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## Special (Miracle) Centres: Blessing or Curse to Secondary School External Examinations in Nigeria?

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### **Abstract**

*This paper focused on examination malpractices in the Nigerian secondary schools with a view to determining the pros and of cons of special centers in the educational system. Examination Malpractice was dully elucidated. Emphasis was laid on the role of the examinations preparatory centres - special centres that claim to prepare intending SSCE and UTME candidates yet end up projecting examinations malpractice in disguise. A good number of these centers tend to organize teaching and learning activities in order to assist students with deficiencies in some subject areas but on the contrary aid and abate examination malpractice with impunity. The qualifications, integrity and real objectives of people who are permitted to establish tutorial centres were equally x-rayed. Functionalist and Anomie theories explained this phenomenon in society. The paper questioned whether special centres were special in practice or examination malpractice centres in reality? It was found that many tutorial centres were actively involved in examinations malpractice even with the compliance and connivance of parents who were*

*bent on securing admissions for their children and/or wards into tertiary institutions. Effective monitoring of tutorial centres among others, were advanced as ways of addressing escalated cases of examination malpractice perpetrated in special centers.*

**Key words:** Special (miracle) Centres; Blessing; Curse; Secondary Education and External Examinations

Life unexamined according to Socrates, the great philosopher is not worth living. Thus every human being is expected to access how well or otherwise he or she lives or has fared in any endeavour embarked upon. In the same vein, examinations have been the most seemingly acceptable means of determining the degree of learning achievements made by students in various academic exercises. The formal education system has been noted for its adoption of different kinds of examinations at different levels to effect students' transition from one level of education to another. Thus for a student in Nigeria to be promoted to a new class or admitted in any institution of higher learning, he or she must have passed the required examinations precisely SSCE, UTME and Post- UTME.

In order to pass examinations very well to please oneself, parents, guardians, school authorities and communities, some students go to the extent of enhancing their performance through various kinds of fraudulent activities referred to as examination malpractices. Examination malpractice could be perpetrated before, during or after the examinations. Malpractice in public examinations has become a common phenomenon in Nigerian society yet it seems that addressing the menace is rather with lip – service or consciously neglected by all the educational stakeholders.

It is no longer strange that most tutorial centres indulge in examination malpractice in sophisticated styles, what rather baffles one is the continuing patronage, progress and sustainability of these tutorial centres even when some of them display enticing advertisements that ordinarily should have created much suspicion in the minds of people who patronize the expo centres, disguised and paraded as tutorial centres.

### **Thesis of the Paper**

The central thesis of this paper lies on the continuing success of many tutorial centres that indulge in examination malpractices due to the high level of patronage accorded them by students who in recent cases are supported and financed by parents, guardians and facilitated by teachers, school management, law enforcement officials and communities where these centres are located. This is particularly amazing because examination malpractice has for a long time been identified as a problem to the school

system. The degree of patronage given to tutorial centres that aid and abate examinations malpractice mainly at the SSCE, UTME and Post - UTME examination level is quite alarming and has compelled the authors of this paper to question whether special (examination malpractice) centres in disguise, are blessings or curses to the social system of the Nigerian nation?

### **What then is Examination Malpractice?**

Sonnie (2004) defined examination malpractice simply as cheating in examinations. Any approach adopted to pass examinations through the back doors could be referred to as malpractice. Examination malpractice could be regarded as any act of commission or omission embarked upon by an individual or group of persons with the aim of passing examinations through fraudulent means. This implies that once anyone indulges in dubious acts in order to obtain better result or grades against the rules and regulations of public examinations whether internally or externally written, the person would be said to have committed examination malpractice. Bello (2003 in Sonnie, 2004) laments that examination malpractices have taken the centre stage of public examinations with teachers, parents, law enforcement agencies involvement in the dastardly act - examination malpractice which constitutes a big threat to the further growth and development of societies educational system.

Malpractices in public examinations seem to happen without giving serious considerations to the Examination Miscellaneous Offence Decree No. 20 of 1984, which stipulates 21 years jail term for those found guilty of examination malpractices. Examination Malpractices Act 33 of 1999 which stipulated various imprisonment terms and penalties for culprits appears to have little or no positive impact in addressing the issue of malpractices in public examinations just like Decree 20 of 1984. Examination malpractices have cut across every sector of the educational system ranging from the primary, secondary and tertiary institutions in astronomical proportions without reasonable efforts being made to control same.

### **Theoretical Perspective**

The theory of functionalism presented by Emile Durkheim (Anderson and Taylor, 2005) tends to give justification for the existence of examination malpractice in Nigeria and other nations. According to Durkheim (1964) society should be perceived as an integrated whole with each of its parts contributing to the overall stability of the social system. By this assertion, everything in society is considered functional to its existence and survival hence, society would be incomplete if any of the interdependent parts is expunged. Thus examination malpractice is obviously part of the social system as it creates the opportunity for some people to cheat and pass while allowing the law enforcement and other security agencies to discharge part of their constitutional duties. The school management would equally implement the rules and regulations of the

school if some students default. However, examination malpractice has become a serious canker worm and appears abnormal because of its rampant nature in the Nigerian school system but at the same time, it has created ample opportunities for scholars to seek solutions to it. This way, people would continue to benefit from the problem.

In addition, anomie theory sees individual members of society as capable of reacting differently to situations of anomie as a consequence of individual differences. Thus people who engage in using tutorial centres for examination malpractices for economic gains are regarded as innovators. These set of individuals could capitalize on the high rate of unemployment in Nigeria as basis to committing examination related crimes for material gains (Schaefer, 2006).

### **Trends of Examination Malpractice in Nigeria**

Presently, examination malpractice has become a very big challenge to the educational sector. Modern tutorial centres have found ways into Nigeria's educational system to the extent that some of them have acquired special centres as their outstanding identities.

What is special in these tutorial centers is really questionable because their expertise lies mainly in helping students to cheat and pass public examinations. Most of the special tutorial centres are purely commercial oriented and as a result, have escalated the act of malpractices in secondary schools public examinations as well as the UTME and post – UTME examinations to make profits. The modern day tutorial centres engage in activities such as organized lessons, home teaching hours and tutoring. Several owners or practitioners of tutorial centres or colleges, maintain that they operate modified remedial classes, which render services to different categories of people such as secondary school students, undergraduates, graduates, post graduates as well as adults.

It is common knowledge to see special centres displaying advertisement bills inscribed as follow: *“pass your English Language and Mathematics in one attempt; score 280 marks and above in your JAMB examination; the opportunity you have been waiting for passing your SSCE in a sitting and JAMB only once is here* and so on. One therefore, wonders the possible magic that would have enabled tutorial centres meet these targets if not examination malpractices? Regrettably, people, parents in particular jump into such offers and pay whatever amount of money required but never bother with the negative short or long run implications of their actions for reasons best known to them. Must these obnoxious acts continue? Certainly No!

Special centres adopt various dubious means like registering a candidate and contracting another resource person to seat for the examination while the registered

candidate stays at home only to get the good result later. This is referred to as '**non-appearance**' in their fraudulent business parlance.

A candidate may also register, sit for the examination him or herself but would be aided by machineries in the examination halls. The amount differs according to the option/s the candidate chooses. Indeed, whether this menace would continue unabated, as members of society seem to have thrown caution to the wind remains the concern of these authors.

### **Causes of Examination Malpractice**

Malpractice in examinations according to Iloh (2010) is related to acts of school indiscipline. That is to say, students who are not cultured may likely indulge in cheating to pass examinations. This may occur before, during or after examinations. The high level of importance attached to certificates (formal education) in the Nigerian society with little or no attention given to informal and vocational education seems to have motivated many students in recent time to indulge in different forms of malpractices to pass examinations.

People seem to feel more honourable to cheat and pass than to fail any public examinations. Globalization has also made malpractices in public and other examinations very easy. Information and Communications Technology (ICT) has projected examination malpractices by making it possible for candidates to receive information from examination malpractice syndicate irrespective of the distance. For example, the use of sophisticated handsets and other electronic appliances can facilitate the perpetration of examination malpractices because candidates would have no restriction of space and time from those who aid and abate malpractices in public examinations.

Lack of proper screening of people who establish tutorial centres with regards to their qualifications, objectives and personal integrity may have been responsible for the indiscriminate escalation of examinations malpractice (special- miracle) centers.

Low moral values on the parts of owners of these centres in question are another major cause of adopting criminality as a supposed legitimate source of livelihood. Parents who prefer securing admissions for their children and wards at all cost equally promote examination malpractice because they are always eager to pay for the services of the special centers. If there were no buyers, there would certainly be no sellers.

Weak implementation of legislations against examination malpractices and the support of the law enforcement agents also encourage perpetrators since, they are sure

of escaping justice through bribery. Massive unemployment and poverty equally lure people into establishing expo centres.

Compromising examination supervisors and invigilators contribute to malpractices too. The moment an examination invigilator agrees with the school supervisors to cheat, malpractices would hold, but if he or she rejects their offer, examination malpractice will never occur. However, some invigilators with high integrity are usually victimised to succumbing to the pressures of allowing malpractices to take place in a center used for public examinations.

In view of the lapses in our education system, tutorial centres established for economic gains lure SSCE and UTME candidates to their centres with a promise that when they come, they will assist them in passing their exams. As a result, they charge ridiculously and invariably continue to deteriorate the educational standards in Nigerian schools instead of contributing to its development to meet up the stipulated United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) standard.

In the same vein, a teacher from Stadium Junior Grammar School, Lagos, once reported that she did not see anything good in what the tutorial centres were doing. According to her, the way they operate keeps on deteriorating the educational system. “What they do surpasses what others do to perpetrate examination malpractice”.

### **Effects of Examination Malpractice**

Ebuara and Uduak (2011) capture issues of students/staff unrest, unionism, land disputes, politics and other forms of conflict to be counter-productive in Nigerian University system. This situation has often resulted in frustration of the students, parents and the system, in addition to making the education system inefficient. From the views of this author, one could submit that examination malpractice would be capable of making genuine and studious students to face more frustrations especially, when their counterparts who are noted to be academically poor, perform better in examinations by cheating to pass.

Iloh (2010) identifies examination malpractice or misconduct as part of the behaviours that could cause problems and hinder learning processes in schools. This implies that examination malpractice is capable of constituting danger to students' levels of concentration in reading and assimilation if they form it as a habit. In the short run, examination malpractice may discourage serious students from reading as they might be tempted to follow the short cuts, like other un-serious students in their levels.

In the long run, examination malpractices would likely offer societies unbaked or at most half and/ or quarter baked graduates who would jeopardise the future development of the nation. Thus the provision of adequate and efficient manpower for communities and national development would have been affected (Jegede, Anyikwa and Igwe, 2011). Consequently, some of the primary objectives of the school system which according to Ololube (2011) is to provide students with technical skills, a sense of civic responsibility, new paths to personal development, mental, physical health, and cultural awareness would be affected too.

Igwe (2013) tends to see anyone who indulges in examination malpractice as having some traits of poverty of the mind when he asserts that poverty includes doing the wrong things at the right time or achieving success through fraud. He maintains that poverty could lead to conflict which would result in, increasing the rate of under – development in societies. Thus the tension often created by perpetrators of examination malpractices in the Nigerian society cannot be underestimated.

Some people according to Hernandez and Seem (2004) posit that activities of tutorial centres have been massively instrumental in filling the gaps created by conventional schools. This, they maintain, could be attributed to the insensitivity of government towards improving education system in the Nigerian society. Others contend that many of the tutorial centres have shifted from positively developing the education system to something negative. According to these set of people, tutorial centres have done much harm than good. The motive of some of the proprietors, antagonists of these centres claim, is to enrich themselves through fraudulent means. This could be interpreted that proprietors of tutorial centres mortgage the future of the generations yet to be born in the negative perspective.

## **Conclusion**

It has been revealed in this paper that “*special, miracle or wonder*” (tutorial) centres are more of a curse than blessing to the Nigerian education system, considering the extent of their negative impact on the entire society. Thus it appears that nothing good would come out of the so called special (expo) centres unless there is an urgent intervention from the government and persons concerned with educational matters, to curb the excesses of the expo (tutorial) centres in the school system particularly, at the senior secondary school and tertiary institutions entrance examination levels. Education has been identified by Uriah and Wosu (2012) as the panacea for any reasonable national development of nations.

This implies that, the standard of a nation’s education would most likely, determine her level of development. Thus encouraging examination malpractice in the Nigerian nation would amount to preparing the nation and her citizens further, for

under – development and perpetual dependency. Hence, all hands must be on deck to fight against any form of examination malpractice in public and private schools.

Ololube and Egbezor (2012) have described education as a catalyst for national unity; human capital development; cultural diversity and human rights awareness; as well as means of empowering individuals. These according to the scholars is to enable people participate in global knowledge chains by expanding and improving access to capacity building and information sharing in any social context. This would be difficult to achieve if examination malpractices are allowed to persist. The quality of education at all levels should be improved for national and regional development (Ololube, Amaele, Kpolovie, Onyekwere and Elechi, 2012a). This must not be carried out through cheating in public examination to pass candidates. Can goodbye be said to examination malpractices in Nigeria? The answer is certainly ‘Yes’!

### **Recommendations**

1. Activities of special - miracle (tutorial) centres and their practitioners should be closely monitored on regular basis by government and independent bodies to check mate negative practices in their operations.
2. Parents should allow their children and wards to develop at their own pace instead of influencing the course of nature by forcing them to choose unfamiliar courses or purchasing admissions for them.
3. Provisions should be made for post – UTME candidates to defend their scores orally instead of the written tests organized by tertiary institutions
4. Government should properly investigate and close down any tutorial centre that undertakes in examination malpractices no matter who owns it.
5. Proper investigations on the qualifications, objectives, personal integrity of intending tutorial center practitioners should be made before permitting any person or persons to operate them.
6. There is need for intensive awareness campaigns to be organized and launched at the grassroots level through various Local Government Areas, towards sensitizing parents, students, school authorities, communities as well as all educational stake holders on the dangers associated with allowing examination malpractices to thrive.

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