ICT IN PUBLIC EXAMINING IN NIGERIA: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

BY

AKOREDE, S.F. Ph.D.

&

ABIJO, J.A. Ph.D
INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
UNIVERSITY OF IBADAN,
NIGERIA.

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ABSTRACT

It is universally acclaimed that examinations are vital in determining the credibility of the quality of education that any nation offers to its citizens. This is why the use of Information Computer Technology (ICT) that has been embraced by most of our public examination bodies in Nigeria is seen as a transformation from the formal traditional system of service deliverance. This paper therefore made a review of ICT practices in public examining in order to see the extent to which they have met the global standards. It therefore highlighted the benefits of ICT usage, the challenges and prospects. Recommendations are also offered for improvement in public examining in general.

Key Words: Public Examining, ICT, Benefits, Challenges and Prospects:

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Introduction

Today, the examination system is one of the key contemporary moral issues as technology continues to play a transforming role in societies in all over the world. The prospects for the utilization of new technology in the field of education continue to be part of human consciousness from a number of angles (Fortune and Richard 2013). They further explained that one principal angle, with a strong bearing on the assessment and evaluation of the education system is that of public examination.

Public examining involves some activities engaged by public examining bodies in the bid to examine some individuals (Students) after a completion of some course of studies.

The 1992 edition of the BBC English Dictionary, cited in Ojerinde (2005) differentiates a number of usages of the word 'examine' as to look at carefully; to look at to check the health of; to find how much individuals know by asking them questions or making them take examinations. Hence, it could be seen that examining requires some degree of carefulness, which suggests that it should not be a haphazard activity. We therefore examine in order to take decisions on the examinees. What exact questions are asked or the items constituting the examination are major determinants of the quality of decisions to be taken on the basis of the exercise.

According to Ojerinde (2001) cited in Ojerinde (2005), some of the decisions taken on the basis of examinations include determination of what the examinee has learned, and if they have learned at all. Some examinations are designed to aid in selection of candidates for admission into some programme of further studies, including

promotion to a new class or appointment into a job. Examinations, especially public ones, can also be used for certification of candidates.

However, irrespective of the purpose for which we are examining the extent to which we reach a correct decision on the examinee in respect of whatever trait or ability is of interest to us depends on the quality of the instrument we are using, that is the examination

PUBLIC EXAMINATION AND PUBLIC EXAMINATION BODIES IN NIGERIA

In the context of this paper, we shall look at a public examination as any examination designed for a clearly defined set of students, administered and scored by an establishment different from that in which the examinees receive their training.

Within Nigeria, there is the tendency for people to restrict their conception of public examination bodies to those like the West African Examinations Council (WAEC), National Examinations Council (NECO), Joint Admissions and Matriculations Board (JAMB), National Business and Technical Examinations Board (NABTEB) and National Teachers' Institute (NTI). It is pertinent to observe, therefore, that resident in almost all State Ministries of Education in Nigeria have other public examination bodies that go under names like Examination Resource Centres (ERCs) or Examination Development Centres (EDCs). These bodies develop and administer certificate examinations at least for Junior Secondary School Candidates and in some States, also for primary school candidates. Moreover, in State Ministries of Labour, other bodies exist, which develop and administer tests for tradesmen and artisans and award certificates to successful candidates. It may however not be far from the truth to assert that the degree of

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professionalism put into the activities of these myriad public examination bodies may not be uniform.

ACTIVITIES OF PUBLIC EXAMINATION BODIES

In this paper, a review of the activities of three major examination bodies will be done. These are the activities common to WAEC, NECO and JAMB; this is because their activities mostly revolve around secondary school examinations and certification.

A variety of activities go into the process of public examining in Nigeria. These activities can be grouped into three, each of which has its own challenges and prospects.

These are:-

1. Pre-examination activities;
2. Examination conduct activities; and
3. Post-examination activities.

According to Ojerinde (2005), the process of public examining in Nigeria usually begins quite long before the examinee comes into contact with the examination instrument. In some cases, it might take two or more years before the contact.

Specifically, as the examination bodies such as WAEC, NECO and JAMB prepare for the examination instrument, so also will the candidates prepare for the examination. Most of these activities involve the use of ICT, this is the focus of this paper.

ICT AS TRANSFORMATIVE TOOL IN PUBLIC EXAMINING

In this section, the concept of ICT, the review of the antecedents before the use of ICT is employed in public examining, the various

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innovations brought in through ICT, the challenges faced and prospects of the use of ICT was looked into.

ICT is a global network of computers linked together over long distances. It was created by the American Military as a means of communication and has been in existence since 1950's up until the mid to late eighties. Commercial organizations and educational institutions mainly used the internet. The internet has rapidly become a key element for communication in this so-called global information society (Hick and Halpin, 2001) cited in Ige (2008). The rapid development of technology has seen improvement in communication links and a lowering of cost. The implication of this is that the internet is now more available to more people. Since the internet is now available to a wide sector of the population, the western world have seized on its education potential.

The internet is a valuable potential information for students from various examining bodies, such as information on education materials on various subjects which can facilitates learning e.g E-learning/collaborative learning on different subjects portal e.g four lecturers attending to the same students on net consecutively, synergy of ideas on various topics, E-library in several places and on-line tests/evaluation of performance in selected topics. All these boost the performance of students compared to the conventional forms of doing things before.
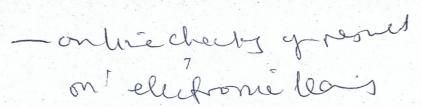
It is worth nothing that most of the pre, post and during examination activities of public examination bodies in Nigeria have been computerized. This signals a u-turn from the use of only paper and pencil recordings of activities. In the same vein, the candidates have also witnessed a change from the traditional approach to application and checking of results through postal services and pasting

of results in schools notice boards. This was made possible by the online checking of results launched by WAEC in February 2003, the launching of e-registration portal by WAEC in November 2004 and the latest online results verification portal launched on 25 September, 2012 by Dr. Iyi Nwadiae, the outgoing Head of National Office of WAEC (Report by Olabisi Deji-Folutile in (Punch 28th Sept., 2012).

The emergence of ICT has occasioned innovations in the generation and dissemination of knowledge through electronic-learning (e-learning). It has effectively eroded the traditional "power" of the teacher as the knower of everything. It has therefore broken the monopoly of knowledge. The search engines such as Google has given everyone Kraven for knowledge to unlock and demystify knowledge in any subject. To crown it all, e-journals and e-books have fast-tracked knowledge dissemination. Students can also exploit the potentials of mobile-learning, SMS texts, bulk/group SMS, closed user groups (CUGS) and phone links. Hence, students have access and avenue through which they can be well prepared towards examinations.

The above trends in public examining signals innovative transformation because of the immense benefits that it involves. This is why Nwadiae said on 25 September 2012 that "it is indeed refreshing to note that the WAEC online result verification portal will promote integrity and efficiency. Ultimately, it would make life easier for students, individuals, institutions and organizations that require the service".

The online result verification portal was launched to enable institutions of higher learning, embassies and employers of labour, to check and verify candidates results from time to time. It will also allow people in any part of the world to have access to results of candidates. The WAEC boss explained further that anyone candidate that sit for

— online checks of result on electronic leas

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any of the councils' examination will no longer have to go through the stress of visiting the council's offices physically before verifying results as they would have access to results of the councils' candidates from any part of the world. This is the global standard.

One can only but imagine the socio-economic advantages that will accrue to the nation as a result of the time, money and other resources that would be saved with the introduction of these services.

The use of ICT in public examining is capable of reducing result forgery and examination impersonation through the use of thumb printing machines which detect the authentic candidate for the examination.

It also allows many students to be admitted or examined at the same time. For example the Open University made use of ICT for his admission into the University.

As much as there are benefits of the innovative use of ICT in public examinations, there are also challenges faced by its usage. Though the general challenges faced by public examination bodies are numerous and ranges from inadequate examination halls or classrooms to check and control candidates during examination; impersonation in the examination hall; leakages of examination questions; mercenaries hired by registered students to write the examination for them; bribing examination officials-supervisors and invigilators; desperation of parents to buy live questions for their wards; conspiracy and collaboration of security agents and officials of public examination to compromise the integrity of the examination (Ayo C.K et al 2007).

Specifically, the challenges faced by the use of ICT in public examinations are also numerous. The epileptic power supply in most

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part of the country; the level of ICT literacy of applicants; online frauds; wrong results given to candidates.

Coupled with this is the issue of network problem. There are many occasions when there will be network failure when an urgent information will be needed and one will not gain an access into it.

Other challenges is that of promptness to an information as a result of too many people who will like to get access to the network at the same time. One may not get quick and easy access needed for an urgent information. Also to log in for an information on the network there is usually the problem of porter closure. There is usually the problem of port closure ad re-opening. One may not get access on the net if there is porter closure where as all these cannot apply to conventional ways of transaction with all the examining bodies.

The use of ICT in public examining have some prospects that are worth mentioning. The Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) had already queued in into the computer based testing (CBT) for the Universal Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) and some universities have employed the use of computer testing in Post-UTME. The category of universities that have made use of CBT for the Post-UTME are mostly private universities and results are given immediately the test is over. It is therefore pertinent that public universities are encouraged to queue in into the use of ICT in their Post-UTME examinations.

The use of ICT in assessment in subject areas at the SSCE is another prospect expected of the public examination bodies in Nigeria. This will require longtime planning and a lot of efforts need to be put into this, so that Nigeria mode of assessment will meet the global standard.

CONCLUSION

Public examining bodies such as WAEC, NECO and JAMB have taken giant strides in the use of ICT in the delivery of their services in the last one decade. However, much still needs to be done in the area of assessment in subject areas written during the Senior School Certificate Examinations (SSCE).

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Government at various levels should equip schools with computer and accessories so that students can learn computer in order to improve their literacy in the subject.
- Government should also see to the control of the epileptic electricity supply in the country, so that people can have access to the internet all the time.
- Public examining bodies should increase the number of days for the opening of portal during registration for examinations.
- Public examining bodies should organize periodic training for staff in the processing of results, so that mixed-up in results will be reduced to the bearest minimum.
- Public examining bodies should start planning for the use of ICT in writing of examinations in various subjects offered at the secondary school level.
- Public and private universities should queue in totally in the use of ICT for Post-JAMB examinations, so as to reduce the bottlenecks involved in paper and pencil tests.

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