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An Aberration of School Effectiveness as Perceived by Parents of Secondary Schools Students in Nigeria

By

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Abstract

The societal confidence in schools is one of the factors that is keeping the schools going. However, there are some bottlenecks associated with school effectiveness in Nigeria. One of them is examination malpractice. Therefore, this study examines the perception of Nigeria parents of secondary school students on examination malpractice as a stain in school effectiveness. A sample of 3,289 parents of secondary schools students in Nigeria was used for the study. This study reveals that one of the factors that encourage examination malpractice in Nigeria is that questions set for students taking examination at senior secondary school certificate level are not related to the syllabus. Another one is the inadequate preparation of students by teachers. Parents contribute to examination malpractice by registering their children/ward in special centres where invigilators hardly get to during the conduct of examination. One of the potent consequences of examination malpractice is the frequent cancellation of examination results affecting innocent candidates. It is recommended that less emphasis should be placed on paper qualification; if this is done, it is likely that many of our students would do their work without resorting to examination malpractice.

Introduction

School effectiveness study is a relatively new concept in Nigeria, although the studies of Farombi, (1998); Onwuakpa, (1998) and Fabayo (1999) deal with school quality. While school quality is looking at the level of material inputs allocated to schools on a per pupil level and the level of efficiency with which fixed amounts of material inputs are organized and managed to raise students' achievement (Fuller, 1986). School effectiveness is interested in such variables as: instructional leadership provided by the principal, curriculum - learning objectives, learning activities, and achievement measures (Adewale 2004). Others are monitoring of pupils / pupils attendance, discipline and school climate, expectations for quality work supported by staff and pupils, existence of school / community partnership programmes. The indicator of school effectiveness that is so obvious to the society is the *product of schooling*, (that is, the achievement level of the students in examinations). If a school produces students with high grades, the school is often tagged effective while a school that cannot turn out students with high grade may be regarded as an ineffective one. In cognitive performance, students' achievement is consistent with their potential (Ibode, 2004). This is in line with the recommendation in the National Policy on Education (FGN, 2004) which stipulated that there is need for functional education for the promotion of a progressive, united Nigeria; to this end, school programmes need to be relevant, practical and comprehensive; while interest and ability should determine individual direction in education (section 1 paragraph 4b). Some students are disillusioned, they think highly of their ability because their interest does not

match their ability, for example, some of these students would want to study medicine but they are may not be good in the sciences. The only way one can discourage these type of students from offering subjects where their interest does not match their ability is to expose them to achievement test in the subjects of their choice. This would provide opportunity for one to advise them based on their ability. There have been a lot of criticisms about the use of tests and examinations to determine students' academic ability, however, there is no better substitute to determine students' ability. If we are going to use examinations to determine their ability, then we may have to improve the way examinations are conducted. Unfortunately, instead of improving the conduct of examination, the examinees have devised ways of cheating during the examination in order to prove that they possess the ability that is required for them to offer specific subjects for them to obtain certificates in the subjects. As at now in Nigeria, emphasis is laid on paper qualification, therefore, most students are caught in the web of passing their examination at all cost and when students engage in such activity as examination malpractice, it makes the effectiveness of a school questionable. It is not only examination malpractice that is the cause of stain in school effectiveness, other vices like cultism, sexual harassment and drug abuse contribute to unconventional behaviour in school. However, the scope of this paper is limited to how examination malpractice makes school effectiveness questionable as perceived by parents of secondary school students.

Examination malpractice as explained by Nwahunanya, (2004) is the act of omission or commission intended to make a student pass examination without relying absolutely on his/her independent ability or resources. Nwana, (2000) while discussing aberrations on the Nigerian Education system illustrated examination malpractice as the massive and unprecedented abuse of rules and regulations pertaining to internal and public examinations, beginning from the setting of such examination through the taking of the examinations, their marking and grading, to the release of the results and the issuance of certificates. Odongbo, (2002) says that examination malpractice refers to an act(s) of wrongdoing carried out by a candidate or groups of candidates or any other persons with the intention to cheat or gain unfair advantage in an examination. Awanbor, (2004) opines that examination malpractice is the application of unusual means to obtain in an examination a score or set of scores that is normally beyond the mental capability or the state of preparedness of a candidate for that examination. In summary, Makoju, Adewale, Nwangwu and Shuaibu (2004) say that whenever the rules and regulation governing the conduct of any examination is not adhered to by parties involved (i.e. candidates and any other person involved in the conduct of examination from setting the question to the release of result) in an examination, then we can conclude that examination malpractice has occurred.

There was a time in Nigeria when the teachers know their students not only by names but also to their homes. Teachers at that time served the functions of both teachers in the school and loco parent to the students. There was a strong link between the homes and the schools. The parents are also in support the observations of teachers made on a child. The home, the society and the school cooperated to raise the children properly. There came the history of Universal Primary Education (UPE) in Nigeria where there was an explosion of pupils in school without adequate preparation in terms of staffing and accommodation (classrooms) and the limited number of teachers remaining in the schools could no longer cope with their formal function as teachers and parents.

Apart from the fact that moral (in terms of knowing what type of behavioural pattern a child exhibited) was declining, teaching and learning deteriorated. Since the emphasis is not on what one can do but on what paper qualification he has, many students resorted to what is referred to as examination malpractice. In order that the teachers could be praised for teaching their students well, they in turn were caught in the web of examination aiding and abetting thereby reinforcing this aberration in students.

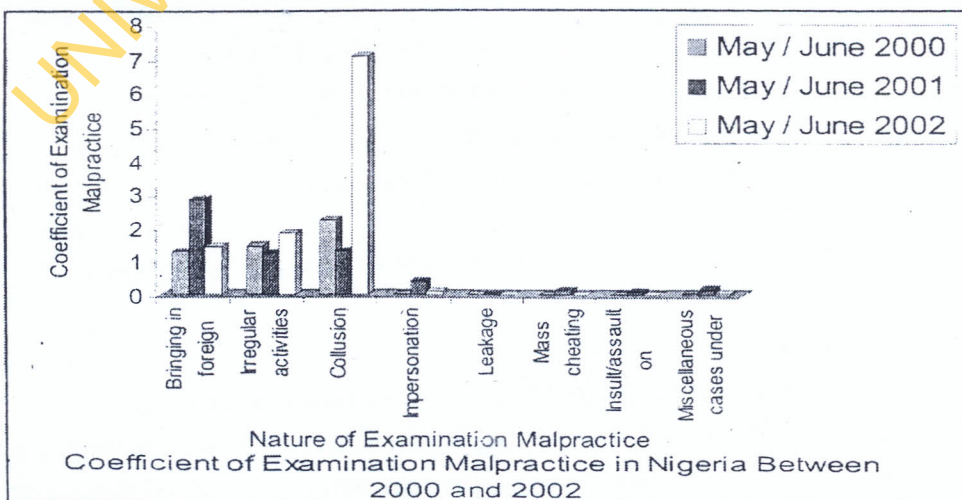
Students now devise different methods of examination malpractice ranging from crude method of giraffing to sophisticated ones (the use of electronics). The use of electronic (scientific) calculator that is capable of storing information and the cell phone is now one of the methods of examination malpractice.

Some of the information we have from WAEC indicated that as many as 54,579 out of 850,479 (i.e. 6.22 percent) were involved (or let say were reported to have been involved) in examination malpractice of one sort to another in the November/December examination. The following table reveals the pattern of the nature of examination malpractice as recorded by WAEC for 2000, 2001 and 2002 May/June Examination.

Table 1 Pattern of the Nature of Examination Malpractice as Recorded by WAEC for 2000, 2001 and 2002 May/June Examination.

Type of Examination	May / June 2000		May / June 2001		May / June 2002	
	No of candidate involved	% Of total sat	No of candidate involved	% Of total sat	No of candidate involved	% Of total sat
Bringing in foreign materials	13064	1.274	244864	2.83	13014	1.430
Irregular activities inside and examination hall	14898	1.453	10909	1.24	16479	1.811
Collusion	22703	2.215	11106	1.27	64172	7.052
Impersonation	643	0.035	3407	0.39	891	0.097
Leakage	-	-	-	-	-	-
Mass cheating	-	-	1568	0.18	-	-
Insult/assault on supervision	359	0.035	1049	0.12	263	0.028
Miscellaneous cases under rule (8)	445	0.082	1676	0.19	700	0.076

Source: Test Development Division WAEC 2002



Collusion appears to be one of the rampant forms of examination malpractice as many of the candidate especially those candidates in May / June 2000 and 2002 were reported to be involved in collusion. We can say that WAEC is intensifying its efforts in making sure that its papers are not allowed to leak, as leakage for the 3 years is nil.

With this type of situation, one question which readily comes to mind is that, 'how can schools be effective, when the entire educational enterprise is infected with the cankerworm of examination malpractice? It appears therefore that if a particular school presents students with very high grade at the end of secondary school, there is the tendency to want to find out whether or not the students were involved in examination malpractice, hence, the society is likely to question the effectiveness of such school. This underscores the need for a search of practical ways of checking the problem of examination malpractice in schools. Social action research could play a significant role in this direction.

In Nigeria, most of the researches on examination malpractice (e.g. Uwadiae (1997); Awonbor, (2004); Jegede, (2003); Makoju, Adewale, Nwargwu and Shuaibu, (2004) and Nwahunanya, (2004) indicate that considerable research has been carried out with focus on schools, teachers and students and less focus on parents of secondary school students. However, parents are also stakeholders in educational enterprise; therefore, data emanating from them could contribute meaningfully to addressing the problem of examination malpractice in Nigeria. Besides, their opinion on what affects their children and/or wards is equally important in enhancing school effectiveness. This explains why their perception on the stain on school effectiveness is important.

Statement of Problem

The societal expectation of a school is to be effective in terms of quality of cognitive, affective and psychomotor. However, there are some obstructions associated with school effectiveness in Nigeria. One of them is examination malpractice. Therefore, this study examines the perception of Nigeria parents of secondary school students on examination malpractice as a stain in school effectiveness.

Research Questions

Four research questions were raised to guide the study, they are as follows:

1. What are the enabling environments for examination malpractice?
2. What are the consequences of examination malpractice?
3. Who among these categories of people suffer most from consequences of examination malpractices?
4. What effective measures can be adopted to curb examination malpractices?

Methodology

The target population was parents of secondary school students in Nigeria. Therefore, the present assessment was conducted as a sample survey covering all thirty-six states and Abuja (Federal Capital Territory) and consequently a good proportion of the 774 Local Government Areas in Nigeria participated in the study. The Federal Office of Statistics provided expertise on the sample

design, on agreed sample size, and on the procedure for sample selection. A multi-stage stratified sampling design was adopted. The survey design provided a basis for valid generalizations at national level and reasonable estimates at State level. The sample size used for this study was 3,289 parents of secondary school students.

Development, Validation and Administration of Questionnaire

The questionnaire for parents of secondary school students was intended to generate data for analysis on contextual variables including pupil, school and home related factors that impact on examination malpractices. The parent questionnaire comprised items on parents' background including gender, school type (school where their children attend), factors encouraging examination malpractice in Nigeria, consequences of examination malpractice, measures to be adopted in curbing examination malpractices. To ensure reliability of the questionnaires, the draft instruments were subjected to pilot testing in 6 states selected on the basis of one from each of the six geo-political zones: Kaduna, Niger, Bauchi, Abia, Edo and Akwa Ibom. Administration of instruments was carried out in 2 Local Government Areas, 1 rural and 1 urban in each state. Eight secondary schools including 4 public and 4 private schools were sampled. Twelve parents of students in the sampled schools completed the Parents' questionnaire. Based on the findings from the Pilot study, the questionnaire was reviewed for increased reliability and validity. The questionnaires were administered in June/ July 2003, about three weeks to the end of the 2002/2003-school session. The instruments were administered on parents of JSS2 and SS2 students in the same school. Students were required to take home the parents' questionnaire, which were returned after completion the next morning.

Results and Discussion

Research Question One

What are the enabling environments for examination malpractice?

There are three (3) questions in the questionnaire that are related to the enabling environments in examination malpractice and each of them is answered in the next 3 tables presented below:

Which of these factors do you think encourage examination malpractices in Nigeria? The parents' responses on this question are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 Parents' Opinion on the Factors Encouraging Examination Malpractice

Parents' Opinion on the Factors Encouraging Examination Malpractice	Frequency	Percent
Examination questions are not related to the syllabus	1375	41.8
Insufficient time	928	28.2
Objective questions	507	15.4

Many parents (1375 out of 3289 representing 41.8 percent) indicated that questions set for students taking examination at senior secondary school certificate examination level are not related

to the syllabus and as a result encouraged examination malpractice. One can explain the situation thus: there are two types of syllabi, one developed by an examination body referred to as examination syllabus and the one developed by Nigeria Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) known as teaching syllabus otherwise known as the curriculum. Although these two syllabi should be common in scope, the report has always been that JAMB syllabus is overloaded and difficult (Farombi, 1988), so candidates often times find it difficult to cope with and that explains why majority of the parents believe that examination questions are not related to the syllabus. About 28 percent of the parents were of the opinion that insufficient time for the examination encouraged examination malpractice. Insufficient time is not a good reason why candidates should cheat during examination because if candidates know what they should write, they are not likely to have time for cheating, hence, it should not be regarded as a threat to candidates in relation to examination malpractice. Some parents were of the opinion that objective questions encourage examination malpractice. This is because; many students have developed different skills in using their fingers to pass information to their colleagues on the correct options in objective questions. For example, if a candidate lifts his fore finger up to a friend who was asking for assistance during examination, it means his correct option is A and two fingers imply B, three fingers mean C and so on.

What in your view are responsible for examination malpractices in schools?

The parents' responses on this question are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Parents' Opinion on Factors Responsible for Examination Malpractices in Schools.

Parents' Opinion on Factors Responsible for Examination Malpractices in Schools.

	Frequency	Percent
Inadequate preparation of students by teachers	2486	70.8
Emphasis on paper qualification	1260	35.8
Students are lazy and not quite prepared to learn	2088	59.4
Parents wants the children to pass at all cost	450	12.8
Corrupt supervisors and custodians of examination papers	213	6.1
Reflection of the wider society	31	.9
Corrupt teachers and examiners	105	3.0
Others	21	.6

Among the strongest factors contributing to examination malpractice according to parents of secondary school students is inadequate preparation of students by teachers. There are complaints that the syllabus for most of the subjects at secondary school level are overloaded (Odetoyinbo, 2004), there is the possibility that most of these topics may not be covered by the teachers and that explains why parents had to express their opinion on inadequate preparation of students by teachers. The next factor responsible for examination malpractices in schools according to parents of secondary school students is that students are lazy and not quite prepared to learn. One of the commonest thing that is observable among the students in cities is that some of them do not stay at school, they may appear in school in the morning but as from 11.00am, they begin to leave school in twos and threes, some go for indoor game like table tennis and snooker while others may go to their friends house to watch

video (Farombi, 1998). Since they are not ready to learn, the next thing they can do when examination is coming is to engage in examination malpractice. Apart from those two potent factors, another strong reason for examination malpractice is the emphasis on paper qualification. Until less emphasis is laid on paper qualification and we place emphasis on the skills acquired in order to function well in the society, the issue of examination malpractice will continue to persist. The craze for paper qualification is the off-shoot of the poor implementation of our national policy on education when emphasis is gradually being removed from proper acquisition of demonstrable skills and academic excellence to possession of paper qualification not backed up with practical experience to show for it (Nwahunanya, 2004). One of the social menaces the present administration is fighting is the issue of corruption. Some people who have one thing or the other with examination are corrupt. They take bribe from students or harass female students sexually before they could allow them pass. There is a saying that charity begins at home, some parents are not helping matters. It was reported somewhere that a parent went to buy JAMB result for his son to read medicine but bought wrong combination. He went to show the result to a professor in one of the leading universities in Nigeria and that one said, he couldn't read medicine because of wrong combination. The son interjected by saying but I told you that you should buy Physics result and not Economics result.

In what ways do parents contribute to examination malpractice?

The parents' responses on this question are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Parents' Roles in Examination Malpractice.

Parents' Roles in Examination Malpractice	Frequency	Percent
Register pupils in special centres	1365	38.8
Purchasing examination marks	491	13.9
Bribing the supervisor / examination official	694	19.7
Having someone to do the examination for the candidate	534	15.2
None of the above	384	10.9
Others	52	1.5

Registration of pupils in special centre top the list of parents' opinion in the ways they (parents) contribute to examination malpractice. Special centres (especially in the rural settings) are usually used to perpetuate examination malpractice because less attention is usually paid on those centres in the rural areas. This supports the findings of Okwonkwo, (2003). Another role of parents that needs to be addressed is the issue of bribing the supervisor/examination officials to allow their children/ward cheat or copy from a well-prepared materials. Next to that is the issue of impersonation (having someone to do the examination for the candidate). Purchasing examination marks is another factors that is prevalent among parents especially the JAMB marks so that their children/ward could be admitted to read what they want them to read (not what their ability can sustain).

Research Question Two

What are the consequences of examination malpractice?

The parents' responses on this question are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Consequences of examination malpractice

Consequences of examination malpractice	Frequency	Percent
Decision based on examination results are often not reliable	2124	64.6
Certificate are no longer widely recognized (acceptable)	707	21.5
Frequent cancellation of examination results of candidates	1214	36.9
Teachers and pupils look out for examination questions	421	12.8

Out of 3289 parents who responded to the questionnaire, 2124 of them representing 64.6 percent indicated that *decisions based on examination are not reliable*. Their reason is likely to be based on the premise that most of the students are involved in one form of examination malpractice or the other. This supports the assertion of Nwahunanya (2004) where he discussed the consequences of examination malpractice.. The second potent consequence of examination malpractice is the *frequent cancellation of examination results affecting innocent candidates* as indicated by 1214 parents representing 36.9 percent. The author was once a victim of cancellation of result in 1983 when he attempted the JAMB examination. The information given was that many candidates cheated in the centre he wrote his examination and the results for that centre was cancelled; thereby preventing this author the opportunity to be admitted into the University for that year. The next consequence of examination malpractice is *certificates are no longer recognized* because the holders of such certificates could not prove that they actually merit it. This is why this author believes that emphasis should not be placed on certificate but what the candidates is able to do. The last consequence bothers on students looking out for examination papers instead of preparing for the examination. This is to buttress the fact that students are lazy and are not willing to work hard.

Research Question Three

Who among these categories of people suffer most from consequences of examination malpractices? The parents' responses on this question are presented in Table 7.

Table 6: Categories of people who suffer most from consequences of examination malpractices

	Frequency	Percent
Examinees/students	4227	94.7
Examiners	343	7.7
Parents	1122	25.2
Examination institution	196	4.4
Schools	261	5.8

Everybody knows that the first category of people to be affected from consequences of examination malpractices is the candidate. If the candidate is apprehended depending on the type of offence, it may lead him to imprisonment of not more than 3 years or a fine of N100,000.00 or both (FGN, 1999). The next set of people that could be affected from the consequence of examination malpractice is the parents. If their children/wards are arrested, and fined, they are likely to be the ones to run around in order to get the money / fine paid. If they (children/wards) are imprisoned the parents will still be involved in visiting them. Schools, although, rated as number 4, the consequence

of examination malpractice on school can be serious because, if a school is blacklisted, the school is banned from presenting candidates for such examination, then what is the fate of the innocent candidates in that school? Again, it is likely that most parents will withdraw their children from such schools.

Research Question Four

What effective measures can be adopted to curb examination malpractices?

The parents' responses on this question are presented in Table 6.

Table 7: measures that can be adopted to curb examination malpractices

	Frequency	Percent
Improve quality control in school	2146	65
Laws on examination malpractice should be enforced	954	29.0
Adequate examination halls should be provided	209	6.4
Affected schools should be blacklisted	188	5.7
Handling of the questions paper and the test scores	528	16.1

The parents' first priority on the effective measures that could be adopted to curb examination malpractices is that school quality control should be improved, as 2146 out of 3289 parents representing 65.2 percent indicated this. The second important factor according to parents is that laws on examination malpractice should be enforced. The federal government enacted decree 33 of 1999, which has to do with penalty for the culprits. The decree spelt different offences and penalty for each offence. Parents did not consider the issue of security in handling question papers and scores as a threat to examination malpractice because only few of them indicated it as a measure that could be used to curb examination malpractice, probably because the staff of examination bodies are security conscious. This supports the WAEC observation on leakages of examination papers between 2000 and 2002 as presented in Table 1. Another way according to parents of secondary school students of curbing examination malpractice is to use big hall for the external examination. We have discussed that one of the factors contributing to examination malpractice is the sitting arrangement made available to candidates in schools. If the examination hall is small, candidates will sit so close and this allows for cheating, giraffing, copying and all sorts of examination misconducts. Although, very few parents considered the blacklisting of school that gets itself involved in examination malpractice, this looks like a good punishment measure of examination malpractice. This implies that if a school is blacklisted, it cannot present candidate for examination again until the school is pardoned. If this is done, the method is likely to increase the school's effectiveness, as most parents would not want to send their children to blacklisted schools and if care is not taking, such schools may be forced to close down.

Conclusion and Recommendations

One important conclusion one can make in this study is that if less emphasis is placed on paper qualification, it is likely that many of our students would not engage in examination malpractice. It is the believe of some educators that if continuous assessment practice is encouraged and the

problem of comparability of standard is addressed, each school can then administer its examination and the examination also can serve as entry requirement for students who are seeking admission (placement) and certification for those who are not willing to further their education. Thus, the emphasis placed on certification is likely to reduce and the urge to cheat by students during examination is also likely to be reduced.

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