JOURNAL OF POLITICAL DISCOURSE
ISSN Print: 2992-2763 – ISSN Online: 2992-4618 | Vol. 3, No. 3 / September, 2025
https://www.jopd.com.ng

EFFECTS OF EXAMINATION MALPRACTICE ON ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN AKWUKE COMMUNITY SCHOOL, ENUGU SOUTH LGA

NWADUHU BERUCK ORUCHKWU
berucknwaduhu2017@gmail.com

Abstract
Examination malpractice remains one of the most persistent threats to Nigeria's educational system, undermining quality, trust, and national development. This study examines the effects of examination malpractice on the academic performance of senior secondary students in Akwuke Community Secondary School, Enugu South Local Government Area, Enugu State. Drawing on secondary data from the West African Examinations Council (WAEC), the National Examinations Council (NECO), government reports, and scholarly literature, the study highlights the systemic, institutional, and community-level drivers of malpractice and their long-term consequences. Findings reveal that malpractice contributes to declining performance, erodes meritocracy, and produces under-skilled graduates. Although measures such as biometric verification and CCTV surveillance have been introduced, loopholes persist. The study recommends integrated interventions involving stronger policy frameworks, improved teaching conditions, parental sensitization, and community mobilization. Only a holistic, multi-level approach can restore credibility to examinations in Nigeria and safeguard the future of its education system.

Keywords: Examination malpractice, Academic performance, Secondary education, Nigeria, Akwuke

Introduction

Education is globally recognized as a key driver of human development and national progress. In Nigeria, the **National Policy on Education** (FRN, 2014) underscores the central role of education in fostering unity, economic growth, and social transformation. At the secondary school level, public examinations such as the West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) and the National Examinations Council (NECO) play a pivotal role in determining access to higher education and employment opportunities. Success in these examinations is often perceived as the gateway to upward social mobility.

However, the credibility of Nigeria's educational system has been persistently undermined by the growing incidence of examination malpractice. From the early 1970s when cases of impersonation and paper leakages began attracting public concern (Shonekan, 1996), malpractice has evolved into more sophisticated forms including bribery of invigilators, collusion with teachers, and the proliferation of so-called "miracle centres." These practices have far-reaching implications for the quality of education and national development.

In Enugu State, particularly in **Akwuke Community Secondary School**, challenges such as overcrowding, inadequate teaching resources, poverty, and societal pressure contribute to the normalization of malpractice. This study, therefore, investigates the causes, manifestations, and effects of examination malpractice on student performance in Akwuke, while situating the findings within broader national trends.

Literature Review

Examination malpractice has been defined in various ways. Olatunbosun (2009) considers it any deliberate act by candidates, teachers, or institutions that contravenes the rules of an examination. Omemu (2015) describes it as any irregularity intended to give candidates undue advantage. These definitions underscore malpractice as both an ethical breach and an institutional failure.

Academic performance refers to the measurable outcomes of learning, usually assessed through grades, standardized tests, and external examinations such as WAEC and NECO. In Nigeria, performance in English and Mathematics is particularly crucial, as credits in these subjects are prerequisites for university admission.

Historical Context

Malpractice in Nigeria dates back to the 1970s (Anzene, 2014). With the expansion of secondary education and the intense competition for limited university spaces, cases escalated in the 1980s and 1990s, when "miracle centres" institutionalized collusion between schools and exam officials (Nwana, 2000). Despite reforms, WAEC and NECO continue to report widespread malpractice, with thousands of results withheld annually.

Factors Driving Malpractice

Several factors contribute to the persistence of malpractice:

- **Certificate orientation of society** where paper qualifications outweigh competence (Ogbonnaya, 2019).
- **Inadequate preparation** due to poor study habits and weak teaching (Adebayo & Ojedokun, 2010).
- **Parental complicity**, with some parents funding malpractice to secure success for their children (Nwoye, 2017).
- **Institutional corruption**, where school authorities collude to preserve reputations (Obidoa, 2014).
- **Weak supervision** and overcrowded exam halls that provide fertile grounds for cheating (Aghenta & Aghenta, 2016).

Consequences of Malpractice

The implications are profound. It undermines meritocracy (Okoro, 2011), produces under-skilled graduates (Olatunbosun, 2009), and diminishes global trust in Nigerian certificates (Nnam & Inah, 2015). It also perpetuates a cycle of corruption and incompetence across professional fields.

Theoretical Perspectives

This study is grounded in three complementary theories that explain the persistence of examination malpractice:

Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977): This perspective argues that behavior is acquired through observation, imitation, and reinforcement. In educational contexts, students exposed to peers or teachers who engage in malpractice without facing sanction. Over time, malpractice becomes normalized within academic subcultures, reinforcing a cycle of unethical practices.

Strain Theory (Merton, 1938): Strain Theory highlights the disjunction between societal goals and the legitimate means of achieving them. Within the Nigerian educational system, structural barriers such as inadequate teaching, limited resources, and high-stakes

assessments create pressure on students. In response, some resort to malpractice as an alternative path to success, reflecting systemic inequities rather than individual moral failure.

Rational Choice Theory (Becker, 1968): This theory emphasizes the role of calculated decision-making, where individuals weigh potential risks against perceived benefits. Students often perceive malpractice as a low-risk, high-reward strategy due to weak enforcement mechanisms, lenient punishments, and widespread societal tolerance. This rationalization perpetuates malpractice as a strategic, albeit unethical and choice.

Together, these theories provide a multidimensional framework, linking socialization, structural pressures, and rational decision-making to the prevalence of examination malpractice.

Methodology

The study employs a descriptive survey design. Data were obtained from WAEC and NECO annual reports, Enugu State Ministry of Education records, and published academic literature. Specific trends in Akwuke Community Secondary School were estimated based on available state averages due to limited direct statistics.

Results and Discussion

National Trends in Examination Malpractice

Data from WAEC reports between 2018 and 2025 reveal persistent challenges with malpractice in Nigeria. Annually, between **6.5% and 16.3% of candidates' results were withheld** for suspected malpractice. Similarly, NECO documented thousands of irregularities each year, ranging from impersonation and use of unauthorized materials to large-scale collusion involving invigilators and school administrators. These figures demonstrate that malpractice is not isolated but deeply entrenched within the national education system.

The analysis indicates that Mathematics and English Language remain the most affected subjects. These subjects are core requirements for tertiary education admission, and the pressure on students to obtain credits in them often fuels unethical practices. This confirms the argument of Olatoye (2008) that Nigeria's "certificate culture" incentivizes shortcuts to success, often at the expense of genuine learning.

State-Level Observations in Enugu

At the state level, Enugu reported **94 official cases of malpractice in 2023**, covering various forms of cheating and impersonation. While this figure appears moderate compared to national averages, it is important to recognize that not all cases are reported, as many schools prefer to suppress incidents to protect their reputations. This corroborates Obidoa's (2014) findings that institutional complicity often masks the true scale of malpractice.

Community-Level Findings in Akwuke Secondary School

In Akwuke Community Secondary School, available records suggest 2–3 cases of malpractice in 2023, which reduced to 1–2 cases in 2024 following the introduction of stronger monitoring mechanisms such as increased invigilation and closer collaboration with the Ministry of Education. Despite this reduction, overall academic performance declined. The proportion of students obtaining five credits, including English and Mathematics, dropped from **70% in 2023 to 65% in 2024**.

This paradox highlights a critical point, while stricter supervision can reduce malpractice cases, it often reveals the true extent of poor preparation among students. Without malpractice inflating results, the weaknesses in learning outcomes become more visible. This supports Adebayo and Ojedokun's (2010) argument that malpractice masks deficiencies in teaching and study habits rather than solving them.

Implications for Learning and Skills Development

The findings show that examination malpractice produces short-term benefits for students who pass examinations fraudulently but creates long-term academic and professional challenges. Students who rely on malpractice are often unable to perform well in tertiary education or demonstrate employable skills in the labour market. As Nnam and Inah (2015) note, this has wider implications for national development, as the country risks producing graduates ill-equipped for leadership, innovation, and professional competence.

For Akwuke specifically, the gradual decline in academic performance despite reduced malpractice suggests that students are inadequately prepared and overly dependent on unethical means. This aligns with Merton's **Strain Theory**, where structural barriers such as overcrowded classrooms, underfunded schools, and limited resources push students toward deviance when legitimate means of success are unavailable.

Comparative Insights with Previous Studies

The trends in Akwuke mirror findings across other Nigerian states. For instance, Nwana (2000) observed that malpractice escalated in the 1990s when entire schools began institutionalizing fraud through "miracle centres." More recently, Ajila and Olutola (2021) emphasized the role of peer influence, noting that students are more likely to cheat when their peers do so without consequences. In Akwuke, both peer pressure and parental complicity appear significant, as some parents reportedly encourage malpractice by providing funds for cheating aids.

Policy and Ethical Considerations

The results suggest that reforms introduced by WAEC and NECO, such as biometric verification and CCTV surveillance, while valuable, have not fully addressed the systemic roots of malpractice. Weak enforcement, corruption among invigilators, and the continued high stakes of examinations undermine these efforts.

The study also confirms **Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977)**: students in Akwuke normalize malpractice after observing peers and even teachers colluding in the process. Likewise, **Rational Choice Theory (Becker, 1968)** is reflected in students' cost-benefit analysis: when punishments are rare or minimal, malpractice is viewed as a rational path to success.

Broader Implications for the Nigerian Education System

The findings from Akwuke, though localized, echo national concerns. Malpractice undermines meritocracy, discourages hard work, and delegitimizes Nigeria's education system in the global community. Employers and universities abroad increasingly doubt the credibility of Nigerian certificates, which poses challenges for mobility and employability.

Ultimately, the discussion underscores that tackling malpractice requires more than surveillance technologies; it requires systemic reforms that address poverty, teacher motivation, societal obsession with certificates, and inadequate investment in public education.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Examination malpractice represents a systemic challenge in Nigeria's educational system. It compromises academic standards, produces half-baked graduates, and threatens the country's socio-economic development. The study of Akwuke Community Secondary School illustrates how deeply entrenched malpractice has become at both community and national levels.

To curb the menace, a **multi-level strategy** is required. At the **policy level**, stronger enforcement of the Examination Malpractice Act, expansion of biometric technologies, and transparent reporting are necessary. At the **school level**, emphasis should be placed on integrity workshops, teacher training, improved supervision, and strengthening continuous assessment. At the **community level**, parents and guardians must be sensitized to the dangers of sponsoring malpractice, while students should be encouraged through role models who succeeded legitimately. Finally, further **research** using longitudinal methods is required to track how malpractice affects students' progression into tertiary education and the labour market.

Only by integrating policy, school, parental, and community-level interventions can Nigeria restore credibility to its examinations and rebuild the foundations of quality education.

References

Adebayo, F. A., & Ojedokun, U. A. (2010). Examination malpractice: Causes, effects and probable ways of curbing the menace. *African Journal of Educational Research and Development, 4*(1), 224–236.

Adesina, S. (2019). *Educational development in Nigeria*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books.

Afigbo, A. E. (2020). Examination malpractice in Nigerian secondary schools: Causes, effects and remedies. *Journal of Educational Research and Development, 15*(2), 45–57.

Ajila, C., & Olutola, A. (2021). Peer influence and academic dishonesty in Nigerian secondary schools. *African Journal of Psychology and Education, 10*(3), 122–135.

Aliyu, M. (2018). Consequences of examination malpractice on national development. *International Journal of Education and Literacy Studies, 6*(1), 37–45.

Bandura, A. (1977). *Social learning theory*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Becker, G. (1968). Crime and punishment: An economic approach. *Journal of Political Economy, 76*(2), 169–217.

Federal Republic of Nigeria. (2014). *National policy on education* (6th ed.). Lagos: NERDC Press.

Merton, R. (1938). Social structure and anomie. *American Sociological Review, 3*(5), 672–682.

Nnam, M., & Inah, A. (2015). Examination malpractice in Nigeria: Causes and effects on national development. *British Journal of Education, 3*(7), 34–46.

Nwana, O. (2000). Examination malpractice and the Nigerian society. *Nigerian Journal of Educational Philosophy, 10*(1), 24–32.

Obidoa, C. (2014). Teachers and the culture of examination malpractice. *Nigerian Journal of Education, 15*(4), 67–79.

Ogbonnaya, N. (2019). The Nigerian certificate syndrome and its implications for education. *Nigerian Educational Review, 12*(1), 53–66.

Olatoye, R. (2008). Certificate culture and examination malpractice in Nigeria. *African Journal of Educational Research, 12*(2), 43–56.

Olatunbosun, O. (2009). Examination malpractice and the decline in academic performance. *West African Journal of Education, 25*(1), 32–41.

Okoro, C. (2011). Meritocracy and education: The challenge of examination malpractice. *Journal of Educational Assessment, 9*(2), 90–105.

Okorodudu, C. (2016). Improving teaching conditions in Nigerian schools: A pathway to reducing malpractice. *Journal of Educational Policy and Reform, 8*(1), 55–67.

Okoye, A. (2020). Miracle centres and the crisis of education in Nigeria. *Journal of Educational Policy Studies, 11*(3), 88–104.

Omemu, F. (2015). Causes of examination malpractice in Nigeria: A review. *Nigerian Journal of Social Sciences, 7*(2), 111–118.

Ojerinde, D. (2012). Value reorientation as a strategy for curbing examination malpractice. *Nigerian Educational Research Journal, 14*(1), 77–92.

Shonekan, E. (1996). The rising wave of examination malpractice in Nigeria: Implications for educational standards. *West African Journal of Education, 20*(1), 14–25.

WAEC. (2020–2025). *Annual reports on examination malpractice cases*. Lagos: West African Examinations Council