

CORRUPTION IN EDUCATION AND ASSESSMENT SYSTEMS: THE WAEC EXPERIENCE IN NIGERIA.

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1. **INTRODUCTION**

Education is the foundation upon which physical and technological developments rest. It is a veritable tool in the development of any nation and the developing ones in particular. Education, however, may not have any meaning without assessment. Thus assessment is required to help determine the standard and level of achievement in education.

The task of assessing candidates at the secondary school education level in Nigeria is that of the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) and other national examination boards. WAEC conducts the West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) twice a year in Nigeria. The examination is conducted in May/June for the school candidates and November/December for private candidates.

Education and assessment systems, like other sectors of national development, could be threatened by corrupt practice.

However, corruption in education and assessment systems in Nigeria has manifested itself largely in the form of examination malpractice.

Salami (1994) defines examination malpractice as an improper and dishonest act associated with examination with a view to obtaining unmerited advantage, while Shonekan (1996) defines it as any act of omission or commission that contravenes the Rules and Regulations of the examination body to the extent of undermining the validity and reliability of the tests and ultimately, the integrity of the certificates issued. Oyekan (1996) also views examination malpractice as a deliberate act of indiscipline adopted by students or their privileged accomplices to secure facile success and advantage before, during and after the administration of a test or examination.

2. HISTORY OF EXAMINATION MALPRACTICE IN NIGERIA.

Corrupt practices in examinations in Nigeria date back to the pre-independence years (before 1960).

It has been reported at various times that examination malpractice is neither new nor peculiar to Nigeria (Adeyegbe and Oke, 1994; Ogbuka, 1995; and Maduemezia, 1998). According to the various sources, examination malpractice was first reported in Nigeria in 1914, when the question papers of the Senior Cambridge Local Examinations were reportedly seen by candidates before the scheduled date of the examination. Examination leakages have featured regularly since then in Nigeria.

According to Maduemezia (1998), examination malpractice, which had existed at a very low ebb with simplistic methods, became more pervasive from 1970 with the involvement of persons other than the candidates and its spread has been wild and fast since then with constant perfection of the methods adopted. She identified about twenty-two (22) categories of people as perpetrators of this act in Nigeria and concluded that the candidates (students) constituted only about fourteen percent (14%) of the group.

3. TYPES AND TRENDS OF EXAMINATION MALPRACTICE IN NIGERIA.

The West African Examinations Council in its over fifty-five years of existence, has been able to detect various forms of malpractice perpetrated by candidates and their accomplices in its examinations. The following are the broad categories into which these various forms of examination malpractice fall:

- (1) Bringing foreign materials into the examination hall e.g. textbooks, cribs, currency notes with copious notes on them, past question papers either containing copious notes or used as disguise for current ones that have been smuggled out, photocopies of prepared answers, etc;
- (2) Irregular activities inside or outside the examination hall e.g. sending information by agents and touts to candidates inside the

examination hall, smuggling of question papers out of the examination hall, etc;

- (3) Collusion e.g. passing notes, receiving or giving assistance to other candidates in the examination hall;
- (4) Impersonation i.e. hiring of touts to write examinations, male candidates sitting in for girls and vice versa in some sensitive papers, twins writing examinations for each other;
- (5) Fore-knowledge of examination questions, e.g. cutting of security bags or question paper packets by supervisors to gain fore-knowledge of questions few hours before the scheduled commencement of examination;
- (6) Leakage of question papers traceable to the printing press or other persons associated with the custody of the papers;
- (7) Mass cheating i.e. large scale organized cheating involving school authorities, candidates and examination officials;
- (8) Insult/Assault on Supervisors/Invigilators/Inspectors by candidates e.g. beating up of examination officials, destruction of examination officials' cars and manhandling of examination officials and using indecent language on supervisors and invigilators who fail to co-operate with the examination cheats;

- (9) Miscellaneous cases such as folding of answer scripts, having two types of handwriting on a candidate's script, scripts not signed by the supervisor, etc.

Table I below shows percentages of candidates in the school candidates' examination involved in the various forms of Examination Malpractice on annual basis from 2000 to 2005.

Table I: TREND OF INCIDENCE OF EXAMINATION MALPRACTICE IN WAEC SCHOOL CANDIDATES' EXAMINATION (2000-2005) IN NIGERIA

S/No	TYPE OF MALPRACTICE	PERCENTAGE OF CANDIDATES INVOLVED					
		2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
1.	Bringing in of foreign materials	1.23	1.27	1.43	1.34	1.60	1.17
2.	Irregular activities inside and outside the examination hall	1.16	1.45	1.81	2.80	2.35	1.46
3.	Collusion	3.71	2.21	7.05	6.00	6.45	4.06
4.	Impersonation	0.07	0.06	0.09	0.11	0.11	0.06
5.	Leakage	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
6.	Mass cheating	Nil	Nil	Nil	0.61	0.40	0.01
7.	Insult/Assault on supervisors and invigilators	0.04	0.04	0.02	0.02	0.07	0.07
8.	New/Miscellaneous cases	0.25	0.04	0.07	Nil	0.19	0.03
Total		6.46	5.07	10.47	10.88	11.17	6.86

Source: WAEC Annual reports.

The table shows that the incidence of examination malpractice fluctuated during the period.

For instance in 2000, 6.46% of the 636,064 candidates for the examination were involved in examination malpractice. In 2001,

5.07% of the 1,025,185 candidates for the examination were involved in examination malpractice. In 2002, 10.47% of the 909,888 candidates for the examination were involved in examination malpractice. In 2003, the percentage increased to 10.88% (of 1,066,831 candidates for the examination) while in 2004, there was a further increase to 11.17% (of the 1,035,280 candidate for the examination). However, there was a sharp drop in the percentage of candidates involved in examination malpractice to 6.86% (of the 1,080,162 candidates for the examination) in 2005.

Table II below shows the percentages of candidates in the private candidates examination who were involved in the various forms of examination malpractice on annual basis from 2000 to 2005.

Table II: TREND OF INCIDENCE OF EXAMINATION MALPRACTICE IN WAEC PRIVATE CANDIDATES' EXAMINATION (2000 – 2005) IN NIGERIA.

S/NO	TYPE OF MALPRACTICE	PERCENTAGE OF CANDIDATES INVOLVED					
		2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
1.	Bringing in of foreign materials	2.83	3.70	2.06	1.82	1.99	3.20
2.	Irregular activities inside and outside the examination hall.	1.24	1.32	2.20	4.52	3.65	5.37
3.	Collusion	1.27	1.33	1.70	1.89	4.20	6.75
4.	Impersonation	0.39	0.44	0.33	0.73	0.70	1.01
5.	Leakage	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
6.	Mass cheating	0.18	Nil	0.12	0.07	Nil	0.26
7.	Insult/Assault on supervisors and invigilators	0.12	0.06	0.07	0.03	0.03	0.03
8.	Miscellaneous/New cases	0.19	0.19	0.06	0.10	0.05	0.06
Total		6.22	7.04	6.54	9.16	10.62	16.68

The incidence of examination malpractice for the November/December private candidates' examination also fluctuated within the period.

For instance, in 2000, 6.22% of the total candidature of 850,479, were involved in various forms of examination malpractice. This percentage rose to 7.04% (of the total candidature of 888,626) in 2001. In 2002, the percentage of candidates involved in examination malpractice dropped to 6.54% (of the total candidature of 966,810). This percentage rose again to 9.16% (of the 528,347 candidates for the examination) in 2003. The rise in the percentage of candidates involved in examination malpractice continued in 2004 and 2005 with 10.62% (of the total candidature of 494,987) and 16.68% (of the 382,450 candidates for the examination) respectively.

4. **EFFORTS AT CURBING EXAMINATION MALPRACTICE.**

For a very long time, the West African Examinations Council was a lone voice in the fight against examination malpractice in Nigeria. The situation has however, shown tremendous improvement as governments (States and Federal) and other stakeholders have not only expressed concern over the cankerworm but have indeed taken laudable steps to further the fight against it.

(1) Efforts by the Council

The West African Examinations Council has, since its inception, devised and reviewed its strategies for curbing examination malpractice. Some of the efforts of the Council include:

(a) Public Enlightenment

The current awareness in the country today of the evils of examination irregularity/malpractice is attributable to the campaign launched formally by WAEC in 1984. The campaign has indirectly given birth to today's Examination Ethics crusade in the country.

(b) Information to Candidates

The Council publishes in book form and also on its website the rules and regulations guiding its examinations. These give details of the various offences and the sanctions applicable to them.

(c) Sensitization of Governments/Stakeholders

The Council, as a matter of policy, avails the Government and stakeholders of decisions taken on reported cases of malpractice by its appropriate Committees.

(d) Sanctions

The Council promptly sanctions candidates caught cheating in its examinations and reports teachers and other operatives to their

employers for appropriate sanctions. Any staff of the Council found to have been involved in examination irregularity/malpractice is regarded as a security risk and is summarily dismissed.

Tables III and IV below show the sanctions applied and the number of culprits sanctioned in the May/June and November/December 2000 – 2005 WASSCE in Nigeria.

Table III: SANCTIONS APPLIED IN THE MAY/JUNE 2000 – 2005 WASSCE

S/NO	DECISIONS	NUMBER INVOLVED					
		2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
1.	Entire results cancelled	30,216	28,605	30,384	50,602	31,897	16,821
2.	Subject results cancelled	9,340	23,507	65,135	61,362	82,117	56,109
3.	Candidates barred or handed over to the police	417	643	891	1,362	1,814	133
4.	Principals warned	19	04	20	31	02	17
5.	Supervisors blacklisted	02	04	07	09	Nil	Nil
6.	Schools warned	02	Nil	32	60	132	178
7.	Schools derecognized	03	02	09	33	40	11
8.	Supervisors/invigilators reported.	06	06	05	04	13	09

Table IV: SANCTIONS APPLIED IN THE NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2000 – 2005 WASSCE

S/No.	DECISIONS	NUMBER INVOLVED					
		2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
1	Entries results cancelled	65,093	43,564	45,070	40,031	26,188	25,116
2	Subject results cancelled	12,674	15,459	18,176	10,397	26,704	38,759
3	Candidates barred or handed over to the police	3,407	3,847	3,181	4,037	3,629	3,852
4	Supervisors/invigilators reported for sanction	03	08	04	19	61	11
5	Centres warned	02	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
6	Centres discontinued from usage for conduct of examination	Nil	07	Nil	03	Nil	Nil
7	Invigilators/Supervisors blacklisted	03	Nil	01	04	Nil	Nil

(e) Embossment of Certificates

The Council introduced photo-embossed certificates to reduce the incidence of impersonation in its examinations.

(f) Use of Security Bags for the Collection of Security Materials

Question papers are collected by supervisors in locked Security bags to which they have no keys. The keys are kept by the WAEC staff at the custodian point of collection of the papers and the schools' examination officers at the point of delivery to the school centre.

(g) Mounting of Anti-Malpractice Billboards

Anti-malpractice billboards are mounted in vantage positions throughout the country to increase public awareness of the ills of examination malpractice.

(h) In-House Security Measures

- (i) The Council has created the Post-Examinations Department to handle cases of irregularity and malpractice in its examinations.
- (ii) Newly recruited officers of the Council are administered with Oaths of Secrecy on assumption of duty.
- (iii) The Council has developed security regulations which are reviewed periodically and made available to officers for proper guidance. Any breach of any of the regulations is promptly sanctioned.

(iv) Delivery of Examination Materials

The delivery of question papers and other examination materials to custodian points/distribution centres is done on daily basis and by senior officers of the Council. The custodian points/distribution centres are also manned by senior officers.

(v) Examination Centre Supervisors

The examination centre supervisors are swapped on daily basis to guard against undue familiarity with and influence from the schools.

(2) Efforts of Governments And Non-Governmental Organisations

The governments and non-governmental organizations (NGO's) in Nigeria have joined in the crusade against examination malpractice.

Some of the measures adopted by the governments are as follows:

- (i) Deployment of senior officials of the Ministries of Education (Federal and States levels) on inspection of examination centres.
- (ii) Monitoring of the enrollment of candidates for the school examinations to prevent non-school candidates from registering for the examination.
- (iii) Sanctioning of erring schools, principals, supervisors and other examination officials.

5. CHALLENGES FACED BY THE COUNCIL

The Council faces a number of challenges in its bid to curb examination malpractice. The list is inexhaustive but some of the major ones include:

(1) Poor Funding:

The organization relies heavily on revenue derived from examination fees which are barely sufficient to run its operations. Government financial assistance has improved in recent times but needs to be increased to provide the required assistance.

(2) Inadequate Staffing:

It is not possible for the Council to have enough senior personnel to man all its examination centres nationwide. It therefore relies on the use of teachers, principals, Ministry of Education officials, banks, sub-treasuries and security agents for supervision, invigilation and custody of security materials. These external personnel often times breach Council's security regulations on examination malpractice.

(3) Existing Laws: There is the need for existing laws to tighten the noose on examination cheats .

(4) The Problems Posed by ICT:

The incidence of fore-knowledge of examination question papers or leakage which hitherto could be localized now spreads fast through the use of mobile phones and internet facilities by candidates.

(5) Degradation of Moral Values

Emphasis on materialism seems to supplant societal ethos.

(6) Increasing Risk to Life

Examination officials now face increasing risks to their lives and property as they dare to stand up against examination malpractice.

6. **THE WAY FORWARD**

No one can claim to have all the solutions to the eradication of examination malpractice. However, the following could assist in stemming the tide:

- (a) Creation of learning-friendly environment in schools;
- (b) Provision of necessary school infrastructure and revamping of decayed ones;
- (c) Adequately equipping school libraries and laboratories;
- (d) Employment of qualified teachers at all levels of education;
- (e) Training and retraining of teachers to equip them for the challenges posed by a technology – driven world;
- (f) Appropriate recognition and remuneration of teachers;
- (g) Societal re-engineering and re-orientation to revamp moral values;
- (h) Promulgation and enforcement of anti-malpractice laws.

7. **CONCLUSION**

In the context of this paper, corruption in education and assessment systems is a societal problem. The experience of the West African Examinations Council has shown that to effectively check this evil, there is need for cooperation from all stakeholders in education.

The implications of corrupt practices, especially examination malpractice, on national development cannot be over-emphasized. Examination malpractice is capable of destroying the entire educational system of any country and putting a serious question mark on the reliability and validity of its assessment system. It is against this background that the efforts of the West African Examinations Council, governments and other stakeholders at fighting corruption in public examinations should be appreciated. The efforts are yielding fast results which must be sustained.

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