A STUDY OF SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS’ ATTITUDE TOWARDS PUBLIC EXAMINATIONS
(Cases from Lagos State & Osun State in Nigeria)

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ABSTRACT
The question investigated the attitude of secondary school student’s attitude towards public examinations. By public examinations, reference is made to such exit test as WASSCE, SSCE or UTME taken for purposes of certification and elevation to the upper rungs of the education ladder upon the conclusion of secondary school education. To achieve the aim of this study, the descriptive survey method was adopted. Selected secondary schools from Lagos State and Osun State were culled as the sample. The sample institutions were probed via a questionnaire to which an aggregate of 100 (A hundred) students 20 from each school responded. Only SSS 3 students destined to sit for 2012 SSCE / WASSCE were polled. For analyzing the responses, a combination of percentage computation and qualitative logical interpretation of the statistics was chosen. A striking outcome of the enquiry is the landslide endorsement of the concept of examination as a vehicle for ascertaining students’ understanding of the academic material presented to them. 83.68% would want WASSCE / SSCE retained although about 64% desired the examination bodies reformed and overhauled, 92% of the lot agreed that success in the public examinations is more lauded and rewarded by parent and other stakeholders than success in internal examinations. Indeed, for 95% of the students, public examinations are unavoidable for progress in education. From this and other statistical information available, it is well beyond contradiction to conclude that students’ disposition towards public examinations was strikingly positive. Apropos of the findings, a sprinkling or recommendations is warranted (1) that school authorities should endeavour to prepare their students adequately to face up to WAEC / SSCE with all confidence. It is suggested that psychological counseling should be factored into the pre examination grooming process (2) that NECO / SSCE should wake up, cut out inefficiencies in the conduct of their examinations, corrupt elements in their ranks should also be cut out and (3) an agenda of moral re-orientation of the education system is ineluctably over-due.

Keywords: Secondary School, Students, Attitude, Public Examinations, NECO, WAEC, SSCE and Results.

1. INTRODUCTION
Examination is a fact of formal education in many countries of the world. Nigeria inclusive. It is an agency for assessing students’ comprehension and assimilation of intellectual stuff purveyed to them. An examination or test is an assessment intended to measure the test taker’s knowledge, skill, attitude or commitment to a cause. A test may be administered verbally, on paper, on a computer or in a confined area that requires the test taker to physically perform a set of skills. Tests do vary in style, rigour and complexity. For example, in a closed-book test, the test taker is required to rely upon his memory to answer specific questions whereas in an open-box test, the candidate may be welcome to employ aids such as a reference book or a calculator. Similarly, an examination may be administered formally or informally. An example of an informal test would be a reading test administered by a parent to a child. On the other hand, a final examination proctored by a psychologist in a clinic will easily pass for a formal test. Formal examinations often produce grades or scores. We can also posit a dichotomy between a standardized test and a non-standardized variety.

The former is any test that is constructed, administered and scored in a particular fashion in order to safeguard its credibility and authenticity. Standardized tests are used in education, professional certification, in military establishments and in other fields; they are fixed in terms of scope, difficulty and format and are of awful lot of significance in the quest for educational advancement. Standardized tests are usually held on fixed dates determined and publicized by the examination authority. A non-standardized test, in juxtaposition, is usually flexible in scope and format, variable in difficulty and significance. Since these tests are usually developed by individual instructors, their format and level of difficulty may not be widely adopted by other instructors or institutions. A non-standardized test may be used to gauge the proficiency level of students, to motivate them to study and to provide feedback to boot.
It is interesting to add that teachers may develop non-standardized tests that approach or approximate to standardized tests in scope, format and difficulty for the purpose of preparing their students for an upcoming standardized test. A test may be developed and administered by an instructor, a clinician or an examining body. In some instances, the developer of a test may not be directly responsible for its administration. In developing and administering education tests, the format and level of difficulty of the tests are highly variable and there is no general consensus or immutable standard for test format and difficulty which often depend upon the educational philosophy of the instructor, the policy of the educational institution and suchlike considerations. It need to be mentioned as well that most school internal examinations are of the non-standardized category while the external examinations taken at the point of completion of secondary school, that is, those tests conducted by WAEC (West African Examinations Council), NECO (National Examinations Council) and JAMB (Joint Admission and Matriculation Board) exemplify the standardizes sort. It is often argued that examination is not a true test of a ward’s ability. As plausible as this proposition may sound, the truth remains however that up till now, no unexceptionable alternative means of measuring academic competence has so far been devised. So, apart from the endless round of assignments and the continuous assessment tests which students in secondary schools have to cope with, they are confronted at the end of each of the three terms in a session with a major internal examination.

A formal examination, whether internal or external, exerts its psychology on the students. Terminal examinations especially promotional examinations are apt to set off frissons of apprehension in a lot of the students particularly the lazy ones. The anxiety to succeed and be promoted to the next class sometimes drives them to explore the murky by-way of impropriety: some smuggle into the examination venue answers scribbled on defaced pieces of paper; others write things on their thighs and palms, still others feed answers into their calculators and several other sophisticated forms of cheating. In many secondary institutions, both private and government-funded, invigilating teachers have to exercise uns tincting vigilance to bring off cheating-proof tests. The realm of public examinations presents even more serious challenges. The problems posed by the conduct of internal examinations pale beside the monumental obstacle encountered in the administration of public examinations.

As hinted upon above, by public examinations in the Nigerian educational context, on refers to the respective examinations conducted by independent examination bodies such as WAEC, NECO and JAMB —examinations administered for purposes of certification and/or progression to the tertiary strata after the conclusion of secondary level education. Because academic progress is inextricably interwoven with success in them, the credible administration of these examinations is a daunting proposition in Nigeria – the exercise being susceptible as it does to the sleaze virus in the body politic. It must be admitted, unspeakable ethical breaches take place in the domain of public examinations. For years, the premier public examinations body in the country, WAEC was haunted and tainted by the spectre of corruption-induced leakages. Since it came on stream, JAMB has been ruthlessly mauled by the sleaze monster: the use of proxy and impersonation is rife; rich candidates desperate for university placement do manoeuvre and buy incredible scores: once upon a time, there was the phenomenon of special centres on the watch of JAMB – the litany is endless.

At a point, when its public image plunged miserably, JAMB was compelled to construct and administer variants of the same papers as a bulwark against malpractice. It is difficult to accept that this strategy achieved any significant sanitization. So glaring and demonstrable was JAMB’S dismal performance that university authorities lost confidence in the capability of the body and moved to develop and impose their own ‘Post-UTME’ tests to thoroughly screen candidates applying for admission and thereby guarantee the integrity of their degree. It is clear that students perceive public examinations of their different secondary school. They take the tests more seriously; their adrenalin does run riot at such times and would do anything including cut corners to pose: what really is students’ attitude towards or perception of public examinations? What educational, socio-economic and psychological variables underscore their perception of public examinations? Is this attitude or perception wholesome for their own intellectual development and for the country as a whole? Unearthing research-based answers to these questions will be the thrust and preoccupation of this work.

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

It is a well-know fact that for an SSS 3 student in Nigeria contemplating higher education for a future career and ultimate economic well-being in life, facilitative examinations in the likes of WAEC’s West African Senior Secondary Certificate Examination, NECO’s Senior Secondary Certificate Examination and JAMB’s Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination, each takes on a life and a psychology of its own. For that ambitions student, failure in any relevant one of these examinations is inconceivable, precipitating sometimes anxiety neurosis, jitters and a tendency to violate ethical norms. More formally expressed, what is the student’s attitude towards public examinations? What factors of whatever description CONDITION and INFLUENCE his attitude? This work aspires to do these queries.

2.1 Research Questions

♦ How do the prospective secondary school graduates view public examinations such as WASSCE, NECO, SSCE, and UTME in Nigeria?
♦ What personal, intellectual and psychological variables impinge upon and define their perception of public examination?
♦ Are there societal, institutional, parental or peer-group influences encouraging the development, expression and sustenance of the attitude and if ‘yes’, what are they?
♦ Is this attitude positive or negative in terms of facilitating the achievement of our articulated educational goals and objective?
♦ If positive, can it be reinforced? If negative, can it be jettisoned and replaced with its constructive counterpart paying cognizance to what such substitution may entail on the social and personal levels?

It is devoutly believed that the above nexus of questions will assist in burrowing into the puzzle of students’ attitude towards public examinations in Nigeria.

2.2 Significant of the Study
The rationale for this study was made clear. It is desirable that the insights yielded by this inquiry would help re-orientate and fine-tune the attitude of candidates sitting public examinations. This work would have done meritorious service to the cause of education if the desired modification of perception is achieved which watershed will generate such spin-offs as a reduction in the level of corruption in the administration of public examinations and the nurturing of a healthier academic environment conducive to the attainment of national educational goals and aspirations.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design
The study employed the Descriptive Survey method to plumb the attitude of secondary school students towards public examinations. The well-worn research tool of Student Attitude Scale (SAS) so familiar in such research formats was again pressed into service to solicit the required information from the respondents.

3.2 Population of the Study
The secondary schools, both privately- and government-controlled, domiciled in Ifako-Ijaye Local Government Area of Lagos Metropolis constituted the population for this study out of which a sample defined below was culled.

3.3 Sample and Sampling Technique
A total number of 100 (a hundred) SSS 3 students randomly drawn from a representative sample of 5 secondary institutions, 3 private – Ifako International Secondary School, Providence Heights Secondary School and African Church Model College – and 2 government – Sonmori Senior Comprehensive High School of Ifako-Ijaye Local Government Area of Lagos State were polled via a questionnaire. To select the respondents in each institution, the random sampling technique which accords the students equal chances of being included was utilized.

3.4 Instrument
A simple two-part questionnaire was administered to conduct the inquiry. Section a featured questions concerning the bio-data of each respondent namely, name, school, class, gender and age. Section B, however, contained more substantive questions and positions to which each student was expected to respond on a continuum of five nuanced options.

3.5 Procedure
After due authorization from the authorities of the sample schools had been obtained, the instrument was personally administered to the randomly selected students. It was stressed to the prospective respondents that the information being solicited would be used solely for research purposes and would be kept strictly private.

They were also assured that there were no correct or wrong answers but should only endeavour to respond to the propositions conscientiously and sincerely. Only one questionnaire was administered to each potential respondent.

3.6 Method of Date Analysis
The method used in analyzing information collected comprehended the quantitative tool of percentage computation and the application of quantitative reasoned interpretation.
4. ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Employing the mathematical tool of percentage for analyzing the responses of the polled students.

Proposing 1: The idea of examination whether internal or public as a way of assessing student understanding is acceptable to me personally.

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<tr>
<td>67%</td>
<td>29</td>
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67% of the respondents indicated strong agreement while 29% agreed, 3% were neutral and only 1% disagreed.

Proposition 2: School terminal examinations especially promotion examinations did make me a bit anxious.

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<td>30%</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
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30% strongly agreed; 38% agreed while 13 were neutral. Those who disagreed accounted for 5% and strongly disagreed were 14%.

Proposition 3: In my experience in the secondary school system, I had occasion to lobby teachers in respect of my weak subjects; it wasn’t an evil thing to do.

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<td>20%</td>
<td>16.8</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>28.4</td>
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Strongly agreed captured 20% agreed polled 29.5% while 16.8% of the students elected to be neutral just as 5.3% disagreed and 28.4% strongly disagreed.

Proposition 4: As an SSS 3 student, I consider SSCE or WASSCE an unnecessary imposition which should have been replaced by some internal test and the examination bodies swept away.

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<tr>
<td>4.08%</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>7.14</td>
<td>34.68</td>
<td>49</td>
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Strongly agreed accounted for 4.08%; agreed, 5.1%; neutral 7.14% while 34.68% disagreed as 49% strongly agreed.

Proposition 5: I hate having to sit SSCE or WASSCE because it is making me sweat more profusely now than my internal school examinations ever did.

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<td>10.2%</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>18.36</td>
<td>29.6</td>
<td>36.74</td>
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10.2% and 5.1% strongly agreed and agreed respectively. The score for neutral was 18.36% while 29.6% disagreed and 36.74% strongly disagreed.

Proposition 6: As an SSS 3 student, the thought of having to confront WASSCE or SSCE very soon leaves me very nervous, apprehensive indeed, more than any past internal examination

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<tr>
<td>33%</td>
<td>34.02</td>
<td>17.52</td>
<td>11.34</td>
<td>4.12</td>
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33% strongly agreed with this observation while 34.02% agreed. 17.52% remained neutral while 11.34% disagreed as 4.12% strongly objected.

Proposition 7: I know that public examinations are more important and therefore taken more seriously than school internal examinations in our educational context.

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<td>58.58%</td>
<td>28.28</td>
<td>6.06</td>
<td>7.08</td>
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Strongly agreed polled 58.58% agreed 28.28%, neutral 6.06% and disagreed 7.08% of the responses.

Proposition 8: I am aware also that success in SSCE or WASSCE is more applauded and rewarded by parents and other stakeholders than success in internal examination.

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<tr>
<td>71%</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>5</td>
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71% of the sample students indicated strong agreement while 21 just agreed. Neutrality and disagreement attracted a paltry 5% and 3% respectively.
**Proposition 9:** I am aware again that access to the higher levels of education and ultimately a good life in Nigeria depends on scaling the initial WASSCE of SSCE hurdle. So I must brace up and face the inevitable.

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<tr>
<td>80</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6</td>
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80% strongly agreed with this remark as 15% agreed, 5% represented neutrality.

**Position 10:** In facing the inevitable, all hands must be on deck! I shall not hesitate to enlist the financial and moral support of my parents to twist the arms of NECO and WAEC officials should any paper prove intimidating, after all some candidates take the same route.

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<td>8.09</td>
<td>15.15</td>
<td>12.12</td>
<td>15.15</td>
<td>49.49</td>
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8.9% strongly bought into this proposition. 15.15% agreed while 12.12% opted for neutrality. Those who disagreed were 15.15% and 49.49% strongly disagreed.

**Proposition 11:** I am conscious of my limited academic abilities but success for me in WASSCE or SSCE is non-negotiable by whatever means. Who cares as long the end justifies the means?

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Strongly agreed 16.33%; agreed 26.53%; neutral 16.33%; disagreed 13.26% and strongly agreed 27.55%.

**Proposition 12:** Experience in Nigeria has shown that NECO and WAEC and JAMB cannot be relied upon to conduct credible examinations owing to the corruption of their officials.

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<tr>
<td>15.15</td>
<td>37.37</td>
<td>26.26</td>
<td>12.12</td>
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About 15.15% strongly agreed, 37.37% agreed; 26.26% were neutral while 12.12% disagreed and 9.1% strongly disagreed.

**Proposition 13:** I should like to see NECO, WAEC and JAMB overhauled and reformed for me to fully conscientiously endorse them.

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<td>32.98</td>
<td>30.93</td>
<td>30.93</td>
<td>3.09</td>
<td>2.07</td>
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Strongly agreed collected 32.98% of the entire poll; agreed captured 30.93; disagreed 3.09% and strongly disagreed 2.07%. A staggering 30.93% remained neutral.
5. DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The explanation of the foregoing findings will be proffered under the following rubrics taking into consideration the research questions (raised in chapter one) which the study set out to answer:

(A) Student’s Attitude Examination:
It is obvious from the responses (to proposition one) that the concept of formal examination whether internal or public as a device to gauge how well the students grasp the material taught them is perfectly acceptable. Indeed, a preponderant 96% of the polled wards are in agreement with the practice. Although they welcome the idea of examination, 68% of the sample students confessed that even internal examinations threw them into a state albeit in varying degrees of intensity. Similarly, a little over 67% of them owned up to experience a measure of apprehension as they contemplated the exit SSCE and WASSCE on their academic horizon while about 15.46% proclaimed themselves unfazed by what lay in prospect even as 17.52% elected to dwell precariously in the twilight zone (proposition 2 and 6)!. Still exploring students’ reactions to internal examination, a tantalizing hint is revealed by the responses to whether or not it was wholesome to lobby teachers in respect of one’s weak subjects: 49.5% almost half of the lot did not see anything particularly evil in it whilst 33.7% would demur. Can this be true? Is it a mere quirk? Would this tendency be carried over into the realm of public examination? It will be interesting to examine how this profile gels or jars with their responses to other proposition.

(B) Students’ Perception of Public Examinations:
Percentage computations showed that a whopping 83.68% of the responses scorned the suggestion that SSCE and WASSCE should be scrapped and replaced by some internal examination (propositions 4). This seems to reveal a positive disposition towards the use of standardized, independently administered examinations to assess their status of intellectual capacity as the students exit the secondary education stratum. They seem prescient that if adopted the system would create massive problems of subjectivity and co-ordination and is simply unsustainable. In consonance with the foregoing, 66.34% of the respondents were not averse to having to sit SSCE or WASSCE; indeed, some 86% of the students concurred that these public examinations are taken more seriously than the internal examinations in our educational milieu while an overwhelming total of 92% agreed that success in the public examinations is more lauded and rewarded by stakeholders than success in internal examinations. To further prove that the examinations are on the winning streak, exception an infinitesimal 5%, the students accepted that SSCE or WASSCE was positively inescapable were they to make headway in education and earn a decent life the country.

Through most of the students accepted that a rendezvous with exit examinations was inevitable and even welcome, there were reservations about the general conduct of tests and the shenanigans of the official. 52.52% of the students made this point. In the same vein, 64% of the students whose pulse was felt indicated that the examination authorities are ripe for overhaul to strengthen their efficiency performance and thereby inspire the wards’ full confidence. However, the variance of almost 11% between the two responses inspires a puzzle. To be explicit, if 64% of the wards are convinced that NECO, WAEC and JAMB deserve a jolt to pep them up, then one would have expected them to show the same if not a greater level of concurrence with the proposition on the moral characterization of the officials. This reveals a slight whiff of inconsistency albeit their low rating of the organizations and their operatives is unmistakable. Also baffling are the statistics for neutral stance for propositions 12 and 13 which are 26.26% and approximately 31% respectively. Why these levels of indifference to the idea of shaking up the outfits whose operations directly affect their lives by supposedly socially aware students? The present investigator believes that the ward’s tepid disposition is a reflection of the pervasive moral cynicism mauling the psyche of the Nigerian society.

(C). Personal Intellectual and Psychological Variable Shaping Students’ Perception of Public Examinations:
The profile of response to proposition 11 provides the basis for comments on this question. Close to 43% of the students revealed themselves, thanks to their limited intellectual capability, prepared to explore whatever means to ensure success in the approaching examinations while 40.81% took a dim view of a potential moral loosening-up in the circumstance. This picture helps to set in high relief an intriguing moral clue while could be allied to the response to proposition 3 discussed under 4.2 (A) above. When a slew of students morally agreeable to the idea of ‘seeing’ their teachers over their weak subjects in internal examinations are confronted by more formal, independently proctored public examinations of vital importance to their educational advancement, is it a surprise if such ones are ready to cory up to the officials of the examination bodies in respect of bogey papers? Against this background, it looks warranted to state that a certain degree of skullduggery attends the conduct of public examinations as widely believed in the country; it is also fair to emphasize that our secondary school students have largely been infected with the virus of moral cynicism as mentioned earlier on. This is unfortunate, indeed and bodes ill for their sound intellectual development. It remains to examine other influences – parental, societal, peer-group –that impinges on student’s attitude to examinations.
(D) Parental and Society Influences Helping to Mould Students’ Attitude Towards Public Examination:

Under this sub-heading, the response to proposition 10 is the reference point. Some 23% of our respondents agreed while 64% disagreed. In other words, 64% took a stand for rectitude and ethical discipline! But pause and reflect: there emerges a quirk of contradiction when this response is juxtaposed with the responses for propositions 3, 11, 12 and 13 as previously analyzed – all of which canvassed ethical norms in the examination context. Are attracted to the attributes of propriety and integrity in the examination situation only in the abstract and are likely to develop second thoughts should the accomplishment of their vital educational goals and aspirations be threatened by even their own intellectual and emotional inadequacies. The moral dilemma highlighted here is poignantly symptomatic of the moral ambivalence of the larger Nigerian nation in spite of her religious vibrancy and pretensions. The 64% score does help to underpin the students’ (and our) moral hypocrisy. And in addition, it seems inconceivable, of course, that secondary school ward would approach agents of public examination bodies without the active connivance of their parents!

6. SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Summary

The verdict has been delivered; the students have given their ringing endorsement of the very idea of examination as a mechanism for determining the extent to which the stuff imparted to them has been assimilated. As disclosed above, 86% agreed that public examinations are taken more seriously than internal examinations as far as education in Nigeria is concerned while 92% believed that success in exit examinations is more applauded and rewarded by parents and other stakeholders than success in internal examinations. Furthermore, that the exit examinations are an unshirkable experience was shared by 95% of the polled mass. Congruent with the above, the wards were averse to the suggestion that the present examinations be replaced by some internal examinations thereby effectively casting WAEC and NECO on the scrapheap.

6.2 Conclusions

In sum, therefore, it feels fairly unassailable to conclude that students’ attitude towards public examinations is overwhelmingly positive through this estimation is slightly vitiated by the inefficiencies in the conduct of the tests as well as by the unsavoury tendencies of the officers.

6.3 Recommendations

Arising from the analysis and illumination offered in the immediately preceding chapter, the following recommendations are apposite and worthy of implementation:

- Owing to the heavy weights assigned to success in public examinations as a condition precedent to exaltation to the higher echelons of education, SSS 3 students tend to regard them with some degree of trepidation and apprehension (67% confessed themselves thrust into a stew as 2012 WASSCE/SSCE approach). It follows then that the authorities of their various schools must ensure that the students are thoroughly and comprehensively prepared in intellectual terms and through psychological counseling to face the papers with confidence. Harking back to literature Review, pieces of research over the years confirm convincingly that intellectual poverty and emotional instability are some of the factors accounting for dismal performance in examinations.

- The wards expressed misgiving about the competence of NECO and WAEC to deliver credible to move swiftly to clean up their houses and get their act together. Safeguarding the integrity of their results and certificates through the conduct of impeccable examinations should be the ultimate mission of NECO and WAEC. Subterranian manoeuvres should be initiated to trap and ‘roast’ officials found enmeshed in squalid mutualism with school owners. To be sure, this is a daunting aspiration in a country where sleaze is ubiquitous, but the task of rebranding and re-inventing the educational sector is unshirkable and need start somewhere.

- On account of the endemic corruption in our educational sector, academic degrees and certificates issued by our institutions have come to be distrusted as frauds in overseas institution. This is a slight which the government must strive hard to retrieve by instating a programme of moral refinement in the school system. This effort should be cheerled by the Ministry of Education. Students and their parent should be shorn of the notion of lobbying teachers and exam officials when the going gets tough! Such overtures should be denounced and castigated and appropriate sanctions stipulated for proven cases. Teachers as well should be reminded of the sanctity of their vocation to nurture the future of their wards without compromising ethical and academic standards.

Education sector across the vast swathe of this country is in deep crisis of confidence thanks to rampant corruption. Again, the arduous work of revamping and rejuvenating it must start somewhere, somehow. It is sincerely believed that if the foregoing suggestions are faithfully and punctiliously practiced, we would have begun to chart a new course whose benefit would ripple through and help sanitise other segments of the economy.

This pieces of research does not claim pretentiously to be flawless in its methodology nor omniscient and pontifical in the conclusions reached and the recommendations articulated. Indeed, some of the prescriptions might be vulnerable to logical challenge, but a world of good would have been done to the cause of education if the ensuring cross-fertilization sparks fresh investigation in the foreseeable future into how well and how far the refinement of our education sector has prospered.
Reference

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