice forms, one would wish to explain a few, thus:

1. **Impersonation:** This malpractice is in various ways. On the whole, it is a situation where a wrong candidate sits in for another in an examination. This impersonation cuts across all levels of the education system. In external examinations like J.A.M.B, the two or more collaborators start early to play pranks with their passports under the same name. In classroom situation, you find one student writing and submitting assignments and tests for his or her absentee-friends. At times, higher level students sit in for their lower level friends who deem some courses difficult. Cases abound where some people are paid to even run a full programme for less brilliant but rich adults. It is common with politicians who desire these certificates but cannot bend down again to class room instructions. They buy the candidates, collude with course lecturers and dish out money to quell any consequences, since the “end justifies the means”
2. **Sorting and Sale of Scores and Grades:** This is a practice where candidates/students buy scores and grades with either cash or kind or both from some gullible-lecturers. In that case, grades depend on amounts paid and the extent of satisfaction rendered in kind. In other words, scores and grades are function of bargaining powers
3. **Using Text Messages (SMS) to Send Out/in Questions/Answers from Examination halls:** It is now a common knowledge that candidates/ students use the GSM phones to cheat in examinations. On discovering this practice, examiners/invigilators/supervisors insist on candidates dropping or switching off their phones before admittance into examination halls. Candidates text out questions to their collaborators who readily use text books to solve them correctly and text them back to the candidate(s) via same short messages services (SMS) usually put in the “silent” mode for it to be noiseless to avoid attracting the attention of the invigilators. They equally use the same means to communicate with fellow candidates in the same hall if left unchecked.
4. **Missing Scripts Scam:** This is peculiar to some unscrupulous lecturers. They would after marking students examination scripts, deliberately fail to submit or hand in their results on some courses in the pretext that the scripts are missing. The affected students will be compelled to pay reasonable amount before the

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“missing” scripts are “found” and the results recorded and forwarded to the appropriate places.

5. **Project Fee Scam:** This is another practice from some lecturers without conscience. Students are made to pay some sums of money before their project topics are approved, graded internally and/or submitted to external examiners. Some lecturers go to the extent of insisting to write the project for the students, type and bind them at exorbitant charges. What an aberration of academics!

### **Causes of Examination Malpractice**

Several factors are responsible for the examination malpractices prevalent in the country today. Each malpractice has its own peculiar cause(s), but generally self-defeat and poor/inadequate preparation for any examination on the part of the students/candidates coupled with Nigeria’s emphasis on “paper qualification”/certificates rather than “practicality”, contribute immensely to the examination malpractice malaise.

1. **Psychological indisposition:** Students and parents are no longer psychologically disposed to accept failures in examinations, no matter the level or class. They view failure as an anetema/stigma as never-do-well. Instead of allowing their children and wards to repeat failed classes, they (parents) go all out to influence/entice teachers to change reports. They openly request for “promotion on trial” to the next class for their children/wards. With this kind of upbringing, it gets into the children’s psyche that failure is a taboo, and that success in any examination must be pursued at all cost through fair or fowl means.
2. **Poor reading culture:** The present generation of Nigerians has poor reading culture. They scarcely open the pages of text books to read. Statistics have shown that more than 90% of the students spend less than four hours a day to read. It has been proven that the hours available to them are spent on GSM phones – either making calls (including mid-night calls), text messaging, pinging, playing games, watching movies, chatting on face book or internet forex. They no longer carry school bags. All they need is a note book squeezed into their back pockets and a bic in the breast pocket and they saunter into the lecture halls when they feel. This perversed generation of youths sleep and wake with ear-phones drumming steady music and recorded comedies into their tympanic membrane “24X7”, and they will be nodding and swinging from side to side as lunatics. That is the Nigerian student for you.

### **Effects of Examination Malpractice**

The negative effects of examination malpractice are many, indeed too numerous to exhaust in an expose such as this. However, this paper would highlight a few.

1. casting doubts on validity and reliability of certificates of the country
2. Breeds half baked professionals and brings about the collapse of professional ethics.
3. Brain drain syndrome
4. Stifles talents as it diverts attention from true self discovery to fear and fraudulence.
5. Promotes the habits of indolence/laziness
6. Encourages mediocrity
7. Increases the propensity of failure in examinations
8. Kills constructive creativity, critical thinking and the spirit of pragmatism/self reliance

- a. **Casts Doubts on Validity and Reliability of Certificates:** Once it has been established that there is examination malpractice in the education system of any nation, certificates from that country are regarded as worthless because it takes greater efforts to determine the genuine ones. Often, certificates from such places are subjected to serious scrutiny before their holders are offered positions. Even when the products of such stigmatized countries are offered jobs, they are treated with some misgivings until they prove their mettle.
- b. **Breeds Half-Baked Professionals and Brings about Collapse of Professional Ethics:** Once the examination evaluation machinery of any education system has a question mark or is proved to be fraught with malpractices, that spells its doom. Think of the collapse of buildings, bridges and other physical structures during or after construction, the avoidable failure of corporations and institutions, the fatal medical errors, the miscarriage of justice etc, all have their roots in collapse in professional ethics in engineering, accountancy, medical, legal and other professions, (Onyechere, 2011:30). He attributed the above situation to incompetence and mediocrity enthroned in various progressions through malpractice in the admission, training, examination, certification and regulation of professionals.
- c. **Brain Drain Syndrome:** This is mass exodus of intellectuals or academics from a place to another. This happens especially when an education system loses its integrity and seriously-minded academics that uphold quality and standards dissociate themselves from the mess and migrate to other countries in search of fulfillment, self-actualization and of course, greener pasture. When this happens,

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the system will be left in a more confused state caused by such factors as examination malpractice

- d. **Stifles Talents as it Diverts Attention from True Self Discovery to Fear and Fraudulence:** Examination malpractice is a thief of talents. It robs individual of his or her innate potentials by instilling fear of failure and cheating in the individual thus, leaving his/her higher potentials undeveloped/untapped. Such individual that takes off on a wrong foot into a wrong path finds it difficult to make it in life even when he or she later discovers his or her areas of giftedness (talents). He/she never enjoys full self-actualization.
- e. **Promotes Habit of Indolence/Laziness:** Examination malpractice inculcates the habit of indolence and laziness in the fertile minds of youths by making them think that they can always achieve greatness without working for it through dishonest means which they refer to as “smart means” or “milky way”. Since they have not imbibed the habit of hard work or self-reliance from childhood, such youths (lazy tricksters) find it extremely difficult to survive when their pranks are effectively check-mated. They resort to other forms of criminalities including terrorism.
- f. **Increases Propensity of Failure in Examinations:** Examination malpractice offers false hope to success. Its “*modus operandi*” includes putting the ‘clients’ into the ‘workshop’ of tricks and falsehoods to outwit constituted examination rules and regulations. Here, these negatively-ingenious youths prepare plans A, B, C etc for their inglorious schemes. One notices that if the youths had spent only half of the time and efforts they expend on these mischiefs to turn few pages of their text books and notes, no doubt, they would pass any examination. But unfortunately, their energies and efforts are misdirected/mischannelled. Since the brain can only retrieve what it has been exposed to, like the computer, (“garbage in garbage out”), they can only demonstrate criminalities at the examination centres since they did not study, hence their obvious failure in examinations.
- g. **Kills Constructive Creativity, Critical Thinking and the Spirit of Pragmatism/Self-Reliance:** The positive thoughts that propel all genuine efforts to success are shut down by this hydra-headed monster called examination-malpractice found in education system. It is a virus that focuses its attacks on positivity. It kills constructive creativity, critical thinking and pragmatism/self-reliance by occupying the receptive minds of the youths with opposition and aggressive mentality to truncate examinations as a vital tool for the success of the education system.

### **Proffered Solutions to Examination Malpractice**

No single individual could claim having the solutions to the problems of examination malpractice. All one can do is to offer the much he/she has to better the situation. On that premise, the writer proffers the following solutions:

1. **Impersonation:** To check impersonation in institutions of higher learning, class admit cards with students' passport photos affixed and students' I.D. cards should be used to allow students into an examination or test halls. While entering scores/marks, an authenticated class list from the Head of Department should be used to avoid scoring of "ghost students". At external examinations like JAMB, candidates should be made to submit up to four (4) copies of their passport photos to be endorsed by JAMB. These photos should be taken again to their examination centres verified and re-endorsed by JAMB officials while the examination would be on. These re-endorsed photos are what should appear on the JAMB results slip to agree with the initial application photo as well as with the 3rd copy that would be sent to the Institution of 1st choice. At the primary and secondary school levels one would rely on Head Teachers' and Principals' integrity to properly always identify their pupils and students at both internal and external examinations. Erring Head Teachers or Principals may be sanctioned and this will bring some degree of sanity into examination/education system.
2. **Sorting/Sale of Scores and Grades:** Since this sordid act is both socially, economically, academically and morally condemnable, every rational being should rise up against it to install sanity. This paper suggest that concerted efforts of both SERVICOM and Anti-corruption and transparency Unit (ACTU) in institutions of higher learning would be able to stem down the raging tide of this malaise. The Academic Boards and Senates of Tertiary Institutions should attach strict and stringent sanctions against any culprit(s).
3. **Using Text Messages (SMS) to Send Out/In Questions/Answers from Examination Halls:** The use of mobile phones (Hand sets) in the examination halls should be prohibited in schools. This should be contained in the students' handbook on institution's rules and regulations and appropriate sanctions clearly stated for any offender(s). Invigilators and supervisors should also be empowered to impound such prohibited articles, when defiantly brought into the hall.
4. **Missing Scripts Scam:** Experience has shown that this act is deliberate and faked. Any lecturer that submits incomplete number of students' results, based on the class list, should be penalized making him by loose/forfeit his year's Peculiar Academic Allowance (PAA), and may be compelled to refund the students that illegally collected money.

5. **Project Fee Scam:** To guard against this ugly trend, there could be in-built checks and balances within the departments whereby lecturers meet each month to give regular progress report on their supervision. At the same time, the Head of Department holds bi-monthly similar meetings with the student-groups on project writing, appraise their challenges and progresses. This may help to curb the excesses of such unscrupulous lecturers and save students from their pangs/claws.

### **Examination Ethics Marshals (EEM) in Institutions**

It is worth the while to recommend to institutions of learning to establish, and sustain the Exam Ethics Marshals. In the words of Onyechere (2011:33)

Examinations Ethics is the respect for the rules, regulations, codes of conduct and moral principles governing examinations as well as other forms of assessment and evaluation systems. Examination ethics is the heartbeat of education. Without it, education stands naked without integrity, character and learning. Without it, there is no quality education. No individual or country achieves meaningful and sustainable success without building on a solid foundation of examination ethics.

With the emergence of this crusader group against examination malpractice in education system, one still nurses the hope that there is light at the end of the tunnel. Therefore let us embrace the EEM and its Exam Ethics club for students at all levels as a “vehicle for planting the seeds of ethical behaviour in the fertile minds of students so that catching them young, they will grow to become ethics-friendly citizens and leaders”.

### **Conclusion**

Examination malpractice is an ill-wind that blows no one any good. It is symptomatic of a harmful endemic disease in the educational system which requires urgent treatment before it reaches full blown/epidemic stage. One of these measures is to introduce effective and comprehensive legislation with stringent penalties against the use of unfair means in examinations, throughout the country, Nigeria.

Another is appealing to the fertile minds of the youths against this malaise, through the instrumentality of Exam Ethics Club in institutions from primary to tertiary levels.

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