

# INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF EXAMINATION MALPRACTICE IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS: A THREAT TO QUALITY SECONDARY SCIENCE EDUCATION IN NIGERIA AND DEVELOPMENT BEYOND 2020

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## **Abstract**

Undoubtedly, examination malpractice has become one of the canker worms that are very endemic and have eaten deep into the fabrics of the Nigerian society. It cuts across all levels of the nation's education system, and the secondary education system, has become the fertile ground where its institutionalization begins. This paper examines the declining state of Nigerian secondary science education as a result of the import of a structure that nurtures and promotes full blown examination malpractices. It concludes with some recommendations towards curbing the menace.

**Keywords:** Examination, Malpractice, School, Quality, Institutionalization.

Education has been the bedrock of developments the world over. The educational standards setup for the school must be challenging to meet the needs of the society and the students, (Oluniyonu, Adekoya and Gbenu, 2008 in Gbenu, 2012). Education enables individuals to get suitable placement in the society into which they found themselves. It equips individuals with the ability that enables them explore the world and manipulate it for their survival. Education enables individuals cultivate good habits and develop the right attitude to work and life as good citizens.

According to United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization, (UNESCO) (2008), commenting on science and technology development, posited that curriculum has to be revised "if it is to prepare youngsters to live in a society marked by explosion of new knowledge in science and technology, by information and communication". UNESCO (2008) referring to the education for ALL (EFA) declaration adopted in Jomtien declares that;

"Every person shall be able to benefit from educational opportunities designed to meet their basic needs. These needs comprise both essential learning tools (such as literacy, oral expression, numeracy and problem solving) and the basic learning content (such as knowledge, skills, values and attitudes) required by human beings to be able to survive, to develop their full capabilities, to live and work in dignity, to participate fully in development, to improve the quality of their lives, to make informed decisions, and to continue learning. The scope of basic learning needs and how they should be met varies with individual countries and cultures and inevitably, changes with the passage of time, etc"

The implication of this is what should form the basis of every nation's educational standards. The school system remains the major instrument and organ for providing the educational opportunities for the achievement of the all important quality education for all. Other agencies charged with the responsibility include, the home, the churches and the larger society. When these agencies resort to paying lip services to education by omission or commission, they end up preparing fertile grounds for the learners to engage in sharp practices in examinations so as to acquire the much sort paper qualifications by hook or crook. This paper is focused on incidences of examination malpractice in secondary schools and how institutions encourage them due to neglect and abandonment of necessary preventive approaches.

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

Examination malpractice, according to Ezeude (2013) could be defined as an act of deliberate wrong doings contrary to official examination rules and regulations designed to place some candidates at unfair advantages or disadvantages. He added that it 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 also involves fraud, cheating or corruption carried on during examinations in which the candidates strive to achieve success at all cost.

### **Prevalence of Examination Malpractice in Nigerian Secondary Schools**

Many students sitting for school certificate examinations like West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) and National Examination Council (NECO) Examination respectively are no longer confident that they can write these exams on their own since they know that they can pass very well through examination malpractices. Cheating in public examinations has become so common that people feel free during and after committing the crime. People go about freely discussing how they cheated or were helped to cheat in exams at their various centers. In some centers, answers are photocopied and given to students to copy while some copy from the black board.

Little wonder, students with very 'good' results find it difficult to pass the Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) for entry into various Universities, Polytechnics and Colleges of education and one will be wondering how these students passed WASSCE and NECO exams with more than five (5) credits including English and Mathematics. In recent times students have resorted to running from public schools to private schools to register for either WASSCE or NECO examinations. The obvious response of these students when asked why they migrate to rural private schools is embarrassing when they say they cannot afford to fail what is given freely in such centers.

These schools charge exorbitant fees to register these students with the intention of building "expo" money into such fees. In fact, there are classes of registration in most of these "miracle" centers as some classes are called A – class where students are assured of making nine (9) distinctions after the exam. Also, some classes are for those who will not be available and exam will be written for them, and a general class for those who will get at least five (5) credits with assurance of passing in mathematics and English language, the class you choose to sit determines your result (<http://www.gamji.com/article8000/NEWS8619.htm>). The above is the testimony of Nasiru Suleiman a 400 level student of Business Administration and Management studies of Federal Polytechnic Idah, Kogi State, a view which is representative of student's experience in external examinations. Note that this does not give an impression that Suleiman engaged in examination malpractice, he is just a popular writer.

WAEC and NECO have devised means of checking the activities of those unscrupulous candidates by intensifying their supervisory roles but the result of this is yet to be felt. Alarmed by the spate of examination malpractice in UTME, joint Admissions and matriculation examinations board (JAMB) in 2001 introduced variations in questions numbering from one candidate to the other sitting for the same matriculation exam; that year, the students performed very poorly. The syndicates however, devised other means to beat JAMB's innovation with the connivance of some JAMB officials. The internet has not helped matters as real answers are now posted to various web sites for easy access of unscrupulous candidates using their phones. JAMB has now resorted to computer based tests as a means of curbing the menace. Who knows the next strategy the syndicates could device?

According to Umaru (2013) in Nigeria, the first publicly reported case of cheating in Examination occurred in 1914 when there was a leakage of examination papers in the senior Cambridge local examination. Ever since, there have been cases of irregularities reported on a yearly basis. But, the outstanding years were, 1963, 1967, 1970, 1973, 1977, 1979, 1981, 1985, 1987, 1991, 1994, 1995, 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2005, 2006, 2009, and 2010, (West African Examination Council, 2011). The major forms of cheating in examinations reported are, impersonation, bringing in

foreign materials, substituting worked scripts, collusion in examination hall (copying), mass organized cheating involving assistance from teachers and outsiders and insult/ assault on supervisors / invigilators (Olaleye, 2006). The trend of cheating in examination is inimical to academic development and advancement and needs to be drastically addressed.

### **How Institutions Prepare Grounds for Examination Malpractice**

The Nigerian government is greatly at fault for the declining state of education in Nigeria. The dilapidating nature of infrastructure for smooth conduct of examinations in secondary schools contributes to gross examination malpractices in schools. Most secondary schools approved by West African Examination Council (WAEC) and National Examination Council (NECO) in Nigeria to take school certificate examinations have no examination halls. The questions to ask are why the schools should be approved to take certificate exams in the first place if the examination halls for such exams are not in place? Who sent such officials to such schools for such assignments? This brings to the fore, the issue of using unqualified, untrained and corrupt personnel in the inspectorate services which results in institutionalization of examination malpractice, leading to poor quality control. The result of the above is that students are ‘jam-packed’ in the small available classrooms or halls where they are exposed to temptation of collusion, pilfering and sharing of materials and ideas in the halls.

**Laboratories:-** Studying science without practical is like attempting to drive a car that has no or faulty engine. Some schools approved to offer science subjects in WASSC and NECO Examinations don’t have laboratories. The condition for such approval is that the students should be taken to nearby schools where such laboratories and equipment are available for such examinations. The question is, what kind of practical exams are the students expected to perform during the exam when they have not been seriously and continuously drilled on routine basis during the periods of study.

The schools that have laboratories report that they are not well equipped. For instance (Nwachukwu in Olatunde, 2010) discovered in her survey of resources for the teaching and learning of Biology in some new secondary schools in Lagos that there was a general inadequacy of resources. She also found among other things.

- ✚ Out of 80% of the old schools that had laboratories none had a well equipped laboratory.
- ✚ About 40% of the schools had no laboratory at all, while the remaining 60% had rooms labeled laboratory but without adequate apparatus.

The usual practice is that few weeks to the Senior Secondary School Certificate or NECO exams, the schools are given practical guides sometimes called “yellow paper”. The schools then realize that equipment are lacking and they go all out to borrow or buy the items, some of which may not meet the recommended ones for the practical exams in the major areas of Physics, Chemistry, Biology and Agricultural Science. Such equipments are dropped at the corners as soon as the exams are over.

**Teacher: -** The vital position of a teacher in the education process makes it imperative that the process of educating the young members of the society lies in his hands. Bad eggs in the teaching profession are neck deep in aiding and abetting examination malpractice, (Odo, 2008). Teachers also indirectly encourage students to go into malpractice when they fail to teach them at the appropriate time so as to keep afloat. Aguba (2015) noted that “teachers are the main determinants of quality in education; if they are apathetic, uncommitted, uninspired, lazy, immoral, antisocial, the whole nation is doomed, if they are ignorant, they are not only useless but also dangerous”.

Some corrupt school principals in Enugu State collected huge sums of money from students during WASSC and NECO registrations aimed at organizing “Expo” for them during the examinations in May/ June 2014. They organized machineries who found solutions to the questions smuggled from corrupt examination officials and distributed answer to students before each paper. The attention of the Commissioner for Education was attracted by this and other sharp practices and he warned that any

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school principal caught would be summarily dismissed. Till today, nobody heard of any dismissed school principal arising from involvement in exam malpractices in the state.

**Invigilators:** - Corruption and bribery have so eroded the fabrics of this country that teachers who hitherto were the reservoir of trust and confidentiality have got some members who have thrown morals to the wind and resorted to making quick money at the slightest opportunity. When some teachers apply to be employed as WAEC and NECO supervisors/ invigilators, they do so not for the real pay that comes to them from the boards at the end of the job but for the juicy “sorting money” from the desperate WAEC and NECO candidates. With the money they collect from the students, they have bought cars, built houses and solved other financial problems. This is Nigeria for you! Some questions arise, are they not being paid monthly salaries? Are salaries not paid regularly? Their possible answer is that salaries are not able to make one buy a car, build and own a house and meet major financial needs. Who then is to blame for the consequences of their inordinate quest that has nearly wrecked the education system? What is the extent of their commitment to morals and to God whom we call upon? These questions are begging for answers from the teachers who have found themselves in this mess.

**Parents:** - Many parents think that the best way to express love for their children is to assist them in cutting corners. It is quite unfortunate that parents spend huge amounts of money on invigilators, supervisors and friends to either write examinations for their children or wards or to allow the candidates to enter the examination hall with “foreign” materials. Such parents will do anything possible to enable their children acquire the minimum entry requirements for such careers as Engineering or medicine.

**The Society:** - Paper qualification is the one major requirement for certification and employment in Nigeria. Any attempt at curbing examination malpractice in Nigeria is viewed as an effort to prevent some people from getting into livelihood and must be opposed by the immediate beneficiaries. Corruption has eaten deep into the fabrics of Nigerians that many people do not see anything wrong in students cheating in examinations. One Ibo adage says that ‘when evil lasts for a year it becomes a norm. Examination malpractice is now common that even security officials like the police employed to secure examination materials easily give in when approached with monetary gratifications, regarding it as a minor offence.

### **The Threat of Examination Malpractice Institutionalization on the Quality of Secondary Science Education**

The warning alarm on the threat of examination malpractice being sounded by concerned bodies like the Exam Ethics Project (EEP), a nongovernmental organizations and concerned individuals has reached a crescendo and educational planners should not pretend to be deaf. It was reported in the Daily Sun of August 12, 2014 that for the fourth consecutive year, candidates who sat for the May/June West African School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) recorded mass failure.

The report stated that out of a total of 1,692,435 candidates who sat for the exam, only 529, 425 (31.28%) obtained five credits including English and Mathematics. Announcing the results, the Head of National Office (HNO), Mr. Charles Eguridu said that during the May/June 2014 WASSCE, the Council introduced a device known as Candidates Identity Verification, Attendance, Malpractice and Post Examination Management System (CIVAMPEMS) stressing that the ICT driven device allowed supervisors and staff to address and record the examination processes in real time, at the venue of the examination. He added that the results of 145, 975 candidates, (8.61%) were being withheld over examination malpractices which were reported both during the conduct and marking of the exam.

The threat and obvious effects of examination malpractices however, cannot be over emphasized. Creativity and resourcefulness are hampered. It wrecks great havoc on the social, religious, economic and political lives of Nigerians. Who knows whether the near anarchy – political environment we have in Nigeria today is traceable to examination malpractice? A situation where politicians look for short cuts

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and how to rig elections and cases of defections from one political camp to the other cannot be separated from examination malpractices.

Employees are engaged in jobs they are not suited for since the certificates they claim to possess are not merited. It thereby decreases job efficiency. It also discourages good students from studying hard because they are tempted to join others in the act especially when they see culprits getting away with it and making better results than those who studied harder. It also denies innocent students opportunities for admission. Many good students have been denied admission by the corrupt ones, who through that unacceptable act have better scores and grades.

Examination malpractice has opened a path of get –rich – quick for teachers in secondary schools who cash in on students ignorance and drive to cheat in exams to enrich themselves at the expense of academic propriety. This is very shameful. The effect of this ignoble act is that educational system in its entirety becomes less reliable and in a lot of ways, it becomes injurious to the same society for which it is established in the first place. According to Sani (2013) in daily Independent newspaper of 2013-02-01, the outcome of all these is that many graduates find it difficult to express themselves in English language in the manner expected of those who have passed through such institutions of learning. Science which is the gateway to the technological development of every nation cannot thrive well in a society that has so institutionalized examination malpractice as seen in Nigeria.

**Possible Areas of Threat of Examination Malpractice on Secondary Science Education**

The 9-3-4 system of education recently introduced in the secondary school system in Nigeria is targeted towards entrepreneurship education. By this system, the first nine years of a child's education is spent in the Basic education where the child is prepared to specialize in some skills in areas of, carpentry, soap making, home management, electrical installations, weaving of textile and ability to engage in small scale enterprises. The child on the alternative can proceed to the senior secondary stage where the child is prepared for high education.

Secondly, a large percentage of secondary school science teachers are redundant and unproductive in an atmosphere of high prevalence of examination malpractice. These teachers would prefer to focus on how to prepare students on how to get results through shortcuts rather than applying the appropriate pedagogy for achieving lasting learning outcomes. Laboratories with remain mere consulting 'warehouses since teachers would not want to engage students in diverse experiments when they are sure that at the final certificate examinations, "yellow papers" will lead them to the real practical questions. The government on her part is no keener to provide more equipment in the laboratories due to corruption in procurement processes. These trends will end up frustrating the children to such an extent that even at the University they will not find their feet. This will not encourage development of science in Nigeria especially beyond 2020.

**Ethical Practices towards Curbing Examination Malpractices in Nigeria Secondary Schools**

It is believed that unless concerted actions are taken, it is likely that greater percentage of graduates, from secondary to tertiary levels unable to defend or justify the qualifications they may claim to possess in science subjects.

1. Examination should be declared a national emergency and government should constitute a national body similar to EFCC to handle and investigate cases of exam malpractice. The government should enforce the 21 years imprisonment sanction decreed in 1984 for exam malpractices to secure the integrity of exams and the nation's education system.
2. Exams ethics projects international should be encouraged and strengthened towards curbing the ugly menace of exam malpractice in educational system.
3. Examination bodies should wake up and be conducting fraud- proof examinations for nation. They should stop approving schools that lack adequate facilities for conduct of external examinations;

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they should go back to the practice of merging schools in consideration of availability of space and materials.

4. Examination bodies should employ more of the ICT facilities like CTV cameras in examination venues to fish out culprits easily for prosecution.

5. The examination bodies should stop concessional posting of invigilators and supervisors and ban special centers where exam malpractices are rooted. Private schools that cannot observe correct guidelines in conducts of exams should be sanctioned. The examination bodies should effect upward review of remunerations of invigilators, supervisors and examiners.

6. Teachers should keep all exam records at their disposal with absolute secrecy and should not in any manner, aid and abet exam malpractice. Teachers are obliged to report all cases of exam malpractices which come to their knowledge to the appropriate authorities without delay. Most importantly, teachers should do their work diligently and teach their students well, by so doing, they might have turned them away from looking for shortcuts. Government should sanction any teacher, invigilator or supervisor and allow the full weight of the law take its course on culprits.

7. Schools should ensure credibility in the certificates they issue by exploring all means to ensure the success of Exam Ethics Project.

8. Parents must stop financing the purchase of exam question papers for their children and wards but encourage them to stay in school and study hard.

9. Emphasis on paper qualification for admission and job placement should be reduced to the barest minimum since in many cases, excellent paper qualifications do not interpret to good performance in place of employment. Education through entrepreneurship should be encouraged for self employment.

10. Continuous assessment as the key to the success of the 9-3-4 system of education should be strengthened and improved upon for it is a sure way to curb the evil of exam malpractice at the final WAEC or NECO exams. Teachers should be continuously trained on the ethics of teaching profession and on the avoidance of evil.

### **Conclusion**

The hope and aspirations of Nigeria in building up a virile prosperous, self reliant and stable nation may be utterly negated if cases of examination malpractices are allowed to continue unabated. Schools and education planners should purge themselves of institutionalized corruption in areas of examination malpractice for a better society for dream to emerge.

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