

# Nature and Drivers of ‘Miracle Examination Centres’ in Private Schools in Nigeria: A systematic review of literatures on examination malpractice

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## Acronyms and abbreviations

CA	Continuous Assessment
CPI	Corruption Perceptions Index
CSO	Civil society organisation
LMIC	Low- and middle-income country
MEC	Miracle Examination Centre
NYSC	National Youth Service Corps
NECO	National Examinations Council
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NOA	National Orientation Agency
SC	Special Centre
SSCE	Senior Secondary School Certificate Examination
TI	Transparency International
WAEC	West Africa Examination Council
WASSCE	West Africa Senior Secondary School Certificate Examination

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## Executive summary

The education sector is listed among the top-five most corrupt sectors in Nigeria (*Sahara Reporters*, 2019). This is largely due to examination fraud and malpractice – in 2012 Nigeria was ranked top in the Global Examination Malpractice Index (Information Nigeria, 2012).

The so-called 'Miracle Examination Centres' (MECs) are mostly associated with private secondary schools and have created opportunities for candidates who sit for their Senior Secondary School Certificate Examination (SSCE) to undeservedly and corruptly achieve excellent results. This has contributed immeasurably to the decay of Nigeria's education sector and has prompted calls for an effective anti-corruption approach.

We conducted a systematic review of available literature to understand the nature and drivers of MECs in Nigeria, and to gauge opportunities to develop an effective anti-corruption approach. After an exhaustive electronic search and screening of articles, we identified and reviewed 104 publications, comprising 50 items of grey literature and 54 journal articles.

The literature points to a proliferation of MECs across the south-south, southeast, southwest and northcentral geopolitical regions of Nigeria. MECs were almost exclusively associated with private schools, with the major drivers of such centres being the policies of schools, weak sanctions from government, and candidates who can avail of the perverse incentives presented by the former two. Agents who drive malpractice in MECs include owners of extra-tutorial centres, owners and principals of private schools, teachers, security agents, students and parents, among others. Some of these agents are politically connected or could pay their ways through to evade sanctions.

There is evidence that MECs have encouraged a growing distrust in the education system in Nigeria and have contributed to an unproductive and incompetent workforce in the country. However, we have also found evidence of the efficacy of certain vertical and horizontal interventions that exist.

We conclude that the integrity of Nigeria's education system is challenged by the proliferation and activities of MECs. Although there are efforts in place to address the menace of MECs, these centres continue to thrive. Our study is the first systematic review on the subject and aims to provide a deeper understanding of the nature of MECs, what drives them and important anti-corruption measures that could be put in place to tackle this aspect of examination malpractice in Nigeria.

# 1. Introduction

The quality of an education system is one index used to assess global competitiveness of countries. However, corruption – defined by Transparency International (TI, n.d.) as the abuse of entrusted power for private gain – has eroded the quality of education services and products in many low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). A key effect of corruption is the weakening of trust that should be accorded to a system.

Nigeria's education system was ranked 124 of 140 countries in 2019 by the World Economic Forum. This is compared to other African countries like the Seychelles, Tunisia and Mauritius that were ranked 43, 71 and 74 respectively, and neighbouring Ghana which was ranked 104 (Chime, 2019). Furthermore, the education sector is listed among the top-five most corrupt sectors in Nigeria (*Sahara Reporters*, 2019), which is driven by widespread examination malpractices in the sector, including those during the Senior Secondary School Certificate Examination (SSCE). There is no doubt that corruption in the education sector contributes to Nigeria's poor rating in the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) released annually by Transparency International – the country scored 26% in the latest CPI for 2019 and ranked 146 out of 180 countries (TI, 2020).

Although President Muhammadu Buhari's administration places anti-corruption at the heart of its governance agenda, the country's corruption perception rating seems rather abysmal and has declined since 2015 when the administration came into power. There are concerns that this could be as a result of the enormous focus that the administration places on grand corruption, particularly concerning embezzlement of public funds, thereby allowing seemingly smaller-scale corruption like examination malpractice to fester and cascade into social norms (Hoffman and Patel, 2017).

Corruption – particularly examination malpractice – is a major cause of weaknesses in the education system in Nigeria. Many people cheat to pass examinations and obtain unmerited results. In 2012, the then Director General of Nigeria's National Orientation Agency (NOA), Mike Omeri, lamented Nigeria's position as number one in the world examination malpractice index (Information Nigeria, 2012). In the same year, 615,010 cases of examination malpractice were reported by the National Examinations Council (NECO) during the May/June SSCE, which is an increase of 175,481 cases from the previous year. The Director General further lamented how examination malpractice during such national exams had evolved into an 'organized crime' perpetrated by several private and public schools (Information Nigeria, 2012). By organized crime, Omeri meant that examination malpractice had become institutionalised by several secondary schools, in the sense that such schools are described as places to get 'miraculous' examination successes that are lacking in merit. Thus, centres where such successes are guaranteed are considered locally to be 'Miracle Examination Centres' (MECs) and, in some quarters, 'Special Centres' (SCs) (Aworinde, 2015a; Onyedinefu, 2019).

While examination malpractices manifest in various forms, in this paper we focus on a kind of institutional fraud that occur during the final examinations that show completion of secondary education, which are usually conducted by the West Africa Examination Council (WAEC) across Nigeria, Ghana, Gambia, Liberia and Sierra Leone, and NECO just in Nigeria.

Both exams can be referred to as the SSCE. Increasing malpractices during the SSCE are cited as one of the reasons that tertiary institutions (particularly universities) in Nigeria are forced to run another round of screening tests to validate the competence of candidates and the qualifications they claim to possess before they are admitted (Aworinde, 2015a). The same distrust is felt by employers who administer revalidating or aptitude tests before offering employment (Dungurawa, 2015; Nnam and Otu, 2015).

Nigeria put in place an *Examination Malpractice Act* in 1999 which is yet to be amended (FRN, 1999). The Act defines examination malpractice as securing unfair advantage before, during or after an examination. It also describes attempts to enrich the self by taking away merit from the examination process. MECs are implicated, first by providing undue advantage to persons who sit for the exams in their schools, and second by charging higher fees to facilitate an examination process that leads to unmerited results by their candidates (Aworinde, 2015a; Omoniyi, 2019). This is a clear case of rule-breaking and using entrusted powers (to conduct or facilitate SSCE examinations) for private benefit. The Act sets out terms of imprisonment with the maximum being four years, and fines ranging from N50,000 to N100,000. Despite these definitions and sanctions, weak enforcement of the Act has been criticised in studies (Anzene, 2014; Asomba, 2012; Njoku and Njoku, 2016).

While it may appear that the Federal Government and the Ministry of Education in Nigeria are not doing enough to end examination malpractice and the proliferation of MECs, there have been accounts of unease among State governments and the examination bodies (WAEC and NECO) about the growing culture of malpractice (Aworinde, 2015b; Joseph, 2012; *Premium Times*, 2018). There have also been calls to stiffen the sanctions recommended by the Examination Malpractice Act to intensify deterrence (Animasahun and Ogunniran, 2014; Ibrahim, 2014).

The literature suggests that private schools represent a hub of MECs in Nigeria (Anzene, 2014; Aworinde, 2015a; Jokthan, 2013). The reasons being that they are profit-oriented private establishments, and that there is weak or compromised monitoring of private schools by government authorities. Other reasons include that they somewhat enjoy autonomy as licensed schools to conduct SSCE, especially concerning the registration of candidates and charging of examination fees, and some of them are either politically protected or wealthy enough to pay through to evade sanctions. However, despite the proliferation of private schools among MECs, our systematic review found that research on this theme is underexplored in peer-reviewed literature with only, except for the efforts of a few investigative journalists (Aworinde, 2015a; Aworinde, 2015b; Omoniyi, 2019; Onyedinefu, 2019). We also found more studies on examination malpractice in general than MECs in particular.

Thus, our systematic review takes a comprehensive look into MECs in Nigeria as facilitated by private schools, their nature, drivers and effects, as well as potential solutions to this malpractice. The findings from this review could contribute to strengthening the education system in Nigeria in a number of ways, by suggesting policy directions and programmes to improve the conduct of SSCE, and by putting forward recommendations to advance the ongoing anti-corruption agenda in the country.

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1. Conceptual framework

According to de Vaal and Ebben (2011), institutions are a form of humanly devised constraints that shape human interaction and also help to reduce uncertainties. They do this by establishing a stable structure for human interaction. These structures provide a framework for transactions and cooperation to occur through the adoption of codes of conduct, as well as behavioural norms and conventions. However, no institution is disentangled from the societal culture and, as Pillay and Kluvers (2010) note, a society's cultural norms and values largely determine the types of institutions that will exist in such a society. Therefore, corrupt behaviour – in this case, MECs – can be facilitated or resisted by the society's dominant culture. This is supported by Nnam and Otu's (2015) examination of malpractice through MECs as a product of the rot in Nigeria's society, where there is an overbearing emphasis on success-goals at the expense of the means through which success is achieved (Jimoh, 2009). This creates an environment where parents, proprietors, students and other stakeholders participate (and sometimes collude) to perpetrate examination malpractice, with each looking for a kind of economic (financial) or social (status) success in the process (Schroepfer, 2016). Such corruption continues to thrive because society's dominant culture has weak moral constraints (Luo, 2005), despite the introduction of anti-corruption legislation.

Another critical strand of literature looks at incentive structures and the enforcement of 'horizontal enforcement' where actor enforce rules in their self-interest rather than because of the fear of sanctions (Khan et al 2019). This approach posits that the reason why formal rules are frequently broken in developing countries is because they have high levels of informality and is a function of their development transition. In essence the underlying distribution of power is such that informal organizations are more powerful than formal ones hence formal rule violation becomes widespread. This rule violation is therefore a result of the structural features of the process of development and has little to do with culture or morality in developing countries (Khan 2012).

### 2.2. Study design

We adopted a systematic review approach to examine the literature on the link between MECs and WAEC-/NECO-conducted exams. We aimed to highlight the nature, drivers and effects of MECs as regards SSCE, with a focus on private secondary schools, owing to their roles in the fostering of MECs in Nigeria.

Search terms were keyed into several search engines and databases, namely: Google, Google Scholar, the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), ScienceDirect, Web of Science, Hinari, ResearchGate, yippy.com and Scopus. The electronic search lasted for a period of three weeks and was conducted by four of the authors. In the fourth week, we conducted an

independent screening of the articles using title and first paragraph, and, where necessary, the abstract. The following inclusion criteria were used during screening:

- written in the English language
- published between 2010 and 2020, except for classical literature
- a focus on discussions around examination malpractice and MECs as regards WAEC and NECO
- a geographical focus on Nigeria, Ghana, Gambia, Liberia and/or Sierra Leone.

The search terms were manually generated using a combination of keywords and Boolean operators, to include:

("Cheating" OR "Exam malpractice" OR "Examination malpractice" OR "malpractice" OR "corruption") AND ("Special Centres" OR "Miracle Centres" OR "Special examination centres" OR "Miracle examination centres" OR "Private schools") AND ("WAEC" OR "NECO" OR "WAEC GCE" OR "NECO GCE" OR "GCE" OR "JAMB") AND ("Nigeria" OR "Africa" OR "Gambia" OR "Ghana" OR "Sierra Leone" OR "Liberia" OR "Ministry of Education") AND ("Edo" OR "Kogi" OR "Rivers" OR "Lagos" OR "Abuja" OR "Benue" OR "Abia" OR "Enugu" OR "Kaduna" OR "Kano" OR "Oyo" OR "Anambra" OR "Kwara" OR "Imo" OR "Plateau" OR "Delta" OR "Ondo" OR "Osun" OR "Borno" OR "Akwa Ibom" OR "Cross River" OR "Taraba" OR "Adamawa" OR "Sokoto" OR "Zamfara" OR "Bayelsa" or "Nasarawa" OR "Bauchi" OR "Ebonyi" OR "Ekiti" OR "Gombe" OR "Jigawa" OR "Katsina" OR "Kebbi" OR "Niger" OR "Ogun" OR "Yobe"))

After an exhaustive and rigorous search and screening process, 104 (54 journal articles and 50 grey literature) of 1,368 retrieved items of literature met the inclusion criteria and were captured for detailed review. To analyse the contents of the selected literature, a data extraction template was created in Microsoft Excel Spreadsheet which thematically highlighted the areas of interest that were deemed relevant to the study. The themes are the nature, causes, drivers and effects of examination malpractice and MECs and obtainable solutions.

## 3. Findings

We discovered a dearth of qualitative literature on the subject, as most of our findings came from grey, theoretical and quantitative literature. None of the literature we retrieved and reviewed have adopted a systematic review approach, therefore our study could be the first of its kind in our context. Most studies we reviewed concentrated on the nature, causes and drivers of examination malpractices in general, and often perpetrated by students, parents, teachers and examination officials. Discussions on MECs are explicit in some cases, and implicit in others.

The findings from our review are discussed in themes. We begin by describing examination malpractices generally and in the context of MECs. We then describe in detail the drivers of examination malpractice and MECs, the influence of gender on examination malpractice and MECs, the effects of MECs on society, and vertical and horizontal solutions to curbing MECs. Table A1 in the Annex summarises our key findings, while Table A2 captures our comprehensive findings from all reviewed literature.

### 3.1. The nature of examination malpractice in MECs

#### 3.1.1. *Context and time trends in senior secondary examination malpractice*

Examination malpractice is a criminal offence and it is outlawed in Nigeria (FRN, 1999). However, an upward trend in this malpractice indicates weak enforcement of laws and/or that perpetrators devise ingenious means to overcome strategies put in place to check for fraudulent acts. In 2012, Nigeria ranked first in a global examination malpractice index (Anyamene et al., 2015). Despite the absence of recent data on the examination malpractice index, available evidence points to slow improvement in examination integrity in Nigeria, particularly concerning WAEC and NECO examinations.

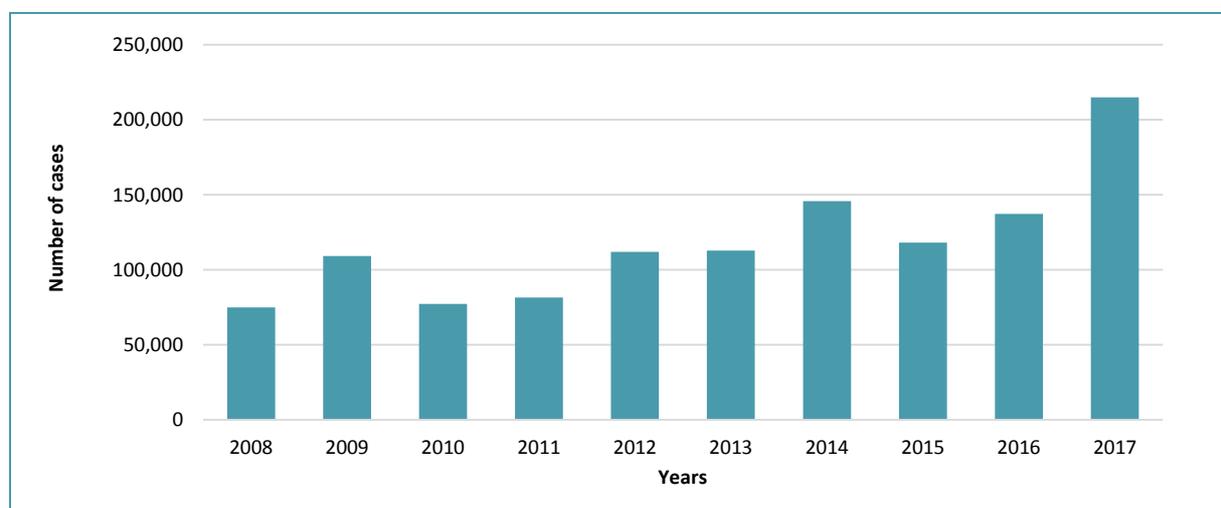
Historically, the first occurrence of examination malpractice in Nigeria was recorded in 1914 when Senior Cambridge Local Examination papers were leaked before the scheduled date (Yunus, 2019). Thereafter, cases of examination malpractice began springing up, with WAEC reporting leakages of examination papers in 1963, 1967, 1971, 1977 and 1981 (Emiloju and Adeyoju, 2012; Raji and Okunlola, 2017).

About 72,516 candidates were involved in malpractice in the 1994 SSCE, and in 2000 at least 6% of the 636,064 candidates who sat for WAEC examinations were implicated in one type of malpractice or another (Asadu and Abonyi, 2020). In 2001, 5% of the 1,025,185 candidates who sat for the examination were caught for unethical conduct, while in 2002, 2003 and 2004 the percentages were at least 10.5%, 11% and 11% respectively (ibid.). Following this trend, the National Examination Malpractices Index for Nigeria increased from 10.5 in 2002 to 12.1 in 2003, indicating that of every 100 students who wrote WAEC SSCE in 2003, 12 were involved in examination malpractice (Adeyemi, 2010).

In recent times, cases of examination malpractice have been consistently reported. For example, Nnam and Otu (2015) reported that in 2006 the Federal Ministry of Education blacklisted and de-recognised 324 secondary schools for the period 2007–2010 due to their involvement in different examination malpractices in SSCE organised by WAEC and NECO. Specifically, a former Minister of Education, Prof. Ruggayatu Ahmed Rufa'i revealed that in the June/July 2009 examinations NECO experienced over one million cases of examination malpractice, and in the same year during the November/December examinations it recorded over 263,000 cases (Anzene, 2014). Raji and Okunlola (2017) reported that in the NECO June/July 2015 examination, 969,491 candidates were caught for examination malpractices. The results of the candidates involved were cancelled, while the affected schools were blacklisted. Recently, in 2017, 276 schools across 34 states were reported to be involved in mass cheating during the NECO exams (Edeh et al., 2019). However, the report did not state if the schools implicated in the misconduct were public or private. The incidence of exam malpractice was reported by NECO as having increased from 20,181 candidates caught cheating on the spot during their examination in 2018 to 40,630 candidates in 2019 (ibid.).

In 2012 WAEC blacklisted 113 secondary schools in Nigeria from participating in their exams due to misconduct, cancelled individual subject results of 83,745 candidates, and barred for two years 3,321 candidates from sitting the council examination (Oduwole, 2013). The names of the schools were not released. In the May/June 2013 WAEC examinations, the results of 112,000 candidates were withheld because of involvement in different forms of examination malpractice (Nnam and Otu, 2015). Similarly, during the May/June 2014 examination, WAEC withheld the results of 145,975 candidates over examination malpractices (Odo, 2015). The figure dropped in 2015 to 118,101 results that were cancelled (Akintunde and Selzing-Musa, 2016), but increased again to 137,295 in 2016 and 214,952 cancelled results in 2017. In 2018, WAEC acknowledged that there were cases of examination malpractice, but refused to declare the statistics for undisclosed reasons (Atueyi, 2019). Most recently, in 2019, WAEC withheld 180,205 results for perceived malpractice (Edeh et al, 2019). Figure 1 shows the trend of exam malpractice in withheld results of reported cases during WAEC SSCE in Nigeria from 2008 to 2017.

**Figure 1. Trends in withheld results on reported cases of WASSCE examination malpractice**



Source: Atueyi, 2019

### 3.1.2. Examination malpractice in MECs

MECs represent institutionalised models of examination malpractice during SSCE in Nigeria and are notably associated with private secondary schools (Anzene, 2014; Aworinde, 2015a; Jokthan, 2013; Sa'ad and Dahiru, 2018).

WAEC and NECO are statutorily charged with determining a school's suitability to conduct SSCE on their behalf and accrediting appropriate institutions. In the past, only public schools conducted SSCE. However, falling standards of education in these schools, as well as an increase in secondary school enrolment, catalysed a growth in privately owned secondary schools that were soon approved to conduct SSCEs (Atueyi, 2019). Indeed, private schools have helped to meet the ever-increasing demand for secondary education in Nigeria, both in terms of quality and quantity. Yet a drive to increase profits and weak monitoring mechanisms and standards that characterise Nigeria's education system have contributed to many private schools adopting deviant means to attract students to their exam centres in exchange for unmerited exam results. What emerges then is a corrupt education and examination system, particularly concerning organised fraud during WAEC and NECO examinations (Animasahun, 2013; *Blueprint*, 2019a; Okoye and Onwuzuruoha, 2020; Udoh, 2011).

This organised fraud happens through the creation of a tolerant culture of examination malpractice within the school setting. Students are permitted to use their smart devices to access answers to questions online (Aworinde, 2015a); examination officials are bribed to turn a blind eye (Anzene, 2014); bribes are used to facilitate access to questions ahead of an exam or answers are rewritten by students after questions have been solved by an expert (Obidoa et al., 2013; Onuka and Durowoju, 2013); individuals impersonate students and sit examinations on their behalf (Adeyemi, 2013; Omoniyi, 2019; Osaretin, 2016); stubborn exam officials are given sedatives in their refreshments (Dike, 2017); answers are dictated openly to candidates or students are allowed to use their notes or textbooks (Onyedinefu, 2019); examiners are threatened with violence, including death threats (Adegoke, 2010; Gbagolo, 2011); there is sporadic inflation of scores or random issuance of huge Continuous Assessment (CA) scores to registered candidates (Belo-Osagie, 2017; Omoniyi, 2019). Many other corrupt behaviours occur too.

Thus, MECs invariably compromise the examination process before, during or after the SSCE (Adeniran et al., 2020; Ndukwe, 2015). They also strive to beat whatever system emerges to check examination malpractice (Atueyi, 2019). MECs make it known that they can guarantee success during WAEC and NECO examinations, and, as a result, they garner patronage from parents and candidates who do not mind how this success is achieved. Candidates also transfer to MECs from public and strict private schools towards the time of the WAEC and NECO examinations (Onyedinefu, 2019).

There are also accounts of employed persons registering with these MECs who need the SSCE certificate to get a new job, to secure promotions, to revalidate their positions at work or who would like to pursue a course of study in an institution of higher learning (Adeyemi, 2011; Udoh, 2013). These kinds of candidates and other unqualified individuals have even been reported as having registered in Ghana (Onuka and Durowoju, 2013).

Omoniyi (2019) presents a case of a registered proxy candidate who never participated in the exam but received an excellent result from an MEC in Kano, Nigeria. While the fees charged by MECs are higher than the actual SSCE registration fees, the fees for proxy candidates are even higher (Adeniran et al., 2020; Akintunde and Selzing-Musa, 2016; Atueyi, 2019; Omoniyi, 2019). Often as a result of the exorbitant fees, MECs indulge in unscrupulous means to deliver the excellent grades that they have promised to candidates. Aworinde (2015a) describes that, beyond the huge registration fees in such centres, there are also other payments made for items like uniforms (which will be worn by individuals pretending to be a student), refreshments for the registration desk officer, day-to-day payments to invigilators and bribes to school principals, to mention but a few. In some cases, sexual transactions are made, especially between female candidates and male examiners/teachers (Belo-Osagie, 2017; Duvie and Eluwa, 2016).

It is clear that MECs represent a serious threat to the integrity of Nigeria's education system. They also deepen the class divide, since those who can afford to pay for such illicit services are at an unfair advantage. MECs are often openly discriminatory, with those who pay being separated from those who refuse to. – The idea is to frustrate honest candidates into reconsidering payment in order to succeed in their exam (Atueyi, 2019).

Given this context, we took a step further to identify the states in Nigeria where these MECs are prevalent, as this could be beneficial for interventions. Although there is no available statistical record of the geographical spread of MECs, we relied on mentions in the literature. For instance, Abia and Anambra states in the southeast region of Nigeria are implicated as hotspots (Jokthan, 2013; The Nation, 2018), while Oyo, Osun and Lagos states are identified in the southwest (Adeniran et al., 2020; Danbaba et al., 2018). Similarly, Plateau, Kwara, Kogi, Abuja and Benue are mentioned in the northcentral region (Atueyi, 2020; Danbaba et al., 2018; *Orient Daily News*, 2018; *PM News*, 2019), while Edo and Delta states are mentioned in the south-south region (Egbejule, 2019; Neme, 2020; Yunus, 2019). Although spread on a national scale, a consensus emerges in the literature that MECs are more prevalent in southern-Nigeria, and less prevalent in the northeast. The northcentral region takes the lead in northern Nigeria (Anzene, 2014).

## 3.2. Drivers of MECs

We notice some nuances between the factors that drive examination malpractice and those that drive MECs. We have categorised these drivers into micro and macro categories. Those that fall under the functional or micro categories relate to personal and group motivations, while those under the structural or macro categories relate more to structural defects in society that have permitted or influenced the operations of MECs.

### 3.2.1. *Micro or functional drivers of MECs*

Key among the micro drivers of MECs are the attitudes of students towards studying and the influence of peers (Akintunde and Seizing-Musa, 2016; Jimoh and Omoregie, 2012; Njoku and Njoku, 2016). A decline in the study habits of students is highlighted in the literature as causing students to pay less attention to their studies. Students can be distracted by their

peers and neglect their studies, and they then turn to MECs once it is time to sit for their examinations (Asadu and Abonyi, 2020). The growth of electronic media has also affected behaviours, with students using electronic gadgets with access to the internet to facilitate exam malpractices in a bid to get good grades during WAEC and NECO exams. This drives students to seek MECs where such practices are permissible, and at times to pressure or cajole their parents (who might be unaware of the malpractices in those centres) into registering them with these MECs (Omede, 2015; Ugwu, 2019). Candidates often identify the exact locations of these MECs through their peers.

We equally found that some parents pressure their children or wards into particular subjects or career paths despite students lacking the required capacity or aptitude (Anzene, 2014; Boris and Awodun, 2012; Gbagolo, 2011; Ojogbane and Amali, 2016). This is notably associated with parents forcing their children into science-based courses. With no interest and capacity to achieve success in these subjects, parents and students seek out MECs that will guarantee results. Sponsors, who are often parents, can register their wards in MECs and can also pay for the exam to be written on behalf of their children. There are also reports of spouses paying for their partners to register with MECs, and of them achieving good results despite not sitting for the exams (Omoniyi, 2019).

MECs are viewed as cost-efficient by some as they guarantee success in one exam sitting, and prevent the need for multiple payments to secure results following initial failure (Amake, 2019; Nwankwo and Nweke, 2016). As a result of what could befall candidates if results are cancelled due to malpractice, the literature also suggests that some examiners avoid reporting fraudulent centres with the excuse that they are being compassionate to students (Atueyi, 2019).

### **3.2.2. Macro or structural drivers of MECs**

The literature points to some structural problems that contribute to increased patronage and the survival of MECs in Nigeria. There is a consensus that the country's value system is experiencing an all-time low, which seems to be a core reason for the prevalence of deviance and rule-breaking across society. This means that examination malpractice is accepted as the norm among many (Adegoke, 2010; Asadu and Abonyi, 2020; Aworinde, 2015b) and hence, MECs operate in the public gaze and continue to thrive. This is in addition to the overvaluation of certificates in Nigeria as evidence that one is educated and deserving of opportunities (Asinya, 2012; Jekayinfa et al., 2011; Olajire, 2019; Omebe, 2014), which forces people to indulge in whatsoever means to guarantee themselves qualifications, including patronising MECs.

Policies within some schools seem to have fostered the existence of MECs and have even turned some schools into MECs, albeit unknowingly to the school owners (Agbedo, 2015). In some private schools, the promotion of teachers is based on the performance of their students in WAEC and NECO exams (Jokthan, 2013). Such policies inadvertently motivate teachers to unethically assist their students to succeed. Additionally, teachers in private schools earn very little, which could make them susceptible to inducements that will add to

their earnings (Osaretin, 2016). The lucrative nature of MECs appeal to such teachers, who thus join in the business and look out for candidates who can pay.

Within certain neighbourhoods and social circles, MECs also save parents the shame of poorly performing wards (Atueyi, 2019; *Blueprint, 2019a*). Thus, it can be said that parents are driven by the pressure to see their children succeed, especially in a society where there is so much emphasis on qualifications and economic status. The literature describes poor parenting here, where parents fail to stand their ground over the 'right' thing to be done (Jimoh and Omoregie, 2012; Zakka, 2014). In financial terms, the high fees charged by MECs also act as justification to engage in malpractice to ensure centres keep their promise of examination success. In the long run, the successes attract more candidates, which generates more pay and profit (Aworinde, 2015a; Omoniyi, 2019).

While at a micro level students or candidates have a hand in their lack of preparedness and poor attitude to learning, on a macro scale the inefficiency of teachers and overloaded curriculum can likewise affect students (Atueyi, 2019; Omebe, 2014). Dungurawa (2015) also argues that there is a lack of harmony between the teaching and examination syllabi, and this is a problem for both teachers and candidates.

The literature also points to a connection between the absence of guidance-counsellors, school social workers and psychologists, and the patronage of MECs (Gbagolo, 2011; Kawugana and Woyopwa, 2017; Njoku and Njoku, 2016). These social service professionals are expected to guide students towards career choices based on their abilities and aptitudes, as well as to provide moral checks. Without such services, students are more likely to give in to parental and peer pressures in terms of career paths that they may not succeed in and distractions away from their studies. This reinforces the previously highlighted view on how the wrong choice of career path and peer influence could drag students into the patronage of MECs.

There is evidence that so-called tutorial centres that claim to prepare candidates for WAEC and NECO exams are a major conduit for the MECs (Aworinde, 2015a; *Blueprint, 2019b*; Udoh, 2011). These centres promise candidates excellent grades through the MECs they are associated with (Onyedinefu, 2019), but they are largely informal and thus lack regulations, monitoring and supervision. A large number of candidates presented for the SSCE exams are trained by tutorial centres (Raji and Okunlola, 2017). Sometimes, the teachers in the MECs run the tutorial centres and use them as a means to convince candidates to register for the exams in their schools, where they will be sure of excellent grades (Jokthan, 2013; Odidi, 2014). Our review had no finding about the political connections of these tutorial centres shielding them from sanctions or kinship networks between school administrators/teachers and students. We hope to investigate this in the qualitative aspect of this study.

Private schools tend to compete among themselves for student numbers and for profits (Atueyi, 2019). A way of edging out competitors is to present excellent WAEC and NECO results to the public. Consequently, some private schools use unscrupulous means to achieve excellent results and hence turn their schools into MECs. Examiners are described in

the literature as being subjected to very tough procedures to report an MEC (Omoniyi, 2019), therefore many save themselves the stress and allow the centres to thrive.

Other macro drivers include security agents who are compromised by the centres (Amake, 2019; Atueyi, 2019); infrastructure deficits in schools which affect the preparedness of students (Udoh, 2011); weak enforcement of sanctions and the Examination Malpractice Act (Adeniran et al., 2020; Yunus, 2019); the avoidance of naming and shaming complicit schools (Fapohunda, 2015); weak monitoring of private schools (Ndukwe, 2015); and lack of regulations pertaining to class admissions and the computation of CA scores (Belo-Osagie, 2017). Examination malpractice is also driven by declining standards in public schools which lead to increased patronage of private schools, including MECs (Atueyi, 2019); corrupt and poorly paid examiners who are ready to be compromised for pecuniary gains and other informal transactions including sex (Okoye and Onwuzuruoha, 2020; Osaretin, 2016). Boarding schools are reported to have more restrictions in place than the day schools, since the day schools facilitate more external interactions connected to sustaining examination malpractice (Adeyemi, 2011); and weak monitoring of schools in rural and remote locations (Adeyemi, 2011; Zakka, 2014). Finally, the free access to cheating websites and the use of SMS and chat platforms to exchange answers to questions (Danbaba et al., 2018; Onyibe et al., 2015), and – very importantly – the political connections of most school owners which shield them from sanctions (Atueyi, 2019) also act as macro drivers of malpractice. Besides school owners using political influence to protect their schools that turn into MECs from sanctions, Atueyi (2019) also highlighted powerful parents who influence the transfer of their children to these MECs at will. Some powerful persons also seek the services of these MECs by proxy or without presenting themselves or their candidates to sit for the exams (Omoniyi, 2019).

In all, we found that both micro and macro drivers can intersect in sustaining MECs. For instance, a poorly performing and misguided student might decide to register with an MEC located in a remote area where supervision is weak. A corrupt and poorly paid examiner could lobby their way to a school where they are sure to receive extra pay through bribes. A teacher whose promotion is dependent on the success of their students during WAEC and NECO exams could, as an invigilator, allow students to use their electronic devices or books to access answers. It is important to observe these intersections when trying to understand how MECs operate and when trying to design interventions.

### **3.3. The influence of gender and MECs**

Using a gender lens, we can try to understand the patronage and persistence of MECs. Although some of the literature we reviewed highlights gender influences as allowing MECs to thrive, as shaping patterns of cheating within these MECs or as working against solutions, some studies present insufficient evidence to back such statements.

As previously noted, beyond the monetary transactions that go on in MECs, sexual transactions are reported in the literature too. Here, female students tend to be coerced by powerful individuals within the school or MEC setting, with the promise of excellent grades (Belo-Osagie, 2017). On the other hand, they could offer sex out of their own volition

(Animasahun, 2013; Anzene, 2014). Some studies also argue that participating in examination fraud is a daring task, hence males are more likely to be involved (Animasahun and Ogunniran, 2014; Anyamene et al., 2015; Nnam and Otu, 2015). Onyibe et al. (2015) mention that while males present money and valuables in exchange for permission to cheat or to secure excellent grades, females partake in transactional sex with examiners, male school owners, teachers at tutorial centres and invigilators. In such context, the females are bound to be subservient in the transactional sex relationship because they are at the mercy of the powerful male figure who is in a position to determine their success in the exam or otherwise. Illicit sexual affairs is usually frowned at in Nigeria owing to its conservative culture, let alone when illicit sex involves females who might be within the teenage years, many of whom comprise of the age bracket that sit SSCE.

Onyibe et al. (2015) also describe how some nursing mothers are permitted within MECs and use breastfeeding to cover up fraudulent behaviour. They are often granted permission to go out of the exam venues to feed their babies, at which point they revise or smuggle in answers. Some even tattoo answers on the skins or clothes of their babies (ibid.). Aderogba (2011) reports that some females tattoo answers on sensitive parts of their bodies, in the belief that examiners (males especially) will be implicated for sexual abuse or harassment if they try to search them, especially in recent times when any form or appearance of molestation toward the females is treated with so much disdain by the society.

Concerning the enforcement of rules in these MECs, there is evidence in the literature that young female security officers and young female examiners are easily intimidated by powerful persons within the centres (Atueyi, 2019; Aworinde, 2015a). We find no relationship between the gendered ownership of schools and the schools becoming MECs. However, it has been observed that some women who own schools or manage the schools together with or on behalf of their husbands, tend to have powerful and politically connected husbands. As a result, indulge in exam malpractice and tend to get away with breaking the rules (Atueyi, 2019). On remedies, Yunus (2019) believes that mothers could utilise their skills in home-making and attachment with their children to advocate for examination integrity.

### 3.4. The effects of MECs on society

Corruption erodes trust in a system, and at an extreme could mean the total absence of confidence in a system. A ripple effect can occur too, in the sense that those who are sincere could be affected by the loss of confidence felt by others.

Animasahun (2013) describes scenarios where diligent students have sat for WAEC and NECO exams in cancelled MECs, where they are unfairly punished for an offence they are not a part of (Animasahun, 2013). Parents and self-sponsored candidates are also affected in these scenarios as they will have to pay to re-sit exams (Sa'ad and Dahiru, 2018). Some employers no longer trust WAEC and NECO results (Dungurawa, 2015) and, as such, expect further professional certification from applicants. This means that the poor who might not have the wherewithal to acquire professional certification could be out of a job or fail to secure a job using their WAEC and NECO results. This represents another kind of class divide.

The proliferation of MECs in Nigeria has contributed in no small amount to Nigeria being ranked first for examination malpractice, which potentially reduces the value of WAEC and NECO certificates locally and internationally (Akintunde and Selzing-Musa, 2016; Jimoh and Omoregie, 2012; Onuka and Durowoju, 2013). It also affects the competence of the workforce in the country, as those who successfully cheat their way through secondary school might do so throughout further levels of their education (Jimoh and Omoregie, 2012) and lack legitimate qualifications and skills to fulfil their roles.

With MECs continuing to operate, a decline in Nigeria's education system seems inevitable. Hard-working students are discouraged by the activities of cheats who unfairly compete with them for opportunities (Odo, 2015) and students are discouraged from working hard since their malpractice presents an easy avenue to obtain good grades (Onyibe et al., 2015). Upstanding and credible private schools are frustrated by the activities of these MECs who often poach their candidates during WAEC and NECO exams, thereby causing them to lose reputation and income (Gbagolo, 2011). At a higher level, the proliferation and continued operation of MECs in Nigeria undermines donor funding towards education (Adeniran et al., 2020) and moreover raises questions around the value that present and future leaders in the country place on education (Edeh et al., 2019; Olajire, 2019). Finally, the threats made to examiners and invigilators who refuse to be compromised in these MECs are sometimes carried out, leading to loss of lives and properties (Adeniran et al., 2020; Jokthan, 2013).

## 4. Solutions to MECs

Remedial actions are needed against the activities and proliferation of MECs. Drawing on our findings from the literature, we have identified two broad categories of solution, namely: 1) vertical solutions, usually involving government authorities, and 2) horizontal solutions involving stakeholders who will be interested in enforcing rules in their self interest and not because of the scare of sanctions usually coming from top to bottom. These stakeholders could be the examination bodies, schools, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), civil society organisations (CSOs) and other stakeholders at the grassroots.

A key difference between vertical and horizontal stakeholders is that while the former is often difficult to reach, the latter can be reached somewhat easily. The Anti-Corruption Evidence (ACE) framework favours a horizontal approach to anti-corruption – especially given the serial failures of vertical approaches (Khan et al., 2019) – whereby persons at the grassroots take ownership of anti-corruption initiatives. Nevertheless, we present findings for both approaches to anti-corruption and observe the possibility of some overlaps. We also distinguish between potential solutions that are supported by evidence and those without.

### 4.1. Vertical solutions to MECs

The Nigerian government has at different times expressed displeasure against MECs and the conditions that these centres create for examination malpractice to thrive. Here, we discuss some of the measures that have been taken to try to tackle this form of corruption.

In 1967 the Alexander Commission was set up to investigate incidents of malpractice in Nigeria (Omemu, 2015). Also, a special conference on exam malpractice was held at Ibadan in 1986, after which decrees were promulgated, schools were sanctioned, results were cancelled and invigilators were arrested, all in a bid to curb malpractice (ibid.). The role of the National Assembly in curbing malpractice was evident again in 1981 when it summoned WAEC examiners to answer questions on the increase in examination mass cheating that had occurred between 1977 and 1981 (Atueyi, 2019). Following this questioning, it was reported that there was a drastic reduction in malpractice in 1982 and 1983. The National Assembly and also the National Examination Council (NEC) are currently on the verge of stiffening sanctions against culprits of examination malpractice (Ibrahim, 2014; Odunsi, 2019), though earlier in February, 2012, they had announced a ban of MECs (Asomba, 2012). However, given current realities, the efficacy of this ban is open to question.

Still, on sanctions, Atueyi (2019) reports that Edo state government suspended the principals of 28 public senior secondary schools and 28 private schools for alleged involvement in examination fraud. The Delta state government arrested 16 individuals within tutorial centres that serve as a conduit for MECs (*Blueprint, 2019b*), and there was also a report on the arrest of a vice-principal, teachers and a supervisor for extorting money from students to assist them in a NECO examination in Kwara state (*PM News, 2019*). Additionally, students and teachers were arraigned in court for their involvement in examination malpractice for using phones to transmit answers in Anambra and Imo States (*Blueprint, 2019c*).

To step up the agenda against examination malpractice, state governments are now establishing examination fraud committees within their Ministries of Education (*Blueprint, 2019b*). The Enugu state government views the admission of final-year (SSS 3) students into new schools as fraudulent and has placed a ban on this practice since the 2016/2017 academic session (Amake, 2019). Some governments in Nigeria have made efforts to increase funding to schools with regards to infrastructure and the re-training of teachers to improve their capacities and competencies (Nnorom, 2020; *Premium Times, 2018; Pulse.ng, 2020*). However, none of the studies we reviewed report whether the government has increased the salaries of teachers as a strategy to curb exam malpractice.

Despite these efforts, the literature suggests that governments in Nigeria rarely 'name and shame' schools that have been caught conducting fraudulent acts (Fapohunda, 2015). This is unlike in Ghana, where all schools that are involved in fraud have been named since 2010, which has helped increase examination integrity within the country (Belo-Osagie, 2015). Ghana has outshone Nigeria in all recent WAEC results and has won the WAEC endowment fund prize more than Nigeria in recent times (*ibid.*). This is evidence of the positive changes that Ghana has introduced to its education system, and the resulting fear among citizens of being shamed as a culprit of examination fraud that has helped to stem malpractice. Nigeria has some lessons to learn from Ghana, as well as from other countries: in China capital punishments are given out for examination malpractice offences; in Uganda examination officials are awarded remuneration increments so as not to justify the collection of bribes on the premise of poor pay and in Pakistan examination bodies have the right to arrest culprits (Jokthan, 2013).

Another vertical measure that Nigeria could introduce to eradicate MECs is for the government to ensure that private schools employ qualified guidance-counsellors, school social workers or clinical psychologists to support and guide students (Kawugana and Woyopwa, 2017; Njoku and Njoku, 2016). Some studies also call for stiffer sanctions, including the full enforcement of the 1999 Examination Malpractice Act to deter fraudulent behaviour (Animasahun and Ogunniran, 2014; Asomba, 2012; Aworinde, 2015a); setting up special judicial tribunals to speed up the gathering of evidence and prosecution (Lawal, 2017; Onyibe et al., 2015); and government-sponsored enlightenment programmes against examination fraud (Animasahun and Ogunniran, 2014). The government should also review the curriculum and revise it to integrate examination ethics into civic education (Atueyi, 2019; Boris and Awodun, 2012), while encouraging examination authorities to harmonise their syllabi with what is taught across schools (Agbo, 2020; Dungurawa, 2015). The government can as well permit the Ministry of Communication to use its authority, skills and networks to fish out websites that aid and abet examination malpractice, and perhaps distort communication frequencies around examination venues when exams are ongoing (Aworinde, 2015a; Zakka, 2014).

Furthermore, the government should sensitise and retrain security outfits on exam-related information and communication technology (ICT), so they are equipped to deal with the operational approaches of MECs, and even utilise the cybercrime unit of the Nigerian Police Force (*Blueprint, 2019a; Osaretin, 2016*). There should also be a system in place to reward schools that have built a reputation for zero-tolerance against examination fraud (Njoku and

Njoku, 2016). An Examination Malpractice Commission could be established just like the government has done with the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) (Akintunde and Selzing-Musa, 2016), which should monitor strictly or even take over the registration process of candidates for WAEC and NECO exams (Osadebe and Bini, 2018). Finally, the government should monitor activities of tutorial centres by first formalising their existence and subjecting their activities to thorough and periodic scrutiny (Amake, 2019; Odidi, 2014).

## 4.2. Horizontal solutions to MECs

The efforts of examination bodies, school owners, students, teachers, parents, the media, telecommunication companies, NGOs, faith-based organisations (FBOs) and CSOs can be galvanised towards curbing examination malpractice and MECs. Such efforts might not involve the government, yet there is evidence to suggest that horizontal measures could be effective.

For instance, the Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB), which is a co-examination body in Nigeria, has made efforts to digitalise its examination process, including the installation of Closed-Circuit Television (CCTV) devices in centres that are directly connected to a central monitoring station. This has helped to check examination fraud (Atueyi, 2019). Belo-Osagie (2017) cites a case where a JAMB examiner was caught via CCTV demanding sex from a candidate. Given the dramatic steps taken by JAMB to curb malpractice within its centres, it becomes possible to identify candidates who perform excellently during WAEC and NECO exams but badly during JAMB exams (Damilola and Oladapo, 2020). There are differences in how exams are conducted by JAMB and by WAEC and NECO, especially in terms of the practical, essay and CA aspects characterising the latter. Nonetheless, the steps taken by JAMB to digitalise the examination process and adopt technology to check for disorderliness during exams could be adopted by WAEC and NECO.

There is further evidence from JAMB of its partnership with telecommunication companies to distort network frequencies around venues when an examination is ongoing (Damilola and Oladapo, 2020). However, there is a need to secure the buy-in of all network service providers in achieving this, else candidates could simply switch networks. With respect to mobile communication, evidence from Malawi points to a reduction in examination fraud since a ban was introduced on the use of mobile communication devices by students, examiners and teachers during exams (Boateng, 2019).

WAEC and NECO have on several occasions cancelled the results of centres that indulge in examination malpractice (Atueyi, 2020; Zakka, 2014), but there is little evidence to show how effective this has been since MECs still thrive (Adeyemi, 2010). Cancellation could even harm those who are innocent. Thus, to prevent such a dilemma, it is advisable to publish a list of schools that have been blacklisted so that candidates are guided away from corrupt centres and can register with another school. As it is done in Sierra Leone and Liberia, the court trials of examiners who facilitate fraud should also be made public (Belo-Osagie, 2017).

WAEC hosts summits on examination malpractice and it is critical about MECs (Ugwu, 2019). They invite different countries that write WAEC examinations to share their experiences on how they are combatting examination malpractice, so that other countries can learn about

effective approaches and consider how they could adopt them in their respective contexts. Such WAEC summits should continue.

Additionally, to prevent sporadic inflation and forgery of CA scores, WAEC is seeking to enforce a policy of procedural submission of CA scores as candidates move across classes before their final year, which would enable better monitoring of student progress and discrepancies in results. WAEC has also produced a customised calculator that will help with uniform computation in the examination hall and traceable computation of CA scores (Belo-Osagie, 2017). Both WAEC and NECO utilise public campaigns like leaflets, jingles, etc., to raise awareness about examination malpractice and MECs. However, the NOA needs to play a bigger part here in public information campaigns (Alhassan, 2017). WAEC and NECO have also begun using biometric capturing devices during exam registration, which should help to curb identity fraud. According to Odo (2015), a new system has been introduced – Candidates Identity Verification, Attendance, Malpractice and Post Examination Management System (CIVAMPEMS). However, the efficacy of CIVAMPEMS remains questionable since MECs still operate very much in plain sight.

The media equally has a crucial role to play in ending examination malpractice, particularly as investigative journalists can uncover practices and incidents within the MECs – such reports generate evidence that will hardly be disputed. A case in point is Aworinde (2015a, 2015b) whose investigative journalism led to the Lagos state government sanctioning and shutting down a private school for examination malpractice. Equally, some CSOs like the Exam Ethics Marshal have proven effective at sensitisation, engagement and petitioning of stakeholders to take action against malpractice (Anzene, 2014; Fapohunda, 2015). The Exam Ethics Marshal also joined forces with Aworinde (2015a, 2015b) to ensure that the Lagos state government acted quickly against the culprit in Aworinde's undercover report. Another CSO, the Education Rights Campaign, is also recognised in the literature for its voice against MECs (Adegbide, 2018).

FBOs too have been found to be useful in curbing examination malpractice. There have been reported cases of repentant examiners and candidates confessing to sinfully engaging in fraud. Some candidates even returned their results, asking to retake their examination and to be issued a fresh result based on genuine performance (Atueyi, 2019). As such, FBOs should be encouraged to speak up and preach against the patronage of MECs and examination malpractice generally, in an effort to help reshape public attitudes and behaviours.

Other horizontal solutions – but that lack evidence – include private schools emphasising the competence of teachers and also retraining them where necessary (Obidoa et al., 2012); discreet and unannounced visits by senior examiners to inspect exam centres, and the rotation of examiners to avoid familiarity with schools (Jokthan, 2013). Also, calls have also been made for WAEC and NECO to employ more personnel to supervise examinations since teachers and other ad hoc staff who serve as invigilators are noted for compromising the examination process and facilitating the activities of MECs (Atueyi, 2019; Osaretin, 2016); where it is not possible to employ more personnel, the adoption of staggered exams could help balance the number of candidates with the number of available examiners (Omoniyi, 2019).

Further measures could include students and National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) members being galvanised to forming anti-examination malpractice groups (Emiloju and Adeyoju, 2012); school owners, under the umbrella of the National Association of Proprietors of Private Schools (NAPPS), paying closer attention to the activities within their schools, and creating policies and practices that do not force teachers into corrupt behaviours for financial survival, for example (Boris and Awodun, 2012). Other measure could also be the examination bodies (as well as the government) could operationalise a whistleblowing policy in Nigeria to capture the reporting of MECs and grant incentives to whistle-blowers (Blueprint, 2019b; Omoniyi, 2019). The examination bodies could also standardise payment procedures, since MECs adopt cash payments for their services (Aworinde, 2015a): and parents, under the umbrella of parent–teacher associations (PTAs), should emphasise the importance of core values and examination integrity amongst fellow parents and their children or wards (Adeniran et al., 2020; Alhassan, 2017; Aworinde, 2015b; Tyokyaa, 2016).

## 5. Discussion

There is ample evidence from the reviewed literature and investigative journalism that examination malpractice is rife amidst WAEC and NECO exams in Nigeria, and that MECs make the problem much more complex. Though we observed a geographic focus in the literature on states in southern Nigeria, the problem is understood to cover the entire country – indeed, some studies report similar problems in northern states.

A broad range of behaviours is evidenced in the Nigeria-focused literature, from looking into someone's examination sheet to steal and copy answers (*giraffing*), to pressuring invigilators to allow students to cheat in exams. Although exam boards can track and punish cheats by cancelling or withholding results, MECs deploy devious means to ensure that clients' results are good and that they are not detected or sanctioned by exam boards in the process. Some hire impersonators to write exams for clients, while other MECs bribe exam officials to cooperate and allow malpractices to continue. Clients are often students and parents who desire good results to advance their academic qualifications and better their chances of progressing to tertiary education and/or to secure economic opportunities in the long run. There are inclinations that some of these MECs benefit from political and kinship connections, preventing them from being detected and sanctioned. Equally, some of the patronizers use same political connections to influence seamless transfer of their candidates to the MECs or to acquire results from these MECs without themselves or their candidates being present to take the exams (Omoniyi, 2019).

Given the practices of MECs, such centres tend to discourage genuine hard work by students, and inadvertently cause problems for tertiary level learning. At a general level they reduce the productivity and competence of individuals who move through Nigeria's education system. The fact that MECs have continued to deliver good results indicates that they profit, attract more clients, grow and acquire more resources and connections to advance their cause. This aligns with the conceptual framework set out in section 2.1 (Jomih, 2009; Luo, 2005; Nnam and Otu, 2015) – where a society has weak moral constraints and does not investigate the source of any kind of success, there is a greater possibility of examination fraud occurring and eventually becoming accepted as a norm. Additionally, the value placed on economic and social status within the workplace and community in Nigeria is a major reinforcer for MECs (Schroepfer, 2016). Individuals continue to succeed without question, due to depleted values in society (Luo, 2005).

Concerned about their candidates, it is little wonder that universities and some employers try to re-evaluate students before admission and question their success in the SSCE. Unfortunately, other successes such as teachers getting promoted because their students passed their exams as a result of malpractice, parents who successfully avoid the shame of being associated with an academically failing child, and ill-gotten wealth from operating MECs continue largely unchecked in the society.

Early drivers of MECs can be traced to the emergence and popularity of private schools in Nigeria to meet the demands of increased secondary school enrolment. In turn, competition amongst private schools to demonstrate their students' achievements in external exams

made some players deploy deviant means to ensure good performance. Gradually, firms that specialise in delivering impeccable SSCE results have emerged as MECs. These centres undermine the efforts of exam boards and ridicule hard work, they affect the quality of intakes into tertiary institutions and have a knock-on effect on the quality of graduates and the productivity of the country. As MECs proliferate, the hope of remedies to curb malpractice appear to dim.

Vertical, government-driven policies such as sanctions, decrees and legislative pronouncements are barely implemented. State governments sanction and demote public school administrators and even close down private schools that are red-marked by regulators; exam boards withhold the results of suspected cheats, cancel individual subject results, and also bar schools and students identified as having cheated. But despite several arrests reported in the media, the successful prosecution of cases of exam malpractice is rare. We did not find a single prosecution within the articles under review.

Horizontal efforts have resulted in exam boards delisting schools that have been found to engage in wanton malpractice, but it is difficult to assess if these measures have deterred MECs – these sanctions seem to target exam malpractice in general and not MECs in particular. It is even more difficult to judge the effectiveness of sanctions, especially as we did not find any structured intervention or evaluation studies in the articles reviewed. Nonetheless, the academic literature and investigative journalists continue to report cases of exam malpractice.

Understandably, several challenges exist for stakeholders/researchers who aim to design and implement interventions to address exam malpractice and MECs in Nigeria. These include tracking and recording incidents and the individuals involved, the development and use of indices to monitor efforts, and issues of confidentiality even if MECs are identified.

## 5.1. The potential of the Anti-Corruption Evidence (ACE) approach

The ACE approach (Khan et al., 2019) identifies the frustrating reality of encouraging change in adverse contexts where rule-breaking is more or less normative. In such contexts, conventional anti-corruption strategies of transparency and accountability will have minimal success. Players who are profiting from rule-breaking will find a way around any rules that are introduced.

Our review has shown that, despite the vertical sanctions introduced to date in Nigeria to address exam malpractice/MECs, the problem has persisted. Consequently, the ACE approach recommends that positive change is likely to be achieved through horizontal measures, by engaging with powerful stakeholders who will benefit from playing by the rules to tackle corruption. ACE strategies towards change include aligning interests, 'designing for differences', resolving rights and building coalitions (ibid.).

MECs and the diverse exam-related malpractices reported in Nigeria appear to be driven mostly by private secondary schools. Though schools in remote areas are identified as likely

to foster MEC activities, the literature is not specific about the nature/type of private secondary schools that are likely – and importantly, unlikely – to foster corrupt behaviours. Here, there is an opportunity to align the interests of schools that are not disposed or unable to indulge malpractice, particularly those that risk losing candidates, and certainly profits, to the MECs when it is time for WAEC and NECO exams. Equally, fostering partnership with the examination bodies known to have some autonomy in making decisions and very open to public engagements, can draw from our study to redesign their strategies to achieve reduction in MECs.

Why are we hopeful that there are schools that are doing it right? There are positive stories regionally, nationally and globally about Nigerian students who have participated in and excelled in different competitions. Recently, a team of Nigerian girls from a school in Anambra state won a global technology competition by developing an application to combat fake pharmaceuticals. In 2018 and 2019, Nigerian students won the best-performing students award in the region. Three schools from Nigeria also won the best performing schools in the West Africa region (*PM News*, 2019). So there is evidence that schools exist which are getting education right. Identifying these schools and assessing how they are impacted by MECs will help us build a theory and strategy of change to galvanize their efforts. The literature already provides evidence that students gravitate towards MECs as they approach the registration period for external exams, which means losses for rule-following schools. Aligning the interests of these rule-following schools (i.e. to retain their students) with the interests of exam boards (to reduce exam malpractice) may be a potentially viable ACE strategy to address examination malpractice.

## 5.2. Limitations and conclusion

Our systematic search of the literature identified few studies on exam malpractice and MECs. Instead the literature consists more of exploratory and descriptive quantitative studies, which lack the depth that a thorough qualitative study would provide. Most of the published literature originates from journals with no information about indexing and ranking. Hence, some of the articles are not written in great depth. Recommendations are made in some studies but reports of evaluation of interventions are missing. However, these gaps present opportunities for more in-depth assessments of examination malpractice in MECs using mixed methods, and testing of potential solutions to curb the practice, which we intend to pursue in future research.

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## Annex

**Table A1. Summary presentation of the nature, drivers and effects of MECs and potential solutions**

Nature and practices in MECs	Drivers of exam malpractice conducted in MECs	Effects of exam malpractice	Interventions/Recommendations
Private schools more involved (Aworinde, 2015a; Atueyi, 2019; Jokthan, 2013)	Proprietor guarantees 'good' results across all the subjects taken upon the payment of high registration fees (Aworinde, 2015a; Atueyi, 2019; Yunus, 2019)	Degrading of the education system in Nigeria (Boris & Awodun, 2012; <i>OM News</i> , 2018)	Promoting ethical and moral education in schools (Gbagolo, 2011)
Connivance of rogue invigilators and corrupt school officials to provide students with answers to exam questions during the examination (Aworinde, 2015a; Atueyi, 2019)	Generally weak education sector (Danbaba et al., 2018)	Eroding of certificate credibility and trust by tertiary schools and employers (Asadu & Abonyi, 2020)	Improving ethical conduct in society (Animasahun & Ogunniran, 2014; Gbagolo, 2011)
Use of electronic devices/technology such as electronic wrist watches, smart phones, eye glasses, miniature ear pieces, rings, Youtube clips explaining how to cheat (Belo-Osagie, 2017; Njoku & Njoku, 2016; Raji & Okunlola, 2017; Igwe et al., n.d.)	Competition among private schools to attract and retain students which means more profit for them (Atueyi, 2019; Asadu & Abonyi, 2020)	Encouraging laziness amongst students ( <i>PM News</i> , 2018; <i>Orient Daily News</i> , 2018)	Introducing honour codes for schools or rewarding well performing schools (Adeyemi, 2011)
Bribing supervisors/invigilators to allow exam malpractice (Obidoa et al., 2013; Onuka & Dorowoju, 2013; Okoye & Onwuzuruoha, 2020; Asinya, 2012)	Corrupt invigilators (Kawugana & Woyopwa, 2017; Asadu & Abonyi, 2020)	Endangering lives (Asadu & Abonyi, 2020)	WAEC conducting campaigns to reduce malpractice (Jekayinfa et al., 2011)
School authorities hire subject specialists to solve leaked exam questions, and the solutions are distributed to students who have paid exorbitant charges (Jekayinfa et al., 2011)	Moral decadence (Njoku & Njoku, 2016; Jimoh, 2009; Jimoh & Omoregie, 2012; Okpe & Lar, n.d.; Emiloju & Adeyoju, 2012)	Widespread unemployment (Asadu & Abonyi, 2020)	Ensuring adequate and competent teachers are recruited (Osadebe & Bini, 2018; Aworinde, 2015b; Obidoa et al., 2013)
Rogue students hired to write exams for others (Yunus, 2019)	Peer influence (Njoku & Njoku, 2016; Jimoh, 2009; Anyamene & Nwokolo, 2015)	Economic waste and inefficiency (Asadu & Abonyi, 2020)	Ensuring that adequate facilities are installed (Osadebe & Bini, 2018; Obidoa et al., 2013)
Bribing security officials posted to exam halls to allow cheating (Okoye & Onwuzuruoha, 2020)	High value on certificates (entry requirements for higher education and requirement for employment) (Adegoke, 2010; Blueprint, 2019d; Jokthan, 2013; Odidi, 2014; Udoh, 2013; Joshua et al., 2013; Obidoa et al., 2013; <i>The Nation</i> , 2018; Petters & Okon, 2013; Jimoh, 2009; Anagbogu et al., 2016; Animasahun & Ogunniran, 2014; Igwe et al., n.d.; Asadu & Abonyi, 2020)	Increased workplace hazards (Asadu & Abonyi, 2020)	Using cameras and other electronic screening processes to monitor the exam process (Osadebe & Bini, 2018; Fayomi et al., 2015; Atueyi, 2019; Adeniran et al., 2020)
Principals build in the cost of facilitating exam malpractice into exam registration fees (Omoniyi, 2019)	Parental pressure on students and examiners and payments to MECs to facilitate exam malpractice and assure good grades (Adegoke, 2010; Akintunde & Selzing-Musa, 2016; Blueprint, 2019d; Anagbogu et al., 2016)	Ruin reputation of individuals, schools, countries (Edeh et al., 2019)	E-invigilation/biometric processes/Computer Based Exams (Fayomi et al., 2015; Alhassan, 2017; Oseratin, 2016; Whawo, 2015a)
Students switch to private schools (that run MECs) during SSCE registration (Onyedinefu, 2019; Okoye & Onwuzuruoha, 2020)		Destroy productivity of country (Edeh et al., 2019)	Employ/encourage professional counsellors and social service professionals to tackle malpractice and related drivers (Ojogbane & Amali, 2016; Anene, 2014; Animasahun & Ogunniran, 2014; Gbagolo, 2011; Aworinde, 2015b; Obidoa et al., 2013)
			Using psychoeducation/counselling students (Anyamene et al., 2015; Ojogbane & Amali, 2016; Emiloju & Adeyoju, 2012; Animasahun & Ogunniran, 2014; Gbagolo, 2011; Alhassan, 2017; Adeyemi, 2010)

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Nature and practices in MECs	Drivers of exam malpractice conducted in MECs	Effects of exam malpractice	Interventions/Recommendations
Students pay extra examination fees used to 'settle' exam officials (Onyedinefu, 2019; Jekayinfa et al., 2011)	Poor learning infrastructure across secondary schools (Udoh, 2011; Petters & Okon, 2013; Asadu & Abonyi, 2020; Anyamene & Nwokolo, 2015)		Improving involvement of parents and family in education (Yunus, 2019)
Using mobile phones and other sophisticated electronic gadgets to facilitate cheating (Okoye & Onwuzuruoha, 2020)	Unqualified and nonchalant/poor teachers/teaching across secondary schools (Asomba, 2012; Udoh, 2011; Udoh, 2013; Obidoa et al., 2013; Animasahun & Ogunniran, 2014; Orji et al. n.d.; Anyamene & Nwokolo, 2015)		Stiffening and enforcing legislation against malpractice (Asadu & Abonyi, 2020; Gbagolo, 2011)
Constant increase in examination fees (Udoh, 2011; Petters & Okon, 2013; Asadu & Abonyi, 2020)	Non-coverage of syllabus (Udoh, 2011; Udoh, 2013; Joshua et al., 2013; Adeniran et al., 2020; Petters & Okon, 2013)		Arrest, prosecution, or full implementation of criminal law for exam culprits (Osadebe & Bini, 2018; Anyamene et al., 2015; Emiloju & Adeyoju, 2012; Akintunde & Musa, 2016; Jekayinfa et al., 2011; Igwe et al., n.d.; Anene, 2014; Animasahun & Ogunniran, 2014; PM News, 2018; Adeyemi, 2010)
Students who register for extra lessons in preparation for exams are registered into MECs to facilitate success at higher registration fees (Blueprint, 2019b; Udoh, 2011; Jokthan, 2013)	Imposition of subjects and career path on students by their parents (Petters & Okon, 2013)		Improve working conditions for teachers (Jimoh, 2009; Animasahun & Ogunniran, 2014)
Answers to exam questions solved and shared with students (Omoniyi, 2019; Okoye & Onwuzuruoha, 2020)	The profit from charging higher fees and the need to justify the high charges for more patronage (Aworinde, 2015a; Omoniyi, 2019)		Closely monitoring affairs of secondary schools (Osadebe & Bini, 2018)
Candidates can pay relatively large amounts and are not required to write the exams, but just to come and pick 'their good results' (2019)	Student laziness and poor studying habits (Animasahun, 2013; Obidoa et al., 2013; Petters & Okon, 2013; Orji et al. n.d.)		Using trusted and reliable examiners (Osadebe & Bini, 2018)
Parents seek and register their wards in MECs ( <i>PM News</i> , 2018; <i>The Nation</i> , 2018)	Remote exam centres more likely to be involved as they are poorly supervised and expected delays in delivery of exam question papers and scripts (Jokthan, 2013; Duvie & Eluwa, 2016; <i>Orient Daily News</i> , 2018; Onyibe et al., 2015)		Improve funding for the education sector (Jimoh, 2009; Onyibe et al., 2015; Onuka & Durowoju, 2013)
Registration of non-candidates, leakages (Joshua et al., 2013; Okoye & Onwuzuruoha, 2020)	Economic gains to teachers, examiners, principals and school owners (Onyibe et al., 2015; Asadu & Abonyi, 2020) and greed to get more money (Boris & Awodun, 2012; Igwe et al., n.d.; Aderogba, 2011)		Involving national religious bodies in collaboration with the Ministry of Education on laying down procedures to establish and run schools (Aderogba, 2011; Onyibe et al., 2015)
Using impersonators and false CA scores (Joshua et al., 2013; Okoye & Onwuzuruoha, 2020)	Tying the reputation and promotion of teachers to students' performance (Jokthan, 2013)		Delisting/derecognition of schools found to perpetrate/engage in malpractice (Duru, 2020; Omebe, 2014; Anyamene et al., 2015; Atueyi, 2019; <i>Premium Times</i> , 2018; Lawal, 2019a)
Seeking out and registering in exam centres in remote places where supervision will be loose ( <i>Orient Daily News</i> , 2018; Duvie & Eluwa, 2016; Okoye & Onwuzuruoha, 2020)	Poor pay for teachers (Udoh, 2013; Adeniran et al., 2020; Raji & Okunlola, 2017)		Naming and shaming students and affected centres (Omebe, 2014; Belo-Osagie, 2015; Atueyi, 2019; Adeyemi, 2010)
	Examiners being willing to compromise supervising the exams (Boris & Awodun, 2012; Obidoa et al., 2013).		Establishing education or exam malpractice courts/tribunal (Lawal, 2017; Onyibe et al., 2016; Ojogbane & Amali, 2016)
	Poor parenting (Animasahun, 2013)		Fines/sanctioning of schools by the examination bodies (Atueyi, 2020; Omemu, 2015)
	Poor implementation of sanctions (Adeyemi, 2010)		

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Nature and practices in MECs	Drivers of exam malpractice conducted in MECs	Effects of exam malpractice	Interventions/Recommendations
	<p>Leakages of exam papers before the exams (Adeyemi, 2010)</p> <p>Excessive workload for exam officials leads to inefficiency and creates room for malpractice (Lawal, 2019a)</p> <p>Social media makes it easy to cheat (Lawal, 2019b)</p> <p>Increasing sophistication of malpractice networks (Raji &amp; Okunlola, 2017)</p>		<p>Demoting and sanctioning principals (Duru, 2020)</p> <p>Dismissing/sanctioning exam officials, security, parents involved in malpractice (Ojogbane &amp; Amali, 2016; Aderogba, 2011; Omemu, 2015; Atueyi, 2019; Adeyemi, 2010; Neme, 2020)</p> <p>Closing down mushroom schools (Duru, 2020)</p> <p>Cancellation of results of students caught cheating especially with mobile devices (Adeghide, 2018; Omemu, 2015; Gbagolo, 2011; Adeyemi, 2010)</p> <p>Jamming mobile networks in and around the exam centres (Adegbide, 2018)</p> <p>Thorough searching of candidates before entering the exam halls (Adegbide, 2018)</p> <p>Putting pressure on principals to monitor exam malpractice in their schools (Adegbide 2018)</p> <p>Improving social/moral values and reorientation (Udim et al., 2018)</p> <p>Examination bodies and schools to attend regular workshops on strategies to combat exam malpractice (Tyokyaa, 2016)</p> <p>Sensitisation of students and teachers on the dangers of exam malpractice (Tyokyaa, 2016; Ojogbane &amp; Amali, 2016; Yunus, 2019)</p> <p>Increase pay of teachers and exam officials (Ojogbane &amp; Amali, 2016; Udoh, 2013; Boris &amp; Awodun, 2012)</p> <p>Examination Malpractice Commission (EMC) should function like the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) in prosecution of examination malpractice offenders (Akintunde &amp; Musa, 2016)</p> <p>Strictly monitor computation of the CA of candidates (Onyibe et al., 2015; Adeyemi, 2010)</p> <p>Tighten operating procedures e.g. setting questions night before exams (Onyedinefu, 2019)</p> <p>Employing independent firms to validate and authenticate results (Nnam &amp; Otu, 2015)</p>

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Nature and practices in MECs	Drivers of exam malpractice conducted in MECs	Effects of exam malpractice	Interventions/Recommendations
			<p>Increasing vigilance in schools identified to be notorious for malpractice (Aworinde, 2015a)</p> <p>Universities to tighten screening to detect those who come in via malpractice (Aworinde, 2015a)</p> <p>CSOs e.g. Exam Ethics Marshal petitioning anticorruption arms e.g. Police, Economic and Financial Crime Commission, Independent Corrupt Practices Commission, Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps, and Ministry of Education (Fapohunda, 2015)</p> <p>Incentivising whistle blowing (Omoniyi, 2019)</p> <p>Policy compelling schools to update the data of their students from younger classes (SS1) on the WAEC portal (Omoniyi, 2019)</p> <p>Ministry of Education to support exam bodies to curb exam malpractice (Omoniyi, 2019)</p> <p>Varying exam questions (Boris &amp; Awodun, 2012)</p> <p>Boost funding to reward excellent performance (Belo-Osagie, 2015)</p> <p>Overhaul the curriculum to recognise vocational and skills development so as to reduce the popularity of certificates (Animasahun, 2013; Jimoh, 2009)</p> <p>Monitor private schools (Ndukwe, 2015)</p>

**Table A2. Comprehensive findings from the systematic review**

S/N	References	Nature and drivers of examination malpractice and MECs	Gender dynamics	Effects of examination malpractice and MECs	Horizontal interventions (without evidence)	Horizontal interventions (with evidence)	Vertical interventions (without evidence)	Vertical interventions (with evidence)
1	Abari et al (2012)	MECs are more in private schools			Improved monitoring of private schools		Improved monitoring of private schools	
2	Abubakar (2017)						Adaptive learning from countries that have or are successfully dealing with examination malpractice	
3	Adegbide (2018)							Cancellation of entire results of defaulters; jamming mobile networks within a specific radius in and around the exam hall; banning supervisors and invigilators from taking their mobile phones and other electronic devices into the hall; briefing school principals and school owners on sanctions
4	Adegoke (2010)	Parental pressure for good grades; overvaluation of certificate; threatening of examiners who refuse to comply with them; supervisors colluding with teachers, school principals or students by allowing teachers to come around to teach the students during examination period						
5	Adeniran et al (2020)	Weak values; poor learning facilities; poor study habits; weak supervision; parental support and pressure; compromising examiners by offering refreshments to them		Loss of certificate credibility and trust in the educational system; incompetent workforce and social vices		Use of ICT services to screen and monitor candidates		
6	Aderogba (2011)	Profit maximisation of proprietors; greed to make more money by teachers, examiners and security agents; parental support to register in MECs; overvaluation of certificates; the need to avoid failure and repeated registration which is not cost effective	Women cheat by writing answers on sensitive parts of their bodies to avoid checks	Incompetent workforce	Religious organisations can support with campaigns against exam malpractice		Stringent sanctions for defaulters; private schools should be relieved of doing the registration of candidates themselves	
7	Adeshina et al (2014)	Increasing trend in SSCE exam malpractice						

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S/N	References	Nature and drivers of examination malpractice and MECs	Gender dynamics	Effects of examination malpractice and MECs	Horizontal interventions (without evidence)	Horizontal interventions (with evidence)	Vertical interventions (without evidence)	Vertical interventions (with evidence)
8	Adeyemi (2010)	Poor study habits; weak values; weak sanctions; compromised examiners; the need for private schools to retain numbers and advertise their schools with excellent SSCE results			Scaling up supervision; monitoring the computation of CA scores		Stiffening and enforcing sanction; speedy prosecution of defaulters	Cancellation and blacklisting of affected examination centres
9	Adeyemi (2011)	Desire to pass at all cost; wide syllabus; insufficient preparation; inadequate learning facilities; weak values; weak sanctions for erring schools; weak supervision of centres; collusion of teachers with candidates; rural and remote locations		Honest students are affected by either joining the bandwagon or having their results withdrawn		Ceasing of results by exam bodies	Government should introduce honour codes for schools that are noted for examination integrity; the use of computer-based tests; academic qualifications should not only be the emphasis for getting a job in Nigeria	Appointments of complicit teachers and principals are terminated
10	Agbedo (2015)					After a school was said to have been involved in examination malpractice, a proprietor sacked the principal and other accomplice staff, and took over the management of her school		
11	Agbo (2020)						Government should ensure harmonisation of teaching and examination syllabi	
12	Aikulola (2017)	Lack of monitoring of schools by the school owners; collusion of teachers with examiners						
13	Akintunde & Selzing-Musa (2016)	Parental pressure on students to follow a particular career path and to achieve excellent results; parental support to register in MEC; peer pressure; incompetent staff; compromised security officials and examiners		Low credibility of certificates; incompetent workforce; honest students affected when results are cancelled	Emphasis on ethics; employing services of guidance-counsellors	Use of computer-based tests and CCTV just like JAMB	Adequate funding of the education sector; reduction of undue emphasis on certificates; establishing Examination Malpractice Commission just like the EFCC	
14	Alhassan (2017)				Instituting counselling services in schools	Introducing computer-based tests		Enforcing the Exam Malpractice Act

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S/N	References	Nature and drivers of examination malpractice and MECs	Gender dynamics	Effects of examination malpractice and MECs	Horizontal interventions (without evidence)	Horizontal interventions (with evidence)	Vertical interventions (without evidence)	Vertical interventions (with evidence)
15	Amake (2019)	Unqualified teachers; poor infrastructure and learning materials; overvaluation of certificates; avoidance of repetitive registration in the event of failure and taunts from neighbours; these centres have used many methods to assist their students during examinations in order for them to pass at ease, like getting examination question papers before examination date and time, impersonation, replacing the answer script written in the examination hall with that written at home, texting answers to objective questions through cell-phone to client's cell-phone when question must have been solved, bribing the supervisor or invigilator to cooperate with the students in the examination hall and removing security personnel from arresting the students in the examination hall, all in the name of making money; students transfer to the MECs in SS3		Fall in the standard of education and eroding of trust in the exams and the certificates	Withdraw accreditation of complicit schools			In 2016, Enugu state government said it will stop the transfer of SS3 students to new schools
16	Amuche et al (2014)	The fear of failure and reduced number of candidates making 5 Credits including Maths and English; poor pay for teachers and examiners; absence of political will to address the issue						
17	Anagbogu et al (2016)	Weak values; peer pressure; overvaluation of certificates; weak supervision						
18	Animasahun (2013)	Peer pressure; parental support; weak values; the need for schools to retain their numbers	Female candidates solicit sex	Undermines the hard work of honest students; incompetent workforce	Employ the service of guidance-counsellors; institute functional Examination Ethics Committee in all schools		Close down mushroom private schools; address curriculum gaps; address the overvaluation of certificates	

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19	Animasahun & Ogunniran (2014)	Very wide syllabus necessitating poor coverage; parents who care less about the education of their children; certificate anxiety; poor pay for teachers and examiners; desperate parents	Males are more daring than females; male examiners and teachers demand sexual exchanges to facilitate malpractice		Promoting positive values amongst teachers and students; improving the capacity of teachers to transfer positive values; instituting examination ethics committee in schools			No full implementation of the examination malpractice decree; government to ensure that guidance-counsellors are employed in schools
20	Anyamene et al (2015)	Weak sanctions; peer pressure; incompetent teachers			Employing services of social service professionals like social workers, psychologists, guidance-counsellors, etc.		Enforcing the Exam Malpractice Act	
21	Anzene (2014)	Weak values; increased CA scores; charging high fees for assured grades, which in turn attracts the public		Loss of self-confidence and certificate credibility; production of unqualified personnel	The need for intensified CA and aptitude tests at various stages of the educational system; intensive counselling; reducing logistical problems that encourage malpractice; sensitisation	An NGO called Exam Ethics Project has been working towards fighting examination malpractice.; WAEC and NECO indulge public campaigns using leaflets, jingles, etc. They have also moved to using biometric capturing devices; JAMB has made exam integrity progress by using biometrics and CCTV	Enforcement of the Examination/Malpractice Act 33 of 1999 to communicate deterrence; effective monitoring of exam centres by the Ministry of Education; erring schools should be sanctioned; learning environment should be conducive	
22	Asadu & Abonyi (2020)	Profit motivation and maximisation by private schools; high charge of education/examination fees; peer pressure; incompetent teachers; poor pay of examiners and teachers		Incompetent workforce; loss of lives from the threats made to non-complying examiners with MECs	Improved pay for teachers		Enforcement of the Exam Malpractice Act; capacity building for teachers and examiners; moral and value reorientation; review of education policy as some of the measures to counter examination malpractices and their adverse outcomes	

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S/N	References	Nature and drivers of examination malpractice and MECs	Gender dynamics	Effects of examination malpractice and MECs	Horizontal interventions (without evidence)	Horizontal interventions (with evidence)	Vertical interventions (without evidence)	Vertical interventions (with evidence)
23	Asinya (2012)	Pressure from parents and peers; financial greed; overvaluation of certificates; compromised exam officials; private schools use the cheating process to get excellent results which they use for publicity so they could attract more candidates		Incompetent workforce				
24	Asomba (2012)	Poorly qualified teachers; exchange of bribery (usually cash) across the stakeholders; separating those that bribe from those who did not; compromising the examiners; weak sanctions; poor attitude towards education by the government					Stiffen sanctions; government should scale up monitoring through setting up vibrant inspectorate team	Senate pronounced ban on MECs
25	Atueyi (2019)	Gullible examination officers; overloaded curriculum; parents saving face in the neighbourhood as not to be seen as parenting a child who cannot pass SSCE; exchange of money among teachers, examiners, principals, etc.; examiners are compromised with bribes; justifying charging of high fees by dubiously creating conditions where one can cheat comfortably and pass; competition among private schools to retain their numbers and make more money; the use of mercenaries to solve questions; examiners who oppose the act are treated with so much hostility or are offered threat to life; MECs are notably associated with private schools; examiners refuse reporting schools because of the compassion they have for students; security agents are compromised; exam bodies are bribed to move non-complying examiners away from the special centres; examiners are offered drugged or poisoned refreshments; adults who need promotion in their places of work rely on special centres to get the credentials; candidates who do not pay are treated badly so they consider the option of paying; subject teachers are punished when students fail their subjects	Young female examiners appear weak; female school owners with powerful husbands evade punishment	Honest students face the consequence of their results cancelled for a fraud committed by the school	Exam bodies should deal decisively with compromising staff; sensitisation of parents on examination integrity and discipline; examiners accepting bribes so they could be safe at the centre but returning and reporting to the exam body afterwards; scaling up monitoring by senior exam officers and the Nigeria Examinations Committee (NEC)	Adopting CCTV as JAMB did; using religious teachings; not letting teachers of schools into the examination venue; examiners rejecting refreshments	Schools that participate in such fraud should have their results withdrawn	Edo state government suspended 28 principals of public senior secondary schools and derecognised 28 private schools for malpractice during 2018 WAEC and the results from the centre were cancelled; National Assembly summoned the WAEC examiner in 1977 and 1981 over gross exam malpractice which reduced in subsequent years

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26	Atueyi (2020)							The schools that were blacklisted by WAEC were each fined N250,000 by the examination body and banned
27	Aworinde (2015a)	The use of internet and mobile communication; compromising of exam officials and security agents; cash payments without issuance of receipts; extra-tutorial centres providing candidates for the MECs; exams in MECs are finished within very short period; collusion of teachers who even write answers on the board for candidates	Younger female NSCDC staff are usually overpowered	Poor quality of students admitted into universities and also responsible for the rot in the country's education sector	University authorities should tighten up entrance examinations to deal with those who passed using malpractice; schools that are notorious for examination malpractice should be identified and a special breed of examiners should be sent there	Between April and November 2013, WAEC announced that a total of 256 candidates who admitted to have cheated in the past returned their certificates because they had 'found Jesus'		The Examination Malpractices Act No. 33 of the 1999 should be stiffened and enforced; NECO blacklisted 13 secondary schools in 2012; WAEC blacklisted 113 secondary schools in 2012; results of 30,654 candidates were cancelled by WAEC; 3,321 candidates were banned from sitting for WAEC exams over misconduct
28	Aworinde (2015b)	Parents want high scores so their children can be admitted into a university where they will get a Bachelors degree instead of an Higher National Diploma (HND) from a polytechnic				Cancellation of centres and prosecute those found culpable	Government security agencies can trail sites to the computers from where they operate	A report in <i>Punch</i> (Nigerian media) forced exam malpractice sites to be taken off the cyber space by the government
29	Belo-Osagie (2015)				Sensitising parents, students and teachers on the danger of examination malpractice	Incentivising excellent performance like the WAEC endowment fund; name and shame defaulters like it is done in Ghana		
30	Belo-Osagie. (2017)	Parents' support for misconduct; internet and mobile communication; weak monitoring of the examination process; forged CA scores; weak enforcement of rules and sanctions			Placing ban on the use of any electronic device while sitting for the exam	The use of CCTV and computer-based tests; naming and shaming complicit parties; speedy trial and prosecution of defaulters; WAEC is making effort to produce a monitored process for computing CA scores	Reducing the overvaluation of certificates; stiffening sanctions against the act	

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31	Blueprint (2019a)						Police cybercrime units collaborating with WAEC	
32	Blueprint (2019b)	Extra-tutorial centres supply candidates to MECs; the use of mercenaries to solve the questions			Whistleblowing			Delta state government arrested 16 people allegedly involved in examination malpractices at dubious examination centres, otherwise known as 'Miracle Centres' outside the state
33	Blueprint (2019d)	People seeking certificates and not knowledge; parents support their children with the finances to register in MECs and bribe the powerful people there						
34	Boateng (2019)				Stakeholder workshops on accountability	In Malawi, exam bodies arrange exams in clusters, so they can effectively monitor the process; online registration of candidates; adoption of CCTV; banning the use of mobile/cellular devices for invigilators, supervisors and candidates; policies where no supervisor or invigilator is allowed, under any circumstance, to supervise or invigilate candidates from schools to which they are affiliated; unreliable markers are cautioned or discontinued from marking; civic education campaigns for the public to discourage examination malpractices		Severe sanctions for defaulters; establishment of distribution centres where exam question papers are kept for collection and written scripts returned by the examination centre daily. During movement of examination question papers and written scripts police personnel are deployed to provide the needed security. Distribution centres are normally manned by police for 24 hours; cancellation of candidate's work, disciplining of teachers, invigilators and other examination officials through a proposed two-year ban – all reported to be effective in Malawi; unbureaucratic whistleblowing policies (which protect those who disclose) and ensure that students who are caught cheating are blacklisted from entering secondary/tertiary institutions

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35	Boris & Awodun (2012)	Overvaluation of certificates; poor learning facilities; absence of guidance-counsellors; parental pressure on career choice of their children; weak values; weak supervision; greed to make more money			Improve remuneration of staff; employ services of guidance-counsellors; improved monitoring of schools by school owners			Setting up Judicial Tribunals to look into causes of examination malpractice and proffer remedies against their reoccurrence. Also, to prosecute offenders; implementing the Examination Malpractice Act
36	Danbaba et al (2018)	Deplorable educational system; compromised security agents			Employing the services of guidance-counsellors; improved pay for teachers;	Cancellation of complicit centres	Increase funding of the education sector; incentivise security agents to check examination fraud; enforcement of the Exam Act; stiffening sanctions	
37	Dike (2017)	Internet and mobile communication; examiners are drugged				International Summit hosted by WAEC on Examination Malpractice in 2017		
38	Dungurawa (2015)	Disharmony in examination and teaching syllabi; emphasis on paper qualification	Female candidates could make sexual advances at the male examiners and invigilators	Loss of confidence in the exam process and the certificates				
39	Duru (2020)	Collusion of teachers, principals and examiners						De-listing of the schools for conducting SSCE exams; demoting and sanctioning identified principals; sacking anyone identified to be involved in exam malpractice; closing down of 'mushroom' schools
40	Duvie & Eluwa (2016)	Principals and examiners collude to aid the cheating process; inducing exam personnel involved in the marking and coordination of participants' scores with sex, gifts and money			Recruiting competent teachers; increasing the number of examiners; identifying and engaging honest examiners; improve supervision; improve the monitoring of CA scores			Minimising the registration of external candidates by centres; detection of multiple registrations on time by authorities; incentivising security agents towards ensuring exam credibility; result cancellation

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41	Dzakadzie (2019)	Incompetent teachers; inadequate learning facilities			Recruitment of qualified teachers	Sensitisation of the public	Government-sponsored campaigns against exam malpractice, including workshops	
42	Edeh et al (2019)	Corruption; poor learning facilities; weak supervision; overvaluation of certificates; parental pressure and support; weak societal values		Loss of certificate credibility; undermining efforts of hardworking students and also discourages them				
43	Egbejule (2019)	The collusion of teachers and principals with the examiners					Strictly monitoring private schools	Issuing warnings and queries to implicated schools
44	Ekpo (2018)	Parents giving money to students to bribe officials				De-recognition of schools involved in malpractice by WAEC and issuing fines		
45	Emiloju & Adeyoju (2012)	Weak societal values			Employing the services of guidance counsellors; formation of anti-exam malpractice groups in schools	WAEC conducts public campaigns and workshops against exam malpractice	Enforcement of the Exam Malpractice Act	
46	Fapohunda (2015)					Exam Ethics Marshal petitioned the Inspector General of Police and Ministry of Education and other stakeholders demanding the arrest of all culprits in a school implicated by an investigative journalist for indulging exam malpractice during WAEC		
47	Fayomi et al (2015)				Adoption of ICT devices to monitor the examination process; telecom companies assisting with distorting internet and mobile communication networks around examination venues			

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48	Gbagolo (2011)	Weak value systems; inadequate supervision; tying promotion of teachers to performance of their students during the exams; desperate students and teachers; incompetent teachers; absence of guidance-counsellors; over-valuation of certificates; large syllabus; wrong choice of career path usually influenced by parents; fear of losing numbers in schools			Guidance-counsellors to guide students choose fitting career path and scale up pro-social behaviours	Public enlightenment advocacy by the media; improve pay of teachers and examiners; the use of CCTV; support from religious bodies	Enforcing the Exam Malpractice Act	Improved funding of the education sector; special welfare package for examination officials; increase the number of examiners
49	Ibrahim (2014)	The fear of failure and reduced number of candidates making 5 Credits including Maths and English; unqualified teachers; poor study habits						Majority Leader in the House of Representatives, Rep. Mulikat Adeola-Akande, has moved a motion seeking for a stiffer punishment for the culprits of examination malpractices in the country. The motion has already passed the second reading
50	Igwe et al. (n.d.)	Overvaluation of certificates; internet and mobile communication; extra-tutorial centres supplying candidates to private schools; weak values in society; weak sanctions; private schools trying to attract more candidates by using malpractice to get excellent results which serve for publicity		Undermines hard work of honest students; incompetent workforce			Enforcement of the Exam Malpractice Act	
51	Jekayinfa et al (2011)	Parental pressure on students to obtain good grades; teachers facilitating the cheating process; overvaluation of certificates; exorbitant registration charges must be justified and cheating helps; the need to bribe examiners influences the need to charge exorbitantly; the use of mercenaries to solve questions			Campaigns on ethical conducts		Improving values in society; enforcement of the Exam Malpractice Act	
52	Jimoh (2009)	Peer pressure; weak value system; internet and mobile communication			Campaigns and seminars on dangers of exam malpractice by schools and exam bodies		Special welfare package for exam officials including teachers, supervisors, and security agents	Improved funding of the education sector

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S/N	References	Nature and drivers of examination malpractice and MECs	Gender dynamics	Effects of examination malpractice and MECs	Horizontal interventions (without evidence)	Horizontal interventions (with evidence)	Vertical interventions (without evidence)	Vertical interventions (with evidence)
53	Jimoh & Omoregie (2012)	Weak values; parental support		Loss of certificate integrity; incompetent workforce; rot of the education sector			Retraining of teachers with emphasis on values; instituting and an Examination Malpractice Commission; reduce overvaluation of certificates; increased funding of the education sector	
54	Jokthan (2013)	Overvaluation of certificates above skills; poor pay for teachers; remote and rural centres are difficult to monitor; parental support to finance registration in MECs; tying the promotion of teachers to how well their students perform in external exams; poor learning aids and infrastructure; internet and mobile communication; extra tutorial centres supplying candidates to MECs; MECs are usually situated in private schools		Loss of lives of examiners and security agents; rot of the education sector	Frequent and unannounced visits to centres by appointed stakeholder or by some senior officials		Prohibit electronic devices	In China the consequence for exam malpractice is capital punishment; in Uganda remuneration of exam officials is increased; in Pakistan, magisterial powers (including the right of arrest) are given to examination board officials
55	Joseph (n.d.)	The fear of failing and the reduced number of candidates that make five credits in WAEC and NECO, including Maths and English				Blacklisting complicit examiners, principals, school owners and schools; severely sanctioning candidates who are caught; naming and shaming complicit schools; rewarding outstanding examiners and schools		
56	Joshua et al (n.d.)	Poor study habits; weak values; wrong choice of subjects; schools trying to retain their numbers and use exam success as advert to attract more candidates for more money; wide syllabus; overvaluation of certificates; weak learning facilities					Enforcing the teaching of values and ethics across all stages of schooling; better pay for security agents who monitor the process	
57	Katuka et al (2015)				Adequate training of teachers; increase the number of examiners per centre; employ the services of guidance-counsellors			Enforcement of the Exam Malpractice Act

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58	Kawugana & Woyopwa (2017)	Laziness; elaborate syllabus difficult for teachers to cover; corrupt examiners; inflation of CA scores; overvaluation of certificates		Incompetent workforce	Employ services of guidance-counsellors and increase numbers of examiners per centre		Government should invest in education; Exam Ethics Committees should be instituted across the different tiers of government	
59	Kolawole & Alade (2019)				Promoting positive values in students and teachers	Exam Ethics Project is committed to fighting against exam malpractice; WAEC conducting public campaigns using leaflets, posters, jingles, seminars and workshops; NECO conducted seminars, workshops and public enlightenment campaign	Improving ethical codes in the society	Collaboration between the Ministry of Education in Oyo state and WAEC to check examination fraud; federal government enacting laws to curb exam malpractice. E.g. computer-based exams by JAMB; ensuring quality assurance in education; enforcing the Exam Malpractice Act; Government to subsidise the price of education materials to enable easy access
60	Lawal (2017)	Emphasis on certificates over intellectual capability		Incompetent workforce			Establishing special tribunals to facilitate speedy trial and prosecution of offenders	
61	Lawal (2019)	The fear of failure and reduced number of candidates making 5 Credits including Maths and English				Derecognition of schools; sanctioning complicit supervisors; providing logistics like vehicles to facilitate effective supervision	Reducing the overvaluation of certificates	
62	National Examination Council (NECO). (2015).	The NECO registrar reported that 50,586 candidates who sat for the SSCE in 2017 were involved in exam malpractices and that 276 schools in 34 states were involved in mass cheating						
63	Neme (2020)					Banning examiners who allow themselves to be compromised		
64	Ndukwe (2015)	MECs are more in private schools; weak monitoring of examination centres					Effective monitoring of both public and private schools in Nigeria to ensure that the minimum standard is maintained	

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65	Njoku & Njoku (2016)	Peer influence; internet and mobile communication; weak societal values			Scale up guidance-counselling in school; incentivise rule-following behaviour; sensitise parents; FBOs should continue teaching how to live as honest citizens	Public enlightenment campaigns by WAEC and NECO; an NGO known as Examination Ethics Project involved in the campaign against exam malpractice		
66	Nnam & Otu (2015)	Undue emphasis on paper qualification in Nigeria, as the sole means of rating people's capabilities and competences; parental support and weak values	Female students write on sensitive parts of their bodies, making it difficult for examiners to check; males seem more daring than females		Employing firms should subject people to further tests to validate the authenticity of their results			
67	Nnorom (2020)	Weak sanctions affecting deterrence						Delisting complicit schools and severely sanctioning defaulting individuals in Benue state; increased funding for the education sector in Benue state; closing mushroom schools in Benue state
68	Nwankwo & Nweke (2016)	Private schools are the hub of MECs					Establish a code of conduct for private schools and their staff; enforce the teaching of ethics and morals across schools	
69	Obidoa et al (2013)	Poor study habits; parental support; incompetent teachers; peer pressure; weak supervision					Intensify the sanctions and enforcement	
70	Odidi (2014)	Overvaluation of certificates; poor pay of teachers and examiners; extra-tutorial centres supply candidates to MECs		Incompetent workforce				
71	Odo (2015)	Poor learning facilities		Loss of confidence in the educational system; incompetent workforce; undermines the efforts of hardworking students and could corrupt them		Adopting ICT means to check on malpractice occurrences	Enforce the Exam Malpractice Act	

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72	Odunsi (2019)					NEC supports exam bodies to issue sanctions where deserving		
73	Oduwole, W. (2013)					WAEC blacklists complicit schools and candidates		
74	Ojogbane & Amali (2016)	Parental pressure on students to pass exams and also to choose career paths they are not comfortable with			Employ services of guidance-counsellors; use CCTV technology to conduct exams; improved pay for teachers and examiners	Cancellation of results; Exams Ethics Projects campaigning against exam malpractice	Enforcing the exam malpractice act; government sponsoring campaigns against exam malpractice	
75	Okoye & Onwuzuruoha (2020)	Fear of failure						
76	Okpe & Lar (n.d)	Weak societal values; collusion of teachers with students to cheat		Falling standards in education				
77	Olajire (2019)	Parental support; poor study habits; overvaluation of certificates; peer pressure		Incompetent workforce; undermining efforts of hardworking students				
78	Omebe (2014)	Weak values; weak supervision; exorbitant registration fees; tying of promotion of teachers to success of candidates in exit examinations; desperate parents and students; incompetent teachers; overvaluation of certificates					Enforcement of the Exam Malpractice Act	Blacklist complicit students and schools
79	Omede (2015)	Incompetent teachers; schools trying to retain their numbers and increasing patronage; ignorant parents					Intensify the sanctions and enforcement	
80	Omemu (2015)	Weak values in society						Setting up special commissions to address exam malpractice trends; effective sanctioning of defaulters

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81	Omoniyi (2019)	Proxy candidates pay higher fees than usual for their excellent results, and do not attend the exams; compromised examiners; more candidates than examiners to supervise; tough process of reporting			Updating data of candidates on WAEC portal from SS1; incentivising whistleblowing; increase in manpower or the use of staggered exams to accommodate increasing population of candidates			
82	Onuka & Durowoju (2013)			Lack of certificate integrity; incompetent workforce	Sensitisation of parents, students, proprietors and teachers, through the media or workshops		Increased funding; speedy trial and prosecution of offenders	
83	Onyedinefu (2019)	Extra-tutorial centres support MECs to thrive by supplying them candidates; desperate students; public school students flood the private schools once it is time to write WAEC and NECO exams; examiners are compromised with money to allow candidates to cheat; MECs charge high extra fees and make promises of helping the candidate with excellent results		Rot in the education sector and low quality of Nigerian academic certificates		Exam bodies try to set questions not too far from when the exams will be taken to prevent leakage		
84	Onyibe et al (2015)	Internet and mobile communication; remote and rural centres are difficult to monitor; greed to make more money	Female candidates offer sex as part of bargain for permission to cheat; nursing mothers use their babies to cover up cheating	Loss of certificate credibility and confidence in the education sector; incompetent workforce; discouraging a culture of hard work	Employment of qualified teachers; campaigns against exam malpractice; reinforcing positive values	Exams Ethics Project campaign against exam malpractice; WAEC conducts public enlightenment campaigns against exam malpractice	Increased funding of the education sector; stiffening sanctions and enforcement of the Exam Malpractice Act; NOA should begin highlighting the need for improving value systems in Nigeria	Setting up judicial tribunal on exam malpractice
85	Orient Daily News (2018)	Exorbitant fees charged in MECs must be justified through unscrupulous means to achieved the excellent results that have been promised		Undermines the hard work of honest students; loss of certificate credibility; incompetent workforce				
86	Orji et al (n.d)	Poor study habits; incompetent teachers; fear of failure; overvaluation of certificates			Re-orientation of examiners and teachers on examination			Adequate funding of secondary education; adequate monitoring of private schools

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87	Osadebe & Bini (2018)	Weak societal values; poor learning facilities; weak supervision; poor study habits		Putting the integrity of issued certificates in doubt	Using technology to facilitate supervision and identifying honest examiners to check on the MECs; sensitising teachers and school owners against exam malpractice; incentivising good performance and rule-following behaviours		Enforcing the Exam Malpractice Act; improved monitoring of private schools by the Ministry of Education; incentivising good performance and rule-following behaviours	
88	Osaretin (2016)				Stop the use of ad hoc staff to supervise exams, or train them adequately; improve remuneration packages of supervisors; improve teachers' retraining	Use of Computer Based Test	Compel security agents to be law abiding	
89	Petters & Okon (2013)	Overvaluation of certificates; poor study habits; incompetent teachers; wide syllabus; parental pressure on career choice; peer pressure; weak supervision			Employ the services of guidance-counsellors; sensitisation of teachers, students, parents and proprietors; encourage electronic examination		Enforcement of exam malpractice decree	
90	PM News (2018)	Parental support; payment of exorbitant fees which must be justified by ensuring that the candidate gets an excellent result; weak values		Killing the education sector and discouraging hard work			Put identified MECs under security watch and stiffen existing sanctions	
91	PM News (2019)							Arresting and prosecution of defaulters
92	<i>Premium Times</i> (2018)	Weak sanctions for complicit schools; unscrupulous elements in the Ministry of Education				WAEC banned 47 secondary schools accused of aiding and abetting examination malpractice in Kogi state		Increased budget to the education sector in Kogi state; retraining of over 100 teachers to increase their competence

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93	<i>Pulse.ng</i> (2020).				Training and retraining of teachers		The Oyo state government pledges support to WAEC in combatting MECs	
94	Raji & Okunlola (2017)	Internet and mobile communication; poor pay for examiners and teachers; extra-tutorial centres supply candidates to MECs			Recruitment of qualified teachers; training and retraining of examiners; incentivise rule-following schools; employing the services of guidance-counsellors; improved pay for teachers and examiners	Adoption of ICT services; public campaigns against exam malpractice; sanctioning complicit schools and candidates		Setting up judicial inquiry team to look at exam malpractice situations; incentivise rule-following schools; government should establish a quality assurance bureau through federal ministry of education that will monitor the activities of NECO
95	Sa'ad & Dahiru (2018)	Weak values; incompetent teachers; poor study habits; peer pressure		Loss of certificate credibility	Employing the services of guidance-counsellors; recruiting competent teachers		Increased funding for education	
	The Nation (2018)	Parental support via financing the registration of their children in MECs; overvaluation of certificates						
96	Tyokyaa (2016)	Overvaluation of certificate			All students and teachers should be sensitised on the menace and consequences of examination malpractice so as to expose them to their damaging effects		All staff of examination bodies or schools must attend regular workshops and seminars on strategies for stamping out malpractices in schools; all students and teachers should be sensitised on the menace and consequences of examination malpractice so as to expose them to their damaging effects.	
97	Udim et al (2018)				Retraining and reassessment of teachers; improved pay for teachers and examiners		The NOA should begin highlighting the need for improving value systems in Nigeria	

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98	Udoh (2011)	Poor learning infrastructure; unqualified and nonchalant teachers; non-coverage of syllabus; imposition of subjects on students by their parents; constant increase in examination fees to have more money for paying bribes; extra-tutorial centres supplying candidates to the MECs; weak values			Employ services of guidance-counsellors	Incentivising good students	Improvement in infrastructure; initiating policies and programmes on examination ethics across schools	
99	Udoh (2013)	Overvaluation of certificates; poor pay for teachers			Improving the remuneration of staff		Improving the remuneration of staff	
100	Ugwu (2019)	Poor teaching; poor study habits; internet and mobile communication			Teachers must find ways to increase students' interest in reading	WAEC hosted the International Summit on Examination Malpractice on October 19–20, 2017, in Lagos, Nigeria		
101	Usman (2013)						Revision of the Examination Malpractice Act for the purpose of stiffening the sanctions	
102	Whawo (2015)					The use of CCTV and computer-based tests	Stiffening sanctions and intensifying enforcement	
103	Yunus (2019)	Poor study habits	Mothers can take advantage of their closeness with their children to educate them on hard work and the need to shun exam malpractice		Improve parental (particularly mothers) and familial involvement in child education; sensitisation			
104	Zakka (2014)	Support from parents; poor study habits of students; poorly paid staff; charging exorbitant fees in MECs; school owners not monitoring ongoing activities within their schools; remote and rural locations are not effectively supervised			Public enlightenment; swapping of examiners daily, to avoid familiarity; improved pay for examiners; schools in remote areas should be well monitored, and candidates who choose to write their exams there should be disallowed	The use of CCTV across approved centres		



### About the Anti-Corruption Evidence (ACE) Research Consortium:

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