

# **GSM TECHNOLOGY AND E-CHEATING IN THE NIGERIAN HIGHER INSTITUTIONS: A CASE OF AKWA IBOM STATE POLYTECHNIC, IKOT OSURUA IN IKOT EKPENE, NIGERIA**

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## **ABSTRACT**

*As important as the GSM technology is, it has a negative effect in the educational sector and this negative effect is of great concern. Most higher institutions in Nigeria and other countries of the world are waging war against examination malpractice. Yet the perpetrators or the cheats tend to device new methods to continue their game through cell-phones technology and computers. Described as E-cheating the cell phone technology is providing students a smart way to beat the best effort of stakeholders to stamp out the menace. This research aimed primarily at examining the GSM technology and E-cheating in the Nigerian educational system. It also examined the various ways in which cell phones are employed to cheat in examinations and research works. The study therefore concluded that cheating is a monster that deprives a student's self-confidence and natural sense of fulfillment. With this inclination, the study advocates among others that maintaining a manageable class size and putting a stop to carrying cell phone to examination halls as some of the ways of stemming out e-cheating among students.*

**Keywords:** *GSM, E-cheating, educational sector, students*

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Global System for Mobile Communication (GSM) technology is one of the major breakthroughs in Communication Technology. It is one of the best thing that has happened in developing countries especially Nigeria. In Nigeria, the GSM explosion can be considered to be GSM technology age; where every business, academic activities etc revolve around the GSM phones. The revolution began in august, 2001 and changed the face of information and Communication Technology in Nigeria. With a person's number, it is much easier to reach the person, whether they are in a remote village, or in their closets, unless in a place where there is no network of the service provider.

In most secondary schools in Nigeria which are of international standard, students mostly those at the senior levels are encourage to own a laptop, palmtop or sell phones with higher memory sizes, so as to download vital and useful information from the Internet. If this could be instilled in student at that level, students at the tertiary institutions across Nigeria are expected to own theirs in order to boost their research potentialities. Apart from downloading from the Internet, computer has made many tasks easier. The importance of these devices notwithstanding, most of the users have turned the devices to a cheat machine. Students no long bother exploring creatively, the Internet facilities they have but use it to devalue themselves

by cheating. Most students nowadays see visiting the library, reading a text book, asking relevant and meaningful questions about a concept as a gross waste of time and energy. They never consider that even the very facility (GSM) they are exploring is a product of hardwork and research. Contrary to this, most student use their phones to download documents from the Internet, paste it into a word-processing programme without making any input apart from replacing their names with that of the author and submit it to the lecturer concern. This tantamount e-cheating. Cheating can be referred specifically to marital infidelity or examination malpractice. It may also be seen as using illegal means to attend success in life. It is an attempt to use ones brain the wrong ways which is always not accompanied with the natural sense of fulfillment. It involves the breaking of rules.

The rules infringed may be explicit or they may be from an unwritten code of conduct based on morality, ethics and customs. According to Hornby (2005), to cheat is to act in a dishonest way in order to gain an advantage, especially in a game, a competition, an examination, etc. In this context therefore we define cheating as the breaking of rules to gain advantage in a competitive situation. A cheat is always nervous and apprehensive. As a result of globalization, cheating has attended a new dimension. This is what is termed has e-cheating. This has to do with using an electronic device such as cell phone or computer to cheat. The increasing incidence of cheating of all dimensions gives the impetus that culminated into examining GSM technology and e-cheating in the Nigerian higher institutions considering the case of Akwa Ibom State Polytechnic, Ikot Osurua, Nigeria.

### ***THE FREQUENCY OF CHEATING AMONG STUDENTS***

It is impossible to determine the actual frequency of cheating in Nigeria. For instance, personal experience of the researcher as a lecturer and examiner has it that out of the 61 students in computer science classes in the Akwa Ibom State Polytechnic in the year 2005, five students, were caught to have downloaded papers from the Internet and presented it in the original form as assignment to the course lecturer. That is approximately 8 per cent and there may have been more of such students who were not caught. In 1998, a survey from who's who among American High School Student reported that of 3,123 students, 80 percent of them admitted to cheating in an examination, a 10-point increase since the question was first asked 15 years ago (Bushweller, 1999). In addition, 50 per cent of them did not believe cheating was necessarily wrong and 95 per cent of those who had cheated said they have never been caught (Kleiner and Lord 1991).

According to the Center for Academic Integrity at Duke University, 75 percent of all college students confess to have cheated at least once (Kleiner and Lord 1999). This finding confirms earlier studies by Baird, Stern and Havlicek, who reported that between 70 percent and 85 percent of America college students engaged in some form of cheating (Lupton, Chapman and Weiss, nd). Student academic dishonesty has been linked to unethical behaviours in the business environment. According to webster's dictionary, academic integrity can be defined as an adherence

to a code of academic values. Maintaining integrity is an important goal for educators and students alike. Probably, that is what informs Pearle (1992) view of integrity as firm adherence to a code of moral values. Mason (2007) stresses that educators must take an active role in an effort to reduce academic e-examination malpractices. Today this certainly includes e-examination malpractices with students utilizing the most sophisticated modern technological devices. The importance of ethical behaviour cannot be understated. Scanlon (2008) feels however, that technology has made it easier for students to cheat thereby increasing academic dishonesty. The beliefs of most faculties in the academic system concerning the frequency of student cheating are related to two critical faculty behaviours. These include faculty prevention effort utilized in the course and the process of challenging students suspected of any examination misconduct or malpractice. Before GSM gained popularity in Nigeria, the most common forms of cheating were the manual form. This involves the use of unauthorized materials called “expo” into the examination hall and impersonation.

Today, examination malpractice and cheating are a combination of these and GSM. Examination malpractice is any unauthorized or unapproved action, inaction, activity, behaviour or practice that is associated with the preparation, conduct and processing of examination and other forms of assessment, and carried out by any person involved in preparing for, giving, taking and processing that examination at any level over the internet or through the use of electronic devices or manual means (James, 2007). This supports the use of generic (non-programmable) calculators by students when taking exams in class. Many institutions provide faculty with this type of calculator to prevent student cheating by utilizing a sophisticated calculator with a large amount of memory. Other information technology controls must also be employed to remove the opportunity to commit the fraudulent act.

### ***CHEATING AND THE WORLD WIDE WEB***

There are several ways a student can use the internet to cheat in school. One of such ways is to type a topic into a search engine like Yahoo to find a web page that someone has posted on the topic at hand. Another possibility is to share assignments with friends in other schools. For example, the researcher has personal experience where one of the students submitted a paper that was found to be the text from an online magazine article, when the student was confronted about it; he said he had never seen the online article, that a friend at another college e-mailed the paper to him, and he assumed that his friend has written it.

During examinations also students who are not sequestered from their cell phones use them to answer examination questions just by keying in the problem into the browser and carelessly copy the result on the answer booklets. But the most blatant form of e-cheating is the use of web paper mills, sites that collect and distribute papers on the web, either free or for a fee. In a cursory search for these paper mill sites, more than 30 were found. Many of these sites duplicate the same database of papers for whatever reason. For example, 15000Papers.com, Phuck School (www.phuckschool.com) and T.O.P. Thousands of Paper (www.termpapers-on-

file.com) are all owned by the paper store and appear to offer the same collection of papers. With names like Evil House of Cheat, most of these sites claim to assist student in cheating and boast with slogans such as “download your workload”. However, some offer interesting disclaimers, like the one from *essayworld.com* “to provide an additional resource for students to obtain information and additional ideas from the insights of fellow students, continuous use of the site will not place Essayworld.com responsible for the improper use of the contents of the site. Information obtained from the essays on *essayworld.com* should be treated as if it were acquired from a book and be cited in the references. Should one need instructions on how to cite information obtained from essays on the internet, please visit our resources section”. Such disclaimers appear to be an effort to avoid liability. Students perusing these sites can find papers in any area of discipline.

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Cheating is a monster that deprives a person's confidence and natural sense of fulfillment. Among students, it is a meme; it is a wrongful way of exploiting intellectual property. The advents of Global System for Mobile Communication (GSM) worsens the whole scenario as so many people especially students these days see cheating as a life style. This study without mincing words conclusively condemns the act of cheating, be it manual, electronic, within the academic system or outside the academic system. Self confidence makes a person therefore where one loses it to cheating; he/she has lost virtually everything. With the inclination that cheating destroys potentials and kills dreams among students, this study advocates the following as a way of stemming out the menace in the Nigeria educational system.

***Take time to explain and discuss your Academic Honesty Policy:*** Most colleges and universities have academic integrity policies put in place to discourage cheating. And plagiarism is also a legal issue, as attorney Ronald Standler explains. "Any work created in the USA after March 1, 1989, is automatically protected by copyright, even if there is no copyright notice attached to the work, “the owner of the copyright...” could sue the plagiarist in federal court. In addition, some states have statues against the sale of a “term paper, essay, report, thesis or dissertation” to students (Standler, 2000).

***Maintain a Manageable Class Size:*** Having a very large class size can encourage cheating. Hence school authorities should ensure maintaining a manageable class size by teachers/lecturers so that they will not be influenced by the class size and neglect going through the student assignment or research works one after the other.

***Design Writing Assignment with Specific Goals and Instructions:*** Most college courses require at least one written assignment with a research component. Don't assign a general work like, “Write a five-page paper on anything related to the course, using at least five sources. “Give specific instructions”. Determine what your goal is for the student writing that research paper, and give the student a purpose for writing and a target audience. Require the format and documentation style used in your

discipline. Be specific about length and the number of sources required. Encourage higher-order thinking rather than easily obtainable plot summaries and character analysis. The more specific your assignment is, the more difficult it will be for the potential plagiarist to find an exact paper online. If the cheating student still tries to take shortcuts and turn in a downloaded paper you will probably be tipped off by something that doesn't fit. For example, in a freshman composition class the researcher assigned a five-page research paper with a five sources requirement. One student downloaded an article from an online magazine and turned it in. Not only was the paper superbly written- beyond the skill level of that student but it also cited 20 sources, which is not likely for any student on a five page paper.

***Know What is Available Online before Assigning a Paper:*** If you're thinking of having your students research the John F. Kennedy assassination, take a few minutes to see what your students might find online. Check out a few of the web paper mills as well as a search engine or two. Remember, papers are available on the Internet just as there are many web pages. In another occasion where the researcher had personal encounter was the situation where students were instructed to interpret and write about literature. The Students read several short stories and choose one to write on. Out of the 61 students, five decided to turn in papers downloaded from the internet. It was easily tipped off when two students submitted identical essays, each not realizing that the other had also copied the paper from the internet. After this encounter, it was discovered that there are numerous essay available online. A more recent novel for Emily Kate Chopin's, *The Story of an Hour* and Eudora Welty's *Path* was chosen for another assignment, with changes in some features. Also, some online searching was carried out to determine that it would be sufficiently difficult for a student to find any prewritten essays on it. This proved successful as the students find it difficult to cheat using the internet.

***Give Students Enough Time to do an Assignment:*** Keep in mind that students are juggling assignments in several courses. Help them plan their work by giving them enough advance notice of any assignment that an annotated bibliography or at least a topic idea earlier on. Students who have put off starting an assignment until the last minute are more likely to seek shortcuts, like plagiarism.

***Have Students Submit Essays Electronically:*** Whether via e-mail, to a share directory on the campus network or on a diskette, this provide the opportunity for you to archive your students essays electronically. Keep them organized in directories according to the assigned topics. Then, you can feel confident about assigning the same topics each semester or each year. If a student's paper sounds familiar, simply do a word or a phrase search on that directory. For example, in another instance one student submitted a personal essay on her experience transferring from a large, state institution to a small, private college. The next year, when another student submitted the same essay, the researcher was able to immediately recognized and was able to perform a search of his essay archive using the essay's first sentence and located it quickly.

***When You Suspect E-cheating, use a free full-text Search Engine like Alta Vista or Digital Integrity:*** (www.find-same.com), if a paper submitted sounds familiar, take a phrase from the paper or the title and type it into a search engine. Or, if the student provides web addresses as source citation, check them out. Sometimes, students who have downloaded a paper from the internet will actually provide that web address in the list of the works cited.

***Consider Subscribing to a Plagiarism search service, like plagiarism.org or Intergriguard:*** For example, plagiarism.org compares a student's text to its database of papers as well as to internet databases and web pages, providing a report highlighting exact phrases, matches and links to the matching and links to the matching pages. The annual fee for this services is \$150, plus \$1 per document, purchased in \$50 blocks. *Plagiarism.org* provides a free trial service of five documents, so at least try it out. *IntegriGuard* (www.intergriguard.com) offers two ways of combating plagiarism. It's How *original.com* site works just like plagiarism.org's service: It compares submitted paper with other papers in its database as well as to web searches and provides a report showing any matching phrases it finds. *IntegriGuard* also offers a \$4.95 per month service through its *PaperBin.com* site. The instructor pays the monthly fee, and all of the instructor's students submit their own papers to the site. These papers get added to IntegriGuard's paper database, and the instructor receives an e-mail report if it detects that any of the papers have been plagiarized. E-cheating is quick, essay and very tempting for students. This study therefore encourages educators to be aware of the possibilities and do what they can to enable the students maintain academic integrity.

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