

**IMPACT OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY ON
EXAMINATION MALPRACTICE AT THE WEST AFRICAN SENIOR SCHOOL
CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION IN NIGERIA**

BY

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ABSTRACT

The West African Examinations Council (WAEC) conducts the West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) in Nigeria. The examination has become a high stake one due to the various uses made of the candidates' results. Consequently, the examination has been prone to various forms of malpractice. Examination malpractice influences candidates' performance in examinations and renders scores/grades obtained in such examinations unreliable, thus a threat to examination bodies. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has become applicable in every human endeavour, examination inclusive. The paper identified the impact of ICT on WASSCE as a two-edge sword. It identified and discussed among others, e-registration of candidates for the examination, pre-printing of objective answer sheets and issuance of forge-proof certificates as ICT measures employed by WAEC to combat examination malpractice. The paper also discussed the emerging trends of the use of cell phones and internet in the perpetration of examination malpractice at WASSCE in Nigeria. The challenges encountered in the use of ICT by WAEC for combating examination malpractice include the shortage of manpower and funds. The paper suggested improved funding, and employment of more staff and honest functionaries to enable WAEC combat malpractice using ICT.

Key words: Examination malpractice, measures employed, ICT usage, challenges, perpetrating.

1. **INTRODUCTION**

Education is the process of acquiring skills, values and knowledge through learning, teaching and training. It is an indispensable tool for the development of sound and effective citizens. Consequently, the development of a nation depends on its educational system. Afolabi (2010) stressed that the quality of a nation's education determines the quality and quantity, pace and level of its development. This is because only effective and sound citizens could contribute meaningfully to the development of the nation. Substantial parts of national budgets are invested in education the world over because of the crucial role of education on development. Similarly, parents and guardians invest considerable part of their resources on the education of their children and wards.

The high expectation and the huge resources (human and materials) invested on education call for accountability which examination provides. According to Bello, Kolajo and Uduh (2010), examination is the process of finding out how much of the objectives of specific learning tasks a learner has learnt. Examination results are used to determine learners' abilities and difficulties, teaching and teaching method effectiveness and the effectiveness of the curriculum. The West African Examinations Council (WAEC) conducts the West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) in English speaking West African countries. The results obtained at the examinations are used for employment and admission into tertiary institutions. Teachers and schools are also assessed by government and parents on the basis of their students' performance at WASSCE. On the other hand, government investment in and commitment to education is assessed by candidates' performance at WASSCE. WASSCE has therefore become a high stake examination in Nigeria. It is common knowledge that various means are employed to secure success at high stake examinations such as WASSCE. According to Bello and Oke (2011), there is no doubt that the high stake on the certificates obtained from WASSCE among others accounts for the high incidences of malpractice at the examination.

Examination malpractice is the act of violating examination rules and regulations by a candidate or candidates or their agents either before, during or after an examination in order to have undue advantage. It gives candidates unfair advantage and reduces the reliability of the grades and scores obtained by candidates if they are not caught and sanctioned. Adeyegbe (1998) asserted that examination leakage, cheating, impersonation, bringing foreign materials into the hall, collusion, certificate forgery, alteration of marks, employing unauthorized agents to smuggle materials into examination venues multiple entries and swapping of answer scripts could be classified as examination malpractice.

2. **TYPES OF EXAMINATION MALPRACTICE AT THE WASSCE**

WAEC which is over six decades in existence has been able to detect various forms of examination malpractice perpetrated by candidates and their accomplices in its examinations. The various forms are classified into the following categories:

- (1) Bringing in of 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 for female and vice versa, 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 foreknowledge 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, manhandling of examination officials, 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.

3. **ICT MEASURES EMPLOYED BY WAEC TO COMBAT EXAMINATION MALPRACTICE**

In order to maintain the sanctity of the certificate issued by WAEC, a number of measures has been taken to combat examination malpractice. The use of ICT is one of such measures.

(1) **Pre-Print of Objective Answer Sheets**

In the early years of WAEC, blank objective answer sheets were given to candidates for the objective tests. The candidates were then expected to fill in their examination particulars and the subjects. Over the years, it became evident that some of the blank objective answer sheets were smuggled out by candidates for later use and by dishonest supervisors and invigilators for sale to candidates. This soon became a major form of examination malpractice as the objective answer sheets were smuggled into examination halls after they might have been filled. In order to address the challenge, WAEC embarked on the pre-printing of candidates' examination particulars and subject/papers on objective answer sheets. Consequently, candidates were given objective

answer sheets bearing their examination particulars and the subject/paper for which they must use. This has eradicated the incidence of smuggling of objective answer sheets out of examination halls for a later use and smuggling objective answer sheets into examination halls. Eguridu (2009) noted that the use of pre-printed objective answer sheets had the added advantage of reducing the incidence of examination malpractice relating to objective tests.

(2) **E-Registration**

Prior to the introduction of e-registration in 2005, candidates' passport photographs were used to produce photocards and photo albums. The purpose of the photocards and photo albums was to identify impersonators. It was then the practice of candidates who intended to be impersonated to use the passport photos of their impersonators. This made it impossible to apprehend them during the examination. With the e-registration facilities, candidates' passport photographs are captured electronically and stored in WAEC data base. The stored passport photographs are used to prepare photocards and photo albums as well as for printing of certificates. This has made it impossible for candidates to use impersonators' passport photographs thereby reducing the incidence of impersonation at WASSCE. The e-registration has been enhanced by the capturing of candidates' biometric data, for storage and future reference which commenced in 2013. This will reduce incidence of impersonation drastically.

(3) **Issuance of Forge-Proof Certificates**

Certificate forgery and alteration have been forms of examination malpractice. In order to stem the tide of these forms of malpractice, WAEC commenced the issuance of certificates with high grade security features like watermarks, holograms and copy-proof marks. These have made identification of forged certificates easy and discouraged incidence of certificate forgery.

(4) **E-Confirmation and Verification of Results**

In order to ascertain the authenticity of candidates' results, employers, higher institutions, embassies and high commissions request for the confirmation of such results. Although, results are confirmed directly by WAEC to the third party, there has been incidence of forgery of such documents. In order to combat such malpractice cases, WAEC commenced the e-confirmation of results in 2012. In addition, candidates' results can now be verified electronically from anywhere in the world. However, security measures are put in place to ensure that the results are not altered in the process of being verified.

(6) **Duplicate Select**

Multiple entries for WAEC examinations were a form of malpractice in time past. During registration, candidates who intended to be impersonated, registered multiple times either at the same centres or in different centres. Such registrations were done with same candidates' particulars and for same

subjects. In this case it becomes more difficult to apprehend the impersonators. Therefore, WAEC adopted the duplicate select procedure. Duplicate select involves the use of appropriate software to edit entry database. All candidates who use identical particulars are identified during the process. Hence candidates involved in multiple entries are identified and duplicated entries deleted. This is a pro-active measure against impersonation and it has eliminated the incidence of multiple entry.

(7) **Photo Embossment on Certificates**

With increasing application of ICT in human endeavour WAEC commenced the embossment of the passport photos with which candidates registered for the examination on their certificates in 2005. This made it impossible for candidates who were impersonated to collect their certificates as they would be apprehended. In addition, such certificates cannot be used. This has reduced the incidence of impersonation. This was corroborated by Adeyegbe (2005) who opined that the embossment of candidates' passport photographs on their certificates could reduce certificate fraud.

4. **PERPETRATING EXAMINATION MALPRACTICE USING ICT**

The advent of ICT brought about the use of Global System of Mobile communication (GSM) which has presented adverse effect on WAEC examinations. Eromosele (2008), was of the opinion that examination malpractice has long graduated from the normal *giraffing* at neighbours' work; using key points, notes or text books; copying on sheets of papers, desk or lap to a more advanced and sophisticated system. The various functions of cell phones have made them ready tools for perpetrating malpractice at WASSCE like in other examinations. Some of the candidates now use their electronic devices to bring in answers into the exams hall especially for the multiple choice items. Sometimes, answers are sent to candidates' phones inside the examination hall. In addition, candidates have been caught browsing for information on the internet while in the examination hall. These irregularities have adverse effects on WAEC's examination integrity. WAEC therefore forbid the use of such electronic devices and sanction culprits. In addition, supervisors and invigilators are implored to search candidates for such devices and ensure that they are not brought into the examination hall.

5. **CHALLENGES OF ICT USAGE IN COMBATING EXAMINATION MALPRACTICE**

ICT usage by WAEC in combating some forms of examination malpractice has been effective. However it has not eliminated such malpractice totally due to some challenges which include non-challant supervisors and invigilators, dishonest school authorities, shortage of staff and large centres.

(1) **Uncommitted Supervisors and Invigilators**

The role of supervisors and invigilators is to ensure that examination is conducted according to the examination rules and regulations. Observance of such regulations will indeed eliminate all forms of malpractice that could be

perpetrated during the examination. Supervisors and invigilators are expected to:

- (i) search candidates before they enter the hall to ensure that nothing is smuggled into the hall,
- (ii) check candidates into the examination hall using the photo album to prevent impersonation, and
- (iii) ensure that examination materials are not smuggled into or out of the examination hall.

Experience has shown that some supervisors and invigilators are not committed in the discharge of their duties. This has led to situations where:

- (i) candidates smuggle out of and into the examination hall pre-printed objective answer sheets,
- (ii) impersonators sit for examination without being apprehended as candidates are not checked with the photo albums.
- (iii) some supervisors and invigilators aid candidates to perpetuate examination malpractice.

(2) **Dishonest School Authority**

School examinations are solely for school candidates. Registration for the examination is done through the various schools. School authorities are expected to ensure that only bonafide students of their school register. However schools have been found to register candidates other than their students. Such candidates are impersonated by students from the schools or touts usually arranged for by the schools. Schools have also been involved in smuggling examination materials out from and into the examination hall.

(3) **Shortage of Staff**

To ensure that examinations are properly conducted, WAEC Staff are deployed to inspect examination centres. The deployed staff are expected to among others:

- (i) use the photo albums to confirm that no candidate is impersonated.
- (ii) prevent smuggling examination materials into and out of the examination halls.
- (iii) ensure that all other activities in the examination halls are according to the rules and regulations of the examination.

Centre inspection by WAEC Staff has resulted in the apprehension of impersonators and candidates who smuggled out their pre-printed objective

answer sheets. Due to the shortage of staff, there has been poor coverage of the examination centres. It has also become a common practice by staff not to spend enough time at a centre in attempt to visit more centres thereby not being able to properly inspect the centres

(4) **Large Centres**

Centre size also affects the effective use of ICT to combat examination malpractice. Some centres have over 300 candidates due to high school enrolment. Such centres are usually too large for WAEC staff on inspection to effectively use the photo albums to check for impersonators within the duration of the examination. In addition, there is no proper searching of candidates or checking for impersonators with photo album by the supervisors due to large number of candidates at some centres. This has led to situations where some impersonators are not caught and materials being smuggled into the examination hall are not intercepted.

6. **WAY FORWARD**

ICT will remain a useful tool for combating examination malpractice. The following are being recommended for effective use of ICT to combat examination malpractice.

- (1) Employment of more staff and engagement of committed supervisors and invigilators.
- (2) Centres should be reduced to manageable size for proper supervision and centre inspection.
- (3) Authority of “dishonest” schools should continue to be properly sanctioned.
- (4) The tempo of public enlightenment on the ills of examination malpractice should be increased.
- (5) WAEC should be provided with sufficient funds for the procurement of relevant equipment and software.

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