THE MANY FACES OF EXAMINATION MALPRACTICE IN NIGERIAN SCHOOLS:
AN ADVOCACY FOR IMPROVEMENTS ON MORAL STANDARDS

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Abstract
Nigeria is known for her vast riches in natural resources and human capital. She is equally vast in notoriety for social and immoral vices. These vices truncate sustainable development in many ways which her enormous resources would have actualized in her unfolding to great nationhood. Education sector is crucial to the development of any nation. Nigeria has huge setback in this dimension due to examination malpractice and other sundry social ills within the sector and outside of it. This paper advocates for improvements on moral standards in the Nigeria society as a permanent and credible solution to the evil of examination malpractice. The findings of this paper reveal that all remedies and recommendations proffered hitherto to solving this menace failed because morality was not a key component of the said solutions, principles and practices. When morality is inculcated in the individual and entrenched in the societal structures and systems, examination malpractice would belong to the dustbin of history. The optimism which this advocacy enjoys is based on its essential results that moral virtues and social positive values would become our culture – our way of life. This work employed descriptive-observational methodology whereby stakeholders and syndicates were viewed and their actions recorded over time.

Keyword: Examination, examination malpractice, Nigerian schools, advocacy, and moral standards

Introduction
The obvious moral decay in the Nigerian society has impacted negatively on her values. Nigeria is on the news for many vices which truncate her systems and structures. Much time and enough money have been spent to beautify her image. Intellectual wealth and physical energies have been drained and dissipated respectively on the Nigerian projects of re-branding, re-packaging, re-orientations and their likes yet the harvest yielded little or futile results. Nigeria has a kind of time she calls “African time” which kills her calculations and consciousness of punctuality. Nigeria has some negative sense of values that promote what she does wrongly; she calls them the “Nigeria factor”. The evidences are very overwhelming and bad that both the public and private, secular and sacred spheres of her national life appear to breathe, thrive and live on institutionalized corrupt practices. Nigeria makes a few progressive steps forward and much retrogressive steps backward due to collapsed values.

In Nigeria, systems and structures are collapsing before the full glare of all her citizens. It is very common to hear about “building collapse”, “naira collapse”, “power collapse”, “educational system collapse”, “capital market collapse”, “leadership collapse”, and even human beings such as pensioners who, waiting for the financial benefit that refused to come, collapse and die and so on. One may not find the reasons for building collapse in the debris, the power collapse or failure in the darkness nor the collapse or devaluation of naira in the note but in the collapse of our value system. One notices too a lot of falsehood, forgery and fakery in the different sectors of her economy. In the educational sector, for instance, one gets some forged certificates, faked studentships impersonated during examinations and many other instances and false teachers who are cheaters in the system. The variance between brilliant certificates and pragmatic results is a pointer to the facts of many social vices that are endemic in their various degrees in Nigerian schools. One of such immoral ills is examination malpractice.

Examination malpractice is one of the multiple challenges found to exist in the education sector in Nigeria. Examination as a criterion for measurement is a critical component of the academic process.
Through examination, data are generated to address the diverse specialized functions which the society needs. Such functions include research, placement, posting and promotion, certification, testimonial, selection, prediction, motivation and instruction. In other words, examinations help “indicate the extent of factual knowledge acquired by students, predict future educational achievement and provide a means of selecting suitable candidates for certain educational courses or occupation” (Adegoke, 2010:3).

Examination provides the measurement platforms that show the educational objectives and goals that have been attained within a specified period. However, examination can achieve these laudable aims only when the examiner and the examinee conduct and sit for the examination respectively in conducive atmosphere where they keep the rules and regulations. Good examinations are credible, valid and reliable. However, bad examinations are characterized by irregularities, academic fraud, intellectual dishonesty and malpractices. In Nigeria, both in public and private schools, internal and external examinations, examination malpractices are endemic corrosive agents that tarnish the images of schools, de-value certificates, increase the decay in the educational system and destroy the national pride.

This paper, therefore, strives to discuss examination malpractice, highlight its many faces, explain the factors that breed them and show their dangers. It strongly advocates for improvements on the moral standards in the Nigerian society which have been decadent overtime. As complicated as examination malpractice can be in its multi-strata characteristics, the findings reveal that with morality as a way of life in every person and a cherished value in every system, examination malpractice will be eradicated, education sector will be sanitized and indeed the Nigerian society at large would acquire a new moral image. Finally, the conclusions were drawn from the entire work.

The conceptualization of Examination Malpractice

To understand the concept “examination malpractice”, one has to know the meanings of the component words, namely; “examination” and “malpractice”. On the definition of examination, Oredein A.O (2010:1-2) cites Scholarthus: Maduka (1993) defined examination as a way to ascertain how much a subject matter in a particular field of study the candidate has mastered. Hornby (1995) described an examination as a formal test of somebody’s knowledge or ability in a particular subject, especially by means of answering questions or practical exercises. Balogun (1999) also explained it as the process through which students are evaluated or tested to find out the quality of knowledge they have acquired or both within a specific period. Examination can be internal or external, written or oral or both, theory or practical, tests or quiz or even homework, etc.

On the other hand, “malpractice” as defined by Hornby is “a wrong or illegal behavior exhibited by a person while discharging professional responsibilities”. In the light of the above understanding of the two concepts that make up examination malpractice, we appeal to the authorities of the following scholars as cited by Adegoke (2010:4) for our definitions:

Examination malpractice is defined as “a deliberate wrong doing contrary to official examination rules designed to place a candidate at unfair advantage or disadvantage”. It is “illegally obtaining an answer to an examination question from any other source other than the brain of the examinee” Hornby (1995). According to Nwana (2000), examination malpractice is the “massive and unprecedented abuse of rules and regulations pertaining to internal and external examination, beginning from the setting of such examinations through the taking of the examinations, their marking and grading, to the release of the results and the issuance of certificates”. Oyekan (1996) sees examination malpractice as a “deliberate act of indiscipline adopted by students or their privileged accomplices to secure facile success and advantage before, during and after the administration of a test or examination”. According to Salami (1994), “examination malpractices are improper and dishonest acts associated with examination with a view to obtaining unmerited advantage”. Oluyeb and Daramola (1993) defined it as “any irregular behavior exhibited by candidate or anybody charged with the examination inside or outside the examination hall before, during or after such examination”. In the words of Shonekan (1996), examination malpractice is “any act of omission or commission that contravenes the rules and regulations of the examination body to the extent of undermining the validity and reliability of tests and ultimately, the integrity of the certificates issued”. Examination malpractice is all illegal means which candidates or examinees use to pass examinations.

The evil of examination malpractice stems from its nature as a bad behavior which is a human act (fully human), deliberate or willful (volition, free will, voluntariness) and proceeds from knowledge of it as wrong. The agents of examination malpractice cuts across the social statuses to include: the student himself/herself, peer group influence, parents, individual principals, the principal and the teachers together, individual teachers, miracle/special operators, transporters, security operatives, community in which the school is situated, teachers as a group, JAMB(UTME)/WAEC officials, impersonators and mercenaries,
even friends and relations like brothers, sisters, uncles, etc. In Nigeria, examination malpractice has many dimensions which we call “faces” in this work. Some scholars argue that since examination malpractice is a crime of many faces and varieties, it should go by the name examination malpractices to capture adequately its plural form. However, the position of this paper is that its multiplicity should be understood and expressed in singularity as one immoral vice though with many dimensions. So examination malpractice is characteristically one crime which has many ways it is being committed before, during and after examination.

In the next section, we shall highlight these many ways or faces.

The many faces of examination malpractice

The many faces of examination malpractice are found in the personal/individual, institutional and societal dimensions of the illegal ways of passing examination in Nigeria. Examination malpractice is not restricted to the space called examination hall, centre or venue and neither does it thrive only within the time allowed for the examination. Examination malpractice is in operation before, during and after examination.

Examination malpractice before the examination includes:

i. Examination leakage or “expo”, that is exposition of questions before the examination or test.
ii. Inscription on palms, thighs, handkerchiefs, tables, walls, chairs, rulers, purses, etc.
iii. Micro-chips – writing on small papers and hiding them in the pockets, breasts, pants, etc.
iv. Prior sitting arrangements with one to assist answer questions, etc.

Malpractice inside the examination hall includes:

a. Girafing – stretching one’s neck and eyes to copy answers from another person
b. Stealing and substituting of answer scripts inside the hall. Stealing is a violation of God’s commandment which says “Thou shall not steal” (Deuteronomy 5:19, Exodus 20:15).
c. Impersonation – sitting of examination for another candidate
d. Cheating is broad based – seeking and receiving helps from fellow examinee, invigilator, etc.
e. Electronic based malpractices such as scientific calculators, mobile phones, etc are used to beat the examiners’ old style.

Malpractice after the examination includes;

1. Sorting by cash (money) or kind (sex, or other material gifts, services or favours)
2. Connections – students influence examination results with the help of their influential and affluent parents, friends and politicians.
3. Removing their scripts and re-writing their answers.
4. Intimidating the examiners through obnoxious cult organization or kidnapping syndicates
5. Awards of marks in the face of mass failures. Students are given some marks called “bonus” which they did not merit.
6. Government’s approval of automatic promotion due to protracted industrial action (strikes).
7. Students copying and substituting as original other people’s assignments, projects, theses as original thoughts of theirs.
8. Teachers, lecturers and parents writing assignments for their students or wards.
9. Paying someone to write a research work.
10. Lowering of grades such as cut off marks or Grade Point Average in order to enlarge the number of passes.

The above reveals the many faces of examination malpractice in Nigeria. The list above does not promise to be exhaustive but has tried to enumerate a good number. Our next step is to explain the factors that breed examination malpractice.

The factors that breed examination malpractice

Many factors are responsible for the existence and thriving of examination malpractice in Nigerian schools. They are;

a) Generally, moral decadence is present in the Nigerian society. The students’ low moral standards are influenced by the environment at large where there is reward without work and the end justifies the means. So immoral vices in the schools are fed constantly by the moral decadence in other sectors of the society.
b) Undue emphasis on certificate instead of knowledge and skills. Certificate is seen as a means of livelihood, so people struggle to get it even when their heads are empty of requisite knowledge to defend their paper claims.

c) Inadequate preparations due to laziness and lack of industry on the parts of the students and teachers. Students are distracted by cultism, business concern, truancy, prostitution and other concerns rather than academic work. Some teachers do engage in some economic, political and socio-cultural programs that distract them from their professional responsibilities as teachers. Therefore on the part of the teachers, the inability to cover the scheme of work makes them support examination malpractice.

d) Greed – Under the influence of materialism and lack of contentment, some stakeholders within and outside school environments sell grades, marks, question papers, etc for various sums of money thereby promoting examination malpractice.

e) Lack of educational infrastructure such as poor teaching and learning environment, lack of examination halls that lead to overcrowding of students, inadequate laboratory/scientific materials, sub-standard libraries, that is, if they exist at all, lead to examination malpractice.

f) The laws kept in place against examination malpractice are not enforced. No one has gone to jail due to examination malpractice, so syndicates have their freedom after their crime against meritocracy in the academia.

g) Government’s lopsided policy called “quota system” gives the laggard the opportunity to get admission into schools while the brilliants are denied admission. The laggard resorts to malpractice because his/her ability cannot cope with the demands of higher education.

h) Industrial action such as teachers’ strike and the students’ unrest which lead to the eclipsing of academic activities contribute immensely to examination malpractice.

i) Some parents and guardians support examination malpractice in various ways. They provide the cash or other prices needed to function the evil. Even the home work or assignment which parents and guardians do for their children is indeed another face of examination malpractice.

j) Students’ immoral vices like truancy, embezzlement of their school fees, gangsterism, drug abuse, sexual promiscuity and prostitution that distract them from academic activities drive them into another evil called examination malpractice.

k) Laxity in examination supervision by both internal and external invigilators helps this social menace to thrive in many schools.

Examination malpractice is a great danger to both the individual person and the society.

**Dangers of examination malpractice**

Examination malpractice promotes the following evils:

1. Examination malpractice brings about failure in job performance as the syndicate cannot defend his/her certificate.

2. It is injustice as mediocrity thrives above meritocracy. Hence, examination malpractice is one of the factors that make people perish in ignorance due to want of knowledge (Hosea 4:6).

3. Young minds are exposed to negative influences such as use of tricks, cheating, bribery to influence others.

4. It de-values certificates which Nigerians have in the circle of international space of the academia. It raises the question of integrity in the eye of international bodies and employers of labour. Many Nigerians have suffered terrible ignominy and strenuous screening exercise in order to get their certificates validated in foreign universities and job opportunity circles.

5. It promotes laziness and lack of industry in the victims.

6. In the face of discovery, one loses his or her admission or job. Some politicians have lost their posts due to examination malpractice, forgery of certificates and sundry vices while in school. Nigerian political history is replete with many examples.

7. Examination malpractice is immoral. Therefore, the conscience is troubled by it and eternity may be spent in smokes of fire. This explains the eschatological and soteriological implications of examination malpractice.

8. It truncates sustainable development, as “fake” manpower floods the market ready to perpetuate collapsed buildings, collapsed banks, collapsed organizations, recessed and depressed economy, etc.

9. Examination malpractice places extra financial or psychological burdens on the parents and the examinees themselves.
Having seen dangers above, one notices that there is an urgent need for improvements on our moral standards.

**An advocacy for improvements on moral standards.**

Examination malpractice has been viewed by many scholars as an evil that needs a combined therapy approach. As a pathological disease like malaria, it can only be cured by a combined set of solutions in order to address its plural symptoms comprehensively. This understanding gave rise to the multiple sets of remedies used simultaneously to curb the menace of examination malpractice. These solutions applied hitherto include:

a) Continuous Assessment is applied so that much tensions generated by one – stop examination is eradicated. Under this approach, examination includes punctuality, attendance, neatness, etc. in other words, the cognitive, affective and psycho-motor domains come into play.

b) Legal frameworks as found in the 1999 constitution article 33 and the law enforcement details such as rustication, suspension, repetition of class, withdrawal of certificates, jail terms, sanctions of schools, retrenchment of principals and teachers, sacking of lecturers and accomplices like the non-academic staff.

c) Inadequacies such as necessary infrastructures and incentives to promote good teaching and learning processes have been addressed in more schools than one.

d) Examiners have generated new ideas to match with the modern complexities of examination malpractices introduced and sustained by new devices in science and technology.

e) Examination boards have been tackled to live above “board”. In other words, they like Caesar’s wife, should be above suspicion. Examination is a process of equity which ought to be approached with clean hands.

The fears and efforts generated by this approach have not been able to curb examination malpractice in Nigeria. Recently, the Director General of the National Orientation Agency (NOA), Mike Omeri, has this to say:

> ...exam malpractice has further helped to malign Nigeria’s image in the world and has become a serious organized crime with a street value of N25 billion per annum. .... 12 percent of candidates who sat for the Senior School Certificate Examination (SSCE) this year were involved in examination malpractice …….. examination malpractice has become a serious organized crime, as evident in some private schools that pride themselves as “virtual magic centre”. Sale of marks, grades and degrees in tertiary institutions and outright theft and forgery of certificates, extortion of money from candidates by school administration has become the norm. …. examination malpractice has become so lucrative in the country that it boasts of a street value of N375 billion in the past 15 years. … the statistics is nothing to be proud of, adding that it rather calls for “introspection” toward the cause of the unfortunate realities with a view to finding a solution.

*(Premium Times Newspaper, Friday 25th November 2016, p.1)*

With all the above simultaneous and combined solutions approach, there is still a call from the Director General of NOA and like minds for a solution. Examination malpractice can be solved with one positive idea as a solution. It is the *morality solution*. There is a strong need for improvements on our moral standards in Nigeria. This advocacy has an urgent validity. The root cause of examination malpractice is traceable back to the gradual and constant erosion of our moral values. It has happened overtime and therefore has entered the attitudinal fabrics of most Nigerians as an institutionalized negative culture. Some have grown up to imbibe malpractice as normal, since no other positive way of life in context has been shown them. The improvements on the moral standards have to be universal in character. It has to touch every individual and every sector of the society. The morality solution has a specific objective to de-school Nigerians from the negative values which they have imbibed over the years. Morality is a scarce commodity in the Nigerian society and its absence has done the country a lot of grave harm. The collapse of systems, structures, agencies and programmes are due to moral decadence. IremekaUkamaka Felicia (2007:199) agrees with Scheffler (1959) and Gunniel (1959) that:

Moral judgment is intimately related to educational practice, and a major goal of such practice is the development of moral character in the young. No knowledge is merely for its own sake, but all must, in some way, affect the conduct of children, not as they have been taught, but as society has led them to teach themselves …
dangerous as ignorance is, it is not so dangerous as knowledge without character. Nothing else in education is worth having without rich significant character. Education without character may result in a dreadful capacity for crime and general destructiveness.

Parents without morality cannot show discipline and good example to the children. Teachers without moral worth cannot inspire good moral life in the pupils and students, an immoral worker cannot uphold the professional ethics.

In the magisterium of the Conciliar Fathers; we note:

As it is the parents who gave life to their children, on them lies the gravest obligation of educating their family. They must therefore be recognized as being primarily and principally responsible for their education. The role of parents in education is of such importance that it is almost impossible to provide an adequate substitute. The family is therefore the principal school of the social virtues which are necessary for every society. (Vatican II, GrarissimumEducationis, No.3)

The most brilliant legal framework cannot administer justice without moral judicial persons and neither can the morally depraved religious bodies turn the soul of worshippers to God. The social media that promote and advertise immorality are grave yards for moral uprightness, and so on. The social media is a veritable instrument for the teaching of morality. Majority of the Nigerian youths have access to various social media platforms. Good efforts on the improvements of their moral sense means that the competent civil authorities should be awake to the possible orientations that can derail the moral virtues of the young which could be found in the social media with the view to sanctioning such ugly indices.

In the education sector, morality expressed in intellectual honesty is a necessity at all times. Knowledge which is power and an arduous good should be got first before the evidence of certificate. Adequate emphasis on professional ethics of teaching profession should be harped until it becomes fruitful in the lives of all stakeholders in the education industry. Moral instructions in the school ought to influence behavior in the children positively. This means that moral instructions should occupy a pride of place in the school curriculum. Moral formation of children cannot be compromised for any reason neither in the family, school nor larger society.

In the words of the Conciliar Fathers of the Second Vatican Council:

True education is directed towards the formation of the human person in view of his final end and the good of that society to which he belongs and in the duties of which he will, as an adult, have a share. Due weight being given to advances in psychological, pedagogical and intellectual sciences. Children and young people should be helped to develop harmoniously their physical, moral and intellectual qualities.

(Vatican II, GrarissimumEducationis, No.1)

In the same vein, value re-orientation as a course in the university should modify the behavior of undergraduates meaningfully by giving them the culture of morality. Moreover, higher institutions in conjunction with religious chaplaincies should step up the inculcation of morality in the students and staff. The schools should be seen at once as a beehive of academic activities as well as a centre for morality, where moral values are taught and practiced.

The National Orientation Agency should stop at nothing to see that Nigeria gets a new rebirth in all spheres such as the education sector. We cannot forget the formation of the young using the moral values of the traditional society. According to Agujobi-Odo, Ngozi (2007:58):

In the traditional society, moral formation of young people is valued highly and taken as a serious obligation because it is aimed at bringing up disciplined, sound and responsible people worthy to be future leaders in the society. When the moral formation of the young is ensured, it gives value and meaning to life. The formation is a continuous process and the responsibility of every adult, although there are traditional institutions for imparting this through various channels of communication.

The greatest space in the whole wide world is the space for improvement. Morality has been denied this space for long in Nigeria. Hence, there is need today more than ever to improve our moral standards both in principle and in practice.
Recommendations
1) Morality should be given its proper place in the life of every Nigerian in the family, school, church, mosque and larger society.
2) Moral formation of the young should be done in the schools without any compromise.
3) Rewards should not be given to only best students in academics but also best behaved students, best behaved teachers, etc.
4) National Re-orientation should also incorporate the traditional models of inculcating morality.
5) The social media that do not teach morality should be shut down.

Conclusion
Education is key to individual’s realization of self-actualization. It is critical to sustainable national development. Through education, the self is unfolded, nature is enhanced and the society’s needs are fulfilled. Examination malpractice is a social evil that breeds retrogression, intellectual dishonesty and academic fraud. It stands against true success while in school and in the life after school. In order to sanitize the education sector, the challenges of the many faces of examination malpractice should be fought to stand still, otherwise the prospects of our future generations is bleak. Imagine in the next few years, if it is left to grow, the essential spheres of our national life – economy, politics, religion, culture and society are controlled by those whose placements and promotions came through “a pass” got from examination malpractice. Therefore, we have only one option left and this is to vigorously stop examination malpractice today through the improvements of our moral standards.

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