

Appraisal of the Level of Examination Malpractice in Large Scale Public Examination: The National Examinations Council Experience

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Abstract

Examination malpractice has been identified at various fora of educational discourse as a serious threat to the integrity of public examination. The paper tried to clarify some basic concepts in the title such as examination, examination malpractice and public examinations. The various forms of examination malpractice were identified as well as types of large scale public examinations. An examination of the level of examination malpractice cases in NECO SSCE (Internal) over a period of six years (2010 – 2015) at subjects, types and national levels were done. These were presented in frequencies, percentages and graphical forms. The paper is of the view that if examination malpractice is seriously combated using strict measures (as experienced in NECO), the integrity of public examinations result will not be at stake. Such measures among others include the use of security personnel at examination centres, daily distribution of question papers to custodian points and effective monitoring of examination by external monitors (i.e lecturers from tertiary institutions of learning) etc.

Introduction

Nations of the world have all come to realize that education is the most potent tool for the attainment of national goals. No wonder, Nigeria over the years had attached great importance to education as a vehicle for driving its national programmes such as NEEDS (National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy) and the 7-point Agenda of the Federal Government, Millennium Development Goals (MGDs), sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) etc.

In realizing the objectives of such programmes using education as a tool, there is the need to periodically assess the quality of teaching and learning activities going on in the schools. The achievement of this could be done through the assessment of candidates in school subjects by internal and external bodies. In particular is the assessment by external bodies which is generally referred to as public examinations.

In Nigeria, we have many public examination bodies such as the West African Examinations Council (WAEC), Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB), National Teachers Institute (NTI), National Business and Technical Examinations Board (NABTEB) and National Examinations Council (NECO). All these examination bodies conduct large scale public examinations which could be for certification, placement or and admission into primary, basic and secondary levels respectively.

The National Examinations Council (NECO) came into existence in 1999 by the promulgation of an Act No. 1 of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The Act establishing NECO among other

things, gave it the responsibility of conducting the Senior Secondary Certificate Examination (SSCE) for school-based and external candidates.

One of the major challenges faced by NECO in the conduct of its SSCE is that of Examination Malpractice (Onwuakpa, 2012 ; Anyanwu& Eke, 2012). It is therefore very pertinent to consciously examine the extent to which NECO has combated Examination Malpractice in the school-based SSCE (internal) from 2010 to 2015. The accomplishment of this task forms the major impetus of this paper.

The Concepts of Examination and Examination Malpractice

Ojerinde (2005) and Asuru (1996) defined examination within the context of education as the assessment of a person's performance when confronted with a series of questions, problems or tasks set for him in order to ascertain the amount of knowledge that he/she has acquired, the extent to which he is able to utilize it or the quality and effectiveness of the skills he has developed. The 1992 BBC English Dictionary defined examination with denotations such as to look carefully; to look at; to check the health of; to find how much individuals know by asking them questions or making them take examination. These suggest that examination requires some degree of carefulness and not a haphazard activity. Examinations are conducted in order to provide data that should help improve upon the quality of decisions about the examinee. Some of the decision taken on the basis of examinations include determination of what the examinee learned (if they have learned at all), to aid in selection of candidates for admission into some programme of further studies and promotion to a new class or appointment into a job (Ojerinde, 2001).

Examination malpractice has been carefully defined by Wokocho (1994), Onwuakpa (2012), Okpala (2015), Nzewi (1996) and Ajibade (1996) as “wrong-doings in examinations”, improper or dishonest acts associated with a view to obtaining an unmerited advantage. It exists at three stages: pre-examination, during examination and post-examination. The following forms of examination malpractice exist at pre-examination stage:

- Registration of non-school candidates in school-based examinations;
- Organizing fraudulent activities e.g payment of cooperation fees by candidates;
- Forgery of Continuous Assessment scores;
- Recruitment of unscrupulous and unqualified personnel as supervisors and invigilators;
- Sale of registration slips to non-bonafide candidates.

Examples of malpractice during examinations are as follows:

- Copying (which is called giraffing) or ECOWAS (based on mutual agreement);
- Importation of foreign materials into the hall;
- Dubbing which takes the form of tattoo, super print, missiles and microchips;
- Use of contractors or mercenaries, walkie-talkie and mobile phones;
- Impersonation, mass cheating, leakage of question papers, writing on the chalk-board, dictation of answers to candidates;

- Coded messages for objective questions.

The forms of examination malpractice committed after the examination (post examination stage) are:

- Smuggling in of written scripts either at the examination venue or at custodian points;
- Changing of candidates' scores by staff of examination bodies;
- Inducing examiners at marking venue so as to award generous marks to undeserving candidates.

However, the perpetrators of examination malpractice especially in large scale public examinations are pupils/students, parents, teachers, supervisors, invigilators, school authorities, law enforcement agents, whole communities, staff of examination bodies, bank officials as well as the printers.

The Concept of Large Scale Public Examinations

The word 'large scale' is contextually expressed in terms of the population of candidates that registered and sat for an examination. This is, mostly found in public examinations in Nigeria such as National Common Entrance Examination (NCEE), Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) and Senior School Certificate Examination (SSCE). The population of candidates that sit in these examinations is enormous ranging from thousands to million(s) of candidates. Public examination as distinct from school or internal examination is one which is not restricted to students (candidates) in a particular school but open to persons who have been exposed to the subject examined in a formal or non-formal arrangement. The primary purpose of every public examination is to provide equal opportunities to all members of the society irrespective of the type of education they have received. It is mainly concerned with large testing programmes which involve a large number of candidates and a variety of subjects/papers being examined (Okpala, 2015). The major characteristics of a public examination in a given country according to Okpala, Onocha and Oyedeji (1993) are as follows:

- It lays emphasis on certification as an end in itself and not a means to an end;
- A prescribed syllabus is used by the candidates;
- Teachers' participation is minimal except in conducting (supervision) examinations and marking of scripts, and
- Results obtained are not directly fed back to improve teaching and learning.

Examination of Level of Examination Malpractice in NECO SSCE (Internal)

The National Examinations Council (NECO) conducts at Primary level [National Common Entrance Certificate Examination (NCEE)], Basic level [Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE)] and Secondary level [Senior Secondary Certificate Examination, SSCE (internal)]. Among these examinations, the SSCE (internal) which is conducted in June/July each year is large scale because it has close to a million number of candidates who are examined in many subjects/papers (about 79 of them). E.g Since the inception of NECO and the conduct of its first SSCE (internal) in 2000, the Council has been observing cases of malpractice in this examination. This ranges from impersonation, copying of

worked scripts, writing answers on the board of examination classrooms/halls to smuggling of worked scripts into subject/paper parcel.

It is becoming a serious nightmare to examination bodies.

Hence, this paper examines the level of examination malpractice in NECO June/July SSCE from 2010 to 2015. It is presented at National, Subjects and **Level of NECO June/July Malpractice Cases at National from 2010 to 2015**

Table 1: Level of Examination Malpractice at NECO June/July SSCE (2010 – 2015)

Year	Total Registered	Total Sat	Total No. of Cases	Percentage (%)
2010	1,143,169	1,132,357	577,139	6.37
2011	1,190,393	1,169,951	439,529	4.70
2012	1,124,967	1,102,608	78,099	0.89
2013	1,052,898	1,034,263	66,461	0.80
2014	989,662	978,886	34,744	0.44
2015	975,998	969,491	43,608	0.56

Table 1 displays the level of examination malpractice at the national level in terms of total number of malpractice cases, percentages of malpractice cases observed in each year. Malpractice cases here indicate the number of times the candidates committed a malpractice.

$$\% \text{ of malpractice cases} = \frac{\text{Total No. of Cases} \times 100}{\text{Total Sat} \times 8 \text{ Subjects}}$$

The table shows at a glance that there is a downward trend in the level of malpractice cases from 577,139 cases (6.37%) in 2010 to 43,608 cases (0.56%) in 2015. The implication of the reduction in total malpractice cases in each year is a clear testimony of NECO's fight against and zero-tolerance towards the incidences of examination malpractice.

Level of Examination Malpractice Cases in NECO June/July SSCE at Subject Level

Some key subjects presented in Table 2 were examined with respect to number of candidates that were involved in examination malpractice.

Table 2: Level of Examination Malpractice Cases at NECO June/July SSCE by Subjects (2010 – 2015)

Subject	Year	Total Sat	Total No. of candidates Involved per Subject.	% of Candidates Involved
English	2010	1,116,195	66,519	5.96

Language	2011	1,160,049	51,312	4.42
	2012	1,087,627	10,206	0.94
	2013	1,052,898	5,782	0.57
	2014	967,351	3,489	0.36
	2015	960, 820	7,389	0.77
Mathematics	2010	1,113,177	66,260	5.80
	2011	1,156,561	50,826	4.39
	2012	1,088,530	14,624	1.34
	2013	1,052,891	12,077	1.18
	2014	960,600	3,997	0.42
Biology	2015	961, 258	5, 882	0.61
	2010	1,110,753	66,772	5.87
	2011	1,112,947	49,036	4.41
	2012	1,084,599	7,246	0.67
	2013	1,017,350	6,480	0.64
Economics	2014	783,975	2,668	0.34
	2015	719, 995	4,117	0.57
	2010	1,016,306	60,571	5.72
	2011	1,044,368	48,290	4.62
	2012	975,586	8,732	0.90
Government	2013	913,161	6,691	0.73
	2014	715,000	3,756	0.53
	2015	650, 440	3, 150	0.48
	2010	654,881	40,523	5.91
	2011	656,470	29,541	4.50
Agricultural Science	2012	703,316	6,720	0.96
	2013	562,731	3,962	0.70
	2014	715,000	3,756	0.53
	2015	401, 013	1, 528	0.38
	2010	919,230	56,138	6.11
Technical Drawing	2011	923,759	44,031	4.77
	2012	898,560	5,732	0.64
	2013	843,454	6,781	0.80
	2014	500,897	2,094	0.42
	2015	354, 514	1, 583	0.45
Technical Drawing	2010	919,230	56,138	5.90
	2011	11,403	120	1.01
	2012	10,342	07	0.07

	2013	12,675	16	0.13
	2014	11,485	15	0.13
	2015	11, 719	08	0.07
Literature- in- English	2010	283,748	19,431	6.43
	2011	264,957	12,809	4.80
	2012	264,866	2,552	0.96
	2013	250,152	2,010	0.80
	2014	211,125	992	0.47
	2015	203, 177	905	0.45
Geography	2010	711,689	36,754	4.95
	2011	674,686	28,339	4.20
	2012	703,316	6,720	0.96
	2013	671,991	4,837	0.72
	2014	431,230	1,557	0.36
	2015	338, 973	2,739	0.81

In Table 2, nine (9) subjects that reflect, Science, Social Science, Arts, Mathematics and English Language groups were chosen because of their importance in the school system. In years 2010 and 2011, all the subjects' recorded high number of candidates involved in examination malpractice with Mathematics, Biology and Economics taking the lead. A critical look at Table 2 also reveals that there is a downward or decreasing trend in the level of examination malpractice across the 9 subjects. It also shows that the Council experienced low level of examination malpractice in the various subjects in year 2014 and 2015. This is because of the Council's resolve in fighting and stemming down examination malpractice using a lot of strategies among which are monitoring the examination using external monitors drawn from lecturers at the tertiary institutions as well as the use of security personnel at the examination centres.

Level of Examination Malpractice in NECO June/July SSCE at Type of Malpractice (2010 – 2015)

Examination malpractice occurs in various forms and dimension such as Bringing in Foreign Materials (BFM), Collusion, Copying, Aiding and Abetting etc during the conduct of large Scale public examinations. It is also necessary to examine its trend from 2010 to 2015 by type. This is displayed on Table 3.

Table 3: Level of Examination Malpractice in NECO June/July SSCE by Type from 2010 – 2015

Type of Malpractice	Year	Total Number of Candidates Involved in Malpractice	Number of Number of Candidates Involved per Type	of Percentage (%)
Bringing in Foreign	2010	34,555	7,154	20.70

Material (BFM)	2011	439,529	2,551	0.58
	2012	537,579	24,819	4.62
	2013	8,307	180	2.16
	2014	4,343	37	0.84
	2015	43,608	427	0.98
Bringing into the Hall electronic Communication Gadgets (BEC)	2010	34,555	600	1.74
	2011	439,529	314	0.07
	2012	537,579	1,370	0.25
	2013	8,307	49	0.59
	2014	4,343	18	0.41
Irregular Activities inside or Outside the Examination Hall (IRR)	2010	34,555	187	0.43
	2011	439,529	396	1.15
	2012	537,579	2,043	0.46
	2013	8,307	3,753	0.70
	2014	4,343	141	1.70
Aiding and Abetting, Seeking and Receiving help from non- candidates	2015	43,608	72	1.65
	2010	34,555	232	0.53
	2011	439,529	12,501	36.18
	2012	537,579	91,586	20.84
	2013	8,307	123,731	23.02
Unruly Behaviour in the Examination Hall (URB)	2014	4,343	1,669	20.09
	2015	43,608	774	17.82
	2010	34,555	5,989	13.73
	2011	439,529	1,139	3.30
	2012	537,579	443	0.10
Collusion (COL)	2013	8,307	4,506	0.84
	2014	4,343	61	0.73
	2015	43,608	31	0.72
	2010	34,555	293	0.67
	2011	439,529	2,383	6.70
Impersonation	2012	537,579	1,856	0.42
	2013	8,307	8,610	1.0
	2014	4,343	123	1.48
	2015	43,608	40	0.92
	2010	34,555	2,076	4.76
Leakage (Collective) (LKC)	2011	439,529	2,950	8.54
	2012	537,579	8,208	1.87
	2013	8,307	15,446	2.87
	2014	4,343	630	7.59
	2015	43,608	234	5.38
	2010	34,555	3,024	6.93
	2011	439,529	10	0.02
	2012	537,579	0	0.00
	2013	8,307	17	0.00
	2014	4,33	0	0.00

	2015	43, 608	0	0.00
Mass Cheating (MCH)	2010	34,555	929	2.67
	2011	439,529	301,455	68.58
	2012	537,579	305,092	56.75
	2013	8,307	03	0.04
	2014	4,343	989	22.78
	2015	43, 608	11, 729	26.9
Collective	2010	34,555	115	0.33
insult/assault and	2011	439,529	7,994	1.82
violent behaviour	2012	537,579	8,227	1.53
(ASC)	2013	8,307	45	0.54
	2014	4,343	54	1.52
	2015	43, 608	0	0.00
Bringing dangerous	2010	34,555	1	0
weapons into the	2011	439,529	6	0
hall/precincts of the	2012	537,579	81	0.02
Exam hall (DWE)	2013	8,307	01	0.01
	2014	4,343	0	0.00
	2015	43, 608	0	0.00
Absent but has answer	2010	34,555	1,271	3.68
script(s) (ABS)	2011	439,529	12,254	2.79
	2012	537,579	14,460	2.69
	2013	8,307	914	11.00
	2014	4,343	117	2.69
	2015	43, 608	1, 861	4.27
Cheating detected at	2010	34,555	3,535	10.23
the Marking Venue	2011	439,529	9,336	2.12
(Double Scripts)	2012	537,579	18,406	3.42
(CDS)	2013	8,307	1,109	13.34
	2014	4,343	814	18.75
	2015	43, 608	5, 539	12.7
Cheating detected at	2010	34,555	1,403	4.06
the Marking Venue	2011	439,529	632	0.14
(Copying foreign	2012	537,579	7,875	1.46
materials) (CDM)	2013	8,307	3,345	40.26
	2014	4,33	1,110	25.56
	2015	43, 608	11, 907	27.3
Use of electronic	2010	34,555	123	0.35
communication	2011	439,529	490	0.11
gadgets brought into	2012	537,579	737	0.14
the Hall (UEC)	2013	8,307	23	0.28
	2014	4,343	37	0.86
	2015	43, 608	295	0.68
Leakage (individual)	2010	34,555	8	0.02
(LKI)	2011	439,529	40	0.01
	2012	537,579	49	0.01

	2013	8,307	01	0.01
	2014	4,343	0	0.00
	2015	43, 608	0	0.00
Individual	2010	34,555	37	0.10
Insult/Assault	and 2011	439,529	321	0.07
Violent Behaviour	2012	537,579	400	0.07
(ASI)	2013	8,307	13	0.16
	2014	4,343	16	0.37
	2015	43, 608	49	0.11

Table 3 presented the level of examination malpractice in NECO June/July SSCE by type of malpractice. Seventeen (17) different types of examination malpractice were indicated with respect to the total number of candidates involved in each year by type.

High levels of examination malpractice were experienced in years 2010 and 2011 for most of the types of malpractice. Year 2013 and 2014 did not experience a high level of examination malpractice by type.

Over the five years, Bringing in Foreign Materials (BFM), Aiding And Abetting (AAA), Mass Cheating (MCH), and Impersonation (IMP) featured as the major types of examination malpractice. It was also observed that Leakage of examination questions (both collective and individual) was not common. This is a testimony of how NECO has been seriously combating examination malpractice in its examinations. No wonder, many candidates do not want to sit for its examinations even when they have registered and finished taking WAEC because of the Council's stand towards examination malpractice.

Recommendations

The National Examinations Council (NECO) has been steadfast in the fight against examination malpractice in all its examinations and in particular the SSCE June/July SSCE (Internal). The tables as presented clearly showed that there is indeed a significant reduction in the level of examination malpractice at all levels in NECO SSCE (internal). It is against this background that the following strategies could be adopted in tackling the incidences of examination malpractice as exemplified by NECO:

- Deployment of security personnel like officers of Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) at various examination centres to provide security around and inside examination hall(s);
- Use of customized (coded) answer sheets;
- Daily distribution of question papers to custodian points by NECO Staff;
- Use of permanent Senior Staff of the Council as custodians;
- Effective monitoring of examination by external monitors with good integrity such as lecturers from tertiary institutions;
- Biometric registration and validation of candidates;
- Application of maximum sanctions on offenders;

- De-recognition of schools perpetuating examination malpractice from taking examinations for a period of time (eg. 2 years ban).

Conclusion

This paper examined the concepts of examination malpractice and large scale public examinations. Efforts were made to examine the degree of examination malpractice at the National, Subjects and Types levels. It was observed that NECO over the years under study the incidences of examination malpractice have continued to reduce. Some measures to checkmate the occurrence of cases of examination malpractice in public examinations were identified among which are effective monitoring of public examination by external monitors with good integrity and application of maximum sanctions on offenders as a deterrent to others.

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