

**BEYOND COGNITIVE ASSESSMENT: MECHANISMS FOR  
REDUCING SYSTEM -GENERATED CAUSES OF EXAMINATION  
MALPRACTICE**

**BY**

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## Abstract

*One of the major problems facing education managers and examining bodies is how to conduct malpractice-free and credible examination. This is because examination malpractice has assumed a global and sophisticated dimension, permeating all strata of the education system and beyond. The problem is mainly system-generated as teaching, learning and indeed examination mechanisms in most countries are geared towards the cognitive domain to the neglect of the affective and psychomotor domains. This paper calls for the integration of the three domains of behaviour a teaching and assessment and the re-designing of curriculum packages to cater for these domains. It further advocates for the improvement of school quality and the introduction of periodic monitoring of learning achievement as strategies for reducing system-generated causes of examination malpractice.*

## **Introduction**

Examination has over the years become one of the basic characteristics of the school system. It is used as one of the important indices upon which most decisions about the learner is based. Thus, it is used to generate data for decision making about the learner or the examinee among others. In context, examination is the assessment of the examinee's performance or behaviour when confronted with series of questions, problems, tasks or situations in order to ascertain the amount of knowledge, skills, attitudes or other behaviours that he has acquired, the extent to which he is able to utilize them or their quality and effectiveness (Asuru, 2004).

In most countries, including Nigeria, examination at all levels of schooling has seriously dominated the education system that it is aptly referred to as an examination system instead of education system . This is mainly because undue emphasis is placed on examination to the extent that teaching and learning are essentially geared towards passing examinations, instead of the acquisition of knowledge, skills, values, attitude, and the like. Furthermore, such examinations have essentially been focused on the assessment of the cognitive domain to the utter neglect of the affective and psychomotor domains of behaviour. In most cases the assessment process is hundred percent cognitive-based, while teaching and learning and indeed the assessment procedures emphasize on the passing of examination. The acquisition of certificates (by whatever means) has taken precedence over the

acquisition of knowledge, competences, observable skills, worthwhile attitudes and values. Today, paper qualification or certificate has become the measure of success with education playing only an extrinsic (instrumental) role; that is used as a means for admission, employment, placement, etc. There is therefore craze for certificate. The effect is high incidence of examination malpractice.

### **Examination Malpractice**

Examination malpractice according to Asuru (2004) , is any illegal act by the examinee or his agent/s before, during or after the examination with the intent to make the examinee have an undue advantage or have an unmerited grade. However, it will also amount to examination malpractice where the examiner acts *mala fide* by making the examinee be disadvantaged by awarding him a grade lower than he should have objectively earned. For an act or omission to constitute examination malpractice therefore, it must be one that is in contravention of the rules and regulations of a particular examination with the attendant *mala fide*. This is because every examination is predicated on rules and regulations governing its conduct to avoid abuses.

Acting *mala fide* in examination though not a new phenomenon, has in recent times assumed a worrisome dimension. Commenting on the global dimension of examination malpractice, a former Registrar of the West African Examinations Council (WAEC), reported that preliminary studies showed that the U.K. and USA were the world's biggest examination cheats (Esezebor, 1996). He added that in the developed countries, examination malpractice has tended to keep pace with their level of technological advancement, citing the case of the use of a spymaster pen with a tiny transmitter and a cordless ear piece to write examination by a student in a British university.

According to Onyekakeyah (2009), examination malpractice has in recent times become one of the most widespread corrupt practices in Nigeria. This ignoble act has permeated all strata of the school system, the primary, secondary and tertiary levels and even the most of the revered of our societal institutions (Nasiru, 2009). Both institution-based and public examinations in

Nigeria and most other African countries have suffered tremendously from this bug. A good percentage of candidates who sit for school certificate examination and other public examinations like the National Examinations Council (NECO), West African School Certificate Examination (WASCE), the University Matriculation Examination (UME), etc. are involved in one form of malpractice or the other (Onyekakeyah 2009).

For instance Njoku (2008), showed that in Nigeria in 2007, over a total of 500,000 results of candidates were cancelled by the four major public examining bodies - the West African Examinations Council (WAEC), National Examinations Council (NECO), National Business and Technical Examination Board (NABTEB) and Joint Admissions And Matriculation Board (JAMB). Report of the 2007 Universities Matriculation Examination (JAMB, 2007) showed that out of 854,439 candidates that sat for the examination, 15,763 candidates had their results withheld on grounds of examination malpractice. The report acknowledged large-scale irregularities in some of the examination centres by candidates, officials and their agents. Furthermore, Onyekakeyah (2009), showed that in 2008, WAEC cancelled 9,762 results, while in the same year, NECO cancelled 21,201 results out of 307,744 who sat for its November/December Senior School Certificate Examination. According to him JAMB, cancelled 23,819 results out of the about 1.2 million candidates who sat for its April, 2009 Universities Matriculation Examination (UME). In the case of institutions of learning, in September, 2007, out of the 44 students expelled by the authorities of the University of Abuja, Nigeria, 41 of them were for examination offences (Daily Trust, 2008).

This spate of malpractice has in turn led to a serious miss-match between candidates' examination scores and their real performance. This has been brought to the fore with the introduction of the post university matriculation examination (post UME) by most Nigerian universities. Empirical studies on the post UME show that there is no correlation between candidates' UME scores and their post UME scores (Daily Sun, 2005, Campus Watch, 2006, Asuru and LongJohn 2008).

The cost of this at individual and national levels has been quite enormous both financially and educationally. According to Onyechere (2002), such withholding and outright cancellation of results do not only lead to direct economic loss, but also to psychological and social trauma to both parents and the candidates, adding that in monetary terms, these losses amount to over N1 billion naira annually. Stressing on the educational implication, Daily Trust (2008), stated that this menace has led to the loss of credibility in our certificates, thus constituting a threat to the quality of education and its entire existence.

### **Some Causes of examination malpractice**

Examination malpractice in public and institution-based examinations are essentially system-generated. This means that the system itself contributes mainly to this malaise. This is because as aptly noted by Asuru, (2004) our students are not congenital cheats, but are merely responding to some fundamental disarticulation in the system. Some of these include over emphasis on the assessment of the cognitive domain, our societal values which have over the years erroneously imbibed the Machiavellian philosophy that the end justifies the means (Asuru, 2009). We have therefore down played such time honoured virtues like dignity of labour, honesty, morality, perseverance, etc. It is logical to state that examination malpractice is a reflection of the degenerating moral bankruptcy in our society, a form of social protest and a manifestation of a warped psyche that endorses reaping where we did not sow.

Other system-generated causes of examination malpractice include poor and inadequate teaching and learning in most of our schools, deplorable condition of schools, non-availability of teaching and learning facilities in schools, overcrowding, poor attitude of teachers, poor teacher quality, constant closure of schools due to industrial action etc. These have seriously affected both students' learning and the level of achievement. Poor school quality especially in the developing countries has brought in its wake inadequate preparation of students for examination. According to World Bank (1994), low school quality is often linked to low returns to education and inadequate demand for schooling that jointly produces low educational attainments and

achievement. Putting it succinctly, Tahir, (2003) asserted that the quality of education in Nigeria has been far from satisfactory as evidenced by low performance of pupils in national surveys of achievement. Such inadequate preparation predisposes them to engage in malpractice to pass since passing (ie acquiring a certificate) is a necessity for future life endeavours.

Some other problems in the system that cause examination malpractice include psychological factors or fear of failure, bandwagon effect and unqualified candidates. These collectively predispose students and candidates to engage in examination malpractice.

### **Strategies for Reducing System -Generated Examination Malpractice**

#### **1. Integration of affective and psychomotor domains in assessment**

One of the major means of reducing the high spate of system-generated examination malpractice in our education system is to go beyond the cognitive assessment as the focal point for teaching, learning and indeed examination. This calls for emphasis on teaching for and the assessment of the affective and psychomotor domains. The affective domain is made up of those personality characteristics which have potential relevance to educational practices. They are such characteristics like values, social sensitivity, temperament, attitude, emotional and social adjustment, etc. (Anastasi and Urbani 2005). They seek to indicate what a person feels, does or will do under certain natural circumstances. All school instructions (subjects and courses) are expected to trigger not only cognitive, but also affective changes in the learner. The affective disposition of the learner has direct relevance to his ability to learn, interest in learning and attitudes to school and school-related activities. A thorough understanding of this will help the teacher and examiner in handling the learner, assigning him roles, selection, placement guidance and counselling (Obemeatia, 1984).

It is in recognition of these important roles that the Nigerian National Policy on Education (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004), apart from including affective dispositions as some of the national educational aims and objectives, stressed the need to gear education towards self-realization, effective

citizenship, better human relations, respect for the dignity of labour, etc. It becomes imperative that our examinations should be tailored towards assessing these all important components of behaviour. It must be emphasised that most people have expressed concern over the difficulty inherent in the assessment of this domain. The difficulty notwithstanding, it is imperative that strategies, deliberate and sustained efforts be made to assess this domain. Some of the methods of assessing this behaviour include the use of interviews, questionnaire, socio-metric techniques, observation, etc.

The implication is that the school should integrate the various components of tests in taking decision about the learner. For instance, self reports, peers reviews and teachers' reports on the child should be accumulated and aggregated for decision making about the child. In a subject like mathematics, for instance such reports could be accumulated and integrated (ie forming the students attitude towards mathematics, attendance at mathematics classes and the totality of his mathematical behaviour) could form part of his overall mathematics performance. The advantage of this is that such result could be used at the early stage for remediation and consequently attitude change.

Furthermore, the assessment of the psychomotor domain should be fully incorporated into the examination process. This is concerned with the manipulative skills. It entails the examinee to be involved in the manipulation of materials and objects or exhibit mechanical skills as in practicals, drawing, writing, fabrication, building, etc. The Nigerian policy on education, in recognition of the importance of this domain, emphasised the acquisition of appropriate skills, abilities and competencies both material and physical for the individual to live in and contribute to the development of his society (Federal Republic of Nigeria 2004). Even though this domain is assessed in some subjects like the sciences and vocational subjects, there is the need for a more comprehensive and in-dept integration of all the three domains in most of our school subjects and courses. This is predicated on the premise that there is an organic link among the three domains of behaviour. Such a blend will help produce a wholesome individual who can face the challenges of his environment as he would possess the requisite skills, knowledge

competencies, values and attitudes that education aims at inculcating (Asuru, 2009).

## **2. Re-designing of Instructional Strategies**

The integration of the three domains of learning in the assessment system calls for the redesigning of instructional strategies in schools. The current “talking and chalking” method that dominate the school system should be re-designed to one that can easily lend itself to an integrated assessment of the three domains. In line with the relevant provisions of the Nigerian National Policy on Education, adequate attention should be given to the acquisition of relevant skills and attitude required in the respective school subjects and courses. Our curriculum packages shall be redesigned in such a way that the three domains of behaviour should be effectively integrated to cater for the 3Hs (the head, the heart and the hands) that is; the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains respectively and thus produce a total person who is equipped with the skills, knowledge, attitudes, and values to make him respond to the challenges of his environment. It therefore means that while classroom lessons are delivered, practical and out-of-classroom experiences must be provided for.

This calls for appropriate provision for practical experiences in the form of laboratory/workshop skills, practicum, industrial/commercial attachments, production and presentation of handicrafts and other items, excursions, seminars, motivational talks by role models, etc. This will greatly de-emphasise the high premium attached to cognitive learning and thus greatly reduce the incidence of examination fraud because acquisition and demonstration of the appropriate skills, knowledge and attitudes will become the focal point rather than mere presentation of certificates. This will make the learners to be practical-oriented and develop worthwhile attitudes instead of being certificate-oriented.

### **3. Improvement in School Quality**

School quality is the nature of instructional processes experienced by each learner, the level of classroom interaction and the school's efficiency in developing knowledge, skills, attitudes and competencies in the learners. According to Yarguah (2000), school quality starts with students' achievement, and then backed up to specify those instructional resources, facilities and teaching practices that most effectively boost achievement. There is the need to improve the quality of schools through the provision of teachers in the right quality and quantity, improvement of school buildings, provision of teaching and learning materials and enhancement of teaching processes. This will positively impact on teaching and learning with its attendant salutary effect on students' school achievement coupled with practical and demonstrable skills and positive values and attitudes. This is premised on the fact that effective learning will reduce the threat syndrome associated with examination. Such effective learning will also make them develop positive attitude towards schooling and enhance their learning attitude and thus demand less of psychological therapy as the teaching and learning experiences would have equipped them with the required skills, attitudes and competencies that are critical to meeting their learning needs. Such adequate and efficient preparation for examinations and related assessment will reduce the spate of examination malpractice.

### **4. Introduction of Periodic Monitoring of Learning Achievement.**

The introduction of a standard yardstick for measuring the quality of learning outcome at the various levels of education, especially primary and secondary levels in the form of monitoring of learning achievement (MLA) is imperative. Learning achievement is a statistical indicator which quantifies the extent to which exposure to formal education has equipped the learners with the requisite knowledge and skills critical to their basic learning needs (Falayajo, Makoju, Okebukola, Onugha and Olubodun, 1997). This will periodically determine the amount of learning that takes place in the

respective levels of schooling and thus act as a feed back mechanism for remediation and system review.

It will also be a ready predictive indicator of the level of students' performance in internal and public examination. This way, stakeholders especially schools and examining bodies involved can effectively plan and make projections on students' achievement in skills, knowledge and attitudes.

Also, such periodic monitoring of learning achievement will assist in building a data-base on each school, education zone or individual learner which would be correlated with subsequent public examination results. It will further help build item bank of instruments for the assessment of the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains of behaviour for schools and public examining bodies. The data so generated will help keep the students on their toes by making them responsive and be ready at all times to be assessed, thereby reducing the threat syndrome associated with examination.

## **Conclusion**

Examinations no doubt form an important component of teaching and learning. It should therefore be seen as a means of generating data for decision making on the learner and the education system, among other functions, but not as an end in itself. For such decisions to be valid and reliable, they must be based on malpractice-free examinations. It becomes pertinent therefore that sustained efforts be made to ensure that our examinations are credible. This calls for the adoption of strategies that will reduce some of the system-generated causes of examination malpractice.

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