

Examination Malpractice in Contemporary Nigeria: An Islamic Ethical Perspective

By

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Abstract

Examination malpractice remains a persistent challenge undermining the integrity of Nigeria's educational system. This study investigates the causes, implications, and ethical dimensions of malpractice, focusing on parental pressure, institutional weaknesses, student attitudes, technological abuse, and governmental oversight. Employing a qualitative phenomenological approach, interviews were conducted with students, parents, and teachers in Kogi and Abuja to explore their lived experiences and perceptions. Findings reveal that malpractice is normalized through societal emphasis on certification, collusion among educators, and the misuse of digital tools, creating moral and structural vulnerabilities. From Islamic injunctions, such practices constitute *zulm* (injustice) against oneself and other intelligent ones whom the Examination malpractice placed ahead. This contravenes divine injunctions emphasizing honesty, fairness, and accountability, which is a sinful act and attracts divine punishment or removal of blessing from the outcome of the studies (certificate acquired by Examination malpractice). The study highlights the dual academic and spiritual consequences of malpractice, including unqualified graduates, devalued certificates, and broader societal corruption. Addressing examination malpractice requires structural reforms and moral reawakening, safeguarding educational integrity while promoting ethical responsibility in line with Islamic teachings. Recommendations include parental reorientation, strict institutional non-compliance, government monitoring, ethical training for educators, and integration of Islamic moral principles into curricula and public sensitization programs.

Keywords: Examination Malpractice, Nigeria, Islamic Ethics, Academic Integrity, Educational Policy

1. Introduction

Education is widely acknowledged as the cornerstone of national development, social mobility, and individual empowerment. Nations that prioritize education experience sustainable growth, reduced poverty, and an informed citizenry capable of addressing complex societal challenges. In Nigeria, Africa's most populous country, the National Policy on Education describes education as an "instrument par excellence for national development" (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013, p. 4). However, despite this recognition, the Nigerian education system continues to face critical challenges that compromise its effectiveness, chief among them being examination malpractice.

Examination malpractice refers to dishonest or fraudulent behaviours undertaken by students, teachers, parents, or administrators to gain unfair advantage in examinations. The West African Examinations Council (WAEC) defines it as "any irregular behaviour exhibited by candidates or anybody charged with the conduct of an examination that compromises the integrity, validity, and reliability of the examination." Forms of malpractice include impersonation, collusion, and smuggling of materials, bribery, and the increasingly common phenomenon of "sorting" culture, where selective information is leaked to candidates.

Several social, institutional, and technological factors drive the prevalence of malpractice. Parental pressure for academic success, societal obsession with certificates, weak institutional oversight, underpaid teachers, and the proliferation of smartphones and online tools have collectively created an environment conducive to cheating. From an Islamic perspective, examination malpractice is not merely an academic problem but a moral and spiritual violation, as Islam provides a guide to all human activities. The Qur'an emphasizes honesty and justice: "And do

not consume one another's wealth unjustly or send it in bribery to the rulers so that they might aid you to consume a portion of the wealth of the people in sin" (Qur'an, 2:188). These texts actually relate to examination malpractice because this act affords a lazy student the opportunity meant for brilliant ones. Similarly, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) warned, "Whoever cheats is not one of us" (Muslim, 101). These injunctions underscore the ethical gravity of malpractice as a form of *zulm* (injustice) with consequences beyond the classroom.

Examination malpractice has evolved into a systemic phenomenon in Nigeria, eroding academic standards, undermining institutional credibility, and fostering moral decay among students. Despite numerous interventions by examination bodies, government agencies, and civil society, malpractice persists. Studies indicate that over 70% of students have engaged in some form of cheating during their academic careers (Adeyemi, 20).

This pervasive dishonesty not only produces unqualified graduates but also contributes to broader societal corruption. Teachers and administrators sometimes collude with students, parents provide financial inducements to secure success, and digital technologies amplify opportunities for cheating. These systemic failures compromise both academic and ethical foundations, creating a dissonance between societal practices and moral teachings. From an Islamic ethical standpoint, malpractice constitutes both an injustice and a betrayal of trust, undermining the spiritual development of individuals and the moral fabric of society.

This study investigates examination malpractice in contemporary Nigeria by examining its primary causes, the perceptions and lived experiences of students, parents, and teachers, its implications for individuals, institutions, and society, and the ways Islamic ethical principles can inform effective strategies for its reduction. Specifically, the study identifies the social, institutional, and technological factors driving examination malpractice, explores how key stakeholders perceive and rationalize the practice, and analyzes its consequences for academic integrity and societal development. By combining a phenomenological approach with Islamic ethical analysis, the study offers a holistic and faith-informed understanding of examination malpractice and proposes morally grounded strategies to address it. The study contributes to scholarship by providing evidence-based insights for policymakers, educators, parents, and religious leaders, emphasizing the importance of integrating moral education with structural reforms. It further underscores the relevance of curriculum development, teacher training, and public awareness initiatives in fostering a culture of honesty, competence, and integrity within the Nigerian educational system.

The study focuses on examination malpractice in secondary and tertiary institutions within Kogi State and Abuja, Nigeria. Participants include students, parents, teachers, and examination officials. While the study acknowledges the national relevance of malpractice, the findings are contextualized within the selected regions due to logistical and resource constraints. The study emphasizes qualitative exploration of lived experiences, ethical perceptions, and practical interventions rather than quantitative measurement of malpractice prevalence.

2. Literature Review

Scholarly literature on examination malpractice in Nigeria consistently portrays the phenomenon as a pervasive and systemic problem rooted in socio-cultural, institutional, economic, and ethical factors. Early studies conceptualize examination malpractice as any deliberate act that compromises the validity and reliability of assessment outcomes (WAEC). Adeyemi argues that examination malpractice in Nigeria has evolved from isolated acts of copying to organized, technology-driven schemes involving multiple stakeholders, including students, teachers, parents, and examination officials (47–48). This systemic nature distinguishes malpractice in Nigeria from sporadic academic dishonesty observed in more regulated educational environments.

Several scholars emphasize the socio-cultural foundations of examination malpractice. Certificate obsession has been identified as a dominant driver, where academic credentials are valued more than actual competence. Adegoke notes that Nigerian society places disproportionate emphasis on certificates as gateways to employment, social mobility, and prestige, thereby

incentivizing unethical shortcuts when genuine academic success appears unattainable (74). This societal pressure extends to families, with parents actively or passively encouraging malpractice to secure their children's future. Denga and Denga describe parents as "active collaborators" whose financial inducements and moral compromises sustain the practice (116). These findings align with broader sociological analyses linking educational dishonesty to survival strategies within highly competitive and unequal systems.

Institutional weaknesses constitute another major theme in the literature. Underfunding, overcrowded classrooms, inadequate facilities, and poor teacher motivation are repeatedly cited as structural enablers of malpractice. Adepoju observes that teachers who are poorly remunerated and overworked are more susceptible to collusion, syllabus manipulation, and bribery, which undermines instructional quality and assessment integrity (63). Onuka and Amoo trace the historical roots of this institutional decay, noting that the rapid expansion of education after independence was not matched with effective governance and monitoring mechanisms, creating fertile ground for unethical practices (55). Weak enforcement of examination regulations further normalizes malpractice, reducing the deterrent effect of punitive policies.

The role of peer influence and student rationalization is also well documented. Okebukola argues that students rarely engage in malpractice in isolation; rather, peer networks function as powerful enablers, fostering collective cheating strategies and normalizing dishonesty as an acceptable academic practice (92). When honest students observe peers benefiting from malpractice without consequences, moral restraint weakens, and cheating becomes a rational response to perceived injustice. Adeyemi similarly reports that a significant proportion of students justify malpractice as a necessary response to systemic failure rather than as a moral wrongdoing (47). The growing negative peer influence among contemporary teenagers and youths is due largely to parental failure (Omosor & Kowhiro, 80; Omosor & Kowhiro, 164; Omosor, 351).

Recent literature highlights the growing impact of technology on examination malpractice. Nwankwo documents how smartphones, encrypted messaging applications, and internet platforms have transformed cheating into a real-time, highly coordinated activity that is difficult to detect using traditional invigilation methods (89). While technological innovations such as computer-based testing and biometric verification have been introduced to curb malpractice, scholars argue that technology alone cannot resolve a problem that is fundamentally ethical and institutional in nature.

Beyond structural and sociological explanations, a growing body of work situates examination malpractice within ethical and religious frameworks. Yusuf frames malpractice as *zulm* (injustice), emphasizing that it violates principles of fairness, harms diligent students, and erodes social trust (134). Islamic ethical scholars draw on Qur'anic injunctions against injustice and deception (Qur'an 2:188; 55:9) and Prophetic traditions condemning cheating (Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim 101) to argue that academic dishonesty constitutes a moral and spiritual failure, not merely an administrative infraction. Al-Ghazālī's ethical philosophy reinforces this view by linking deception to the corruption of both individual character and societal morality (*Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*). Christian ethicists reach similar conclusions, equating examination malpractice with stealing and false witness, thereby underscoring its universal moral gravity (Okonkwo 77).

Despite the breadth of existing scholarship, notable gaps remain. Much of the literature relies heavily on quantitative surveys that measure prevalence but offer limited insight into the lived experiences and moral reasoning of those involved. Moreover, religious perspectives—particularly Islamic ethics—are often referenced superficially, without systematic integration into analytical frameworks. Few studies adopt a phenomenological approach that captures how students, parents, and teachers negotiate ethical tensions between religious values and societal pressures. This study builds on existing scholarship by integrating qualitative phenomenological inquiry with Islamic ethical analysis. By foregrounding lived experiences and situating them within Qur'anic and Prophetic moral principles, the study extends the literature beyond descriptive accounts toward a holistic understanding of examination malpractice as a structural, social, and spiritual crisis. In

doing so, it contributes to ongoing debates on academic integrity, moral education, and sustainable educational reform in Nigeria.

While previous studies have examined the prevalence, causes, and consequences of examination malpractice, few adopt a phenomenological approach to capture the lived experiences of students, parents, and teachers. Moreover, Islamic ethical perspectives are often referenced superficially rather than systematically integrated into analysis. This study addresses these gaps by exploring subjective experiences while situating findings within Qur'anic and Hadith-based moral principles.

3. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences and perceptions of students, parents, and teachers regarding examination malpractice in Nigeria. Phenomenology was chosen because it allows for an in-depth understanding of individuals' subjective experiences, motivations, and moral reasoning, particularly in contexts where societal pressures and ethical dilemmas intersect. By focusing on personal narratives, the study captures the nuanced ways in which structural weaknesses, parental expectations, peer influence, and technological tools shape engagement in malpractice, while also situating these practices within Islamic ethical frameworks.

The population comprised secondary and tertiary students, parents, teachers, and examination officials in Kogi State and Abuja. Using purposive and snowball sampling techniques, a total of 45 participants were selected to provide rich and varied perspectives. Purposive sampling ensured inclusion of participants directly involved or affected by examination malpractice, while snowball sampling allowed for identification of individuals with insider knowledge of institutional practices. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, which provided flexibility for participants to narrate their experiences, rationalizations, and reflections on ethical and moral implications. Interview questions were designed to probe causes of malpractice, personal involvement or observation, and perspectives on Islamic ethical guidance.

For data analysis, interviews were transcribed verbatim and subjected to thematic analysis, identifying recurring patterns, contradictions, and insights across participants' narratives. Themes were organized into categories such as parental complicity, institutional failure, student rationalizations, technological facilitation, and moral awareness. The analysis process was iterative, with continual cross-checking against the original data to ensure authenticity and validity. Ethical considerations were rigorously observed: participants provided informed consent, confidentiality was guaranteed, and sensitive information was anonymized. The study adhered to the principle of non-maleficence, ensuring that participation caused no harm, while upholding the integrity of research within both academic and Islamic ethical frameworks.

4. Historical Evolution of Examination Malpractice in Nigeria

The phenomenon of examination malpractice in Nigeria did not emerge suddenly; rather, it developed gradually alongside changes in the country's educational, social, and economic structures. Tracing its historical evolution provides critical insight into how a once isolated misconduct transformed into a systemic challenge affecting all levels of education.

In the pre-independence and early post-independence period (1940s–1960s), the Nigerian educational system was largely modeled after the British colonial framework, which emphasized discipline, strict supervision, and merit-based assessment. Examinations conducted by bodies such as the Cambridge School Certificate and later the West African Examinations Council (WAEC), established in 1952, were characterized by high integrity and severe penalties for infractions. During this period, cases of examination malpractice were rare and largely limited to individual acts such as copying or unauthorized assistance, which were promptly sanctioned (Onuka and Amoo, 55). Social values at the time also reinforced honesty, as education was viewed as a privilege rather than a right.

The late 1960s to early 1970s marked a transitional phase. Following independence and the Nigerian Civil War (1967–1970), education became central to national reconstruction and

manpower development. Government policies expanded access to education, but this rapid growth was not matched with adequate infrastructure, trained personnel, or effective monitoring systems. As student populations increased, examination administration became more complex, and isolated incidents of malpractice such as copying, collusion, and minor impersonation began to surface (Adeyemi, 48). These practices, though still relatively limited, signaled the early erosion of examination ethics.

During the oil boom era of the mid-1970s, examination malpractice intensified significantly. The sudden influx of oil revenue led to mass expansion of schools and universities, while societal emphasis shifted toward material success and certification as a means to economic mobility. Education became highly competitive, and certificates were increasingly seen as gateways to employment and social status. This period witnessed the emergence of more sophisticated forms of malpractice, including question leakage, bribery of invigilators, and organized cheating within examination centers. The mismatch between educational demand and institutional capacity created fertile ground for unethical practices.

The economic downturn and structural adjustment period of the 1980s marked a turning point in the institutionalization of examination malpractice. Widespread unemployment, declining educational funding, and deteriorating learning conditions intensified pressure on students to succeed at all costs. During this period, examination malpractice evolved from individual misconduct into organized networks involving students, teachers, parents, and corrupt examination officials. Syndicates emerged that specialized in advance access to examination questions, impersonation services, and coordinated cheating arrangements. Scholars have noted that by this era, malpractice had become normalized in many institutions, reflecting broader patterns of corruption in Nigerian society.

In the 1990s, examination malpractice became deeply entrenched and increasingly commercialized. Private “miracle centers” emerged, offering guaranteed success in exchange for payment, while forged certificates and result manipulation became more prevalent. Technological developments such as photocopying and mobile communication facilitated new methods of cheating. The state responded with stricter legislation, including the Examination Malpractice Act of 1999, which prescribed severe penalties. However, weak enforcement limited its effectiveness, allowing malpractice to persist.

In the 21st century, examination malpractice has assumed more technologically driven and transnational dimensions. Digital devices, internet access, and social media platforms have enabled practices such as electronic cheating, hacking of examination databases, and real-time transmission of answers. Despite the introduction of computer-based testing, biometric verification, and surveillance technologies, malpractice continues to adapt, demonstrating its resilience and systemic nature. Contemporary forms include collusion through messaging apps, identity fraud, and manipulation of online assessment systems. Overall, the historical evolution of examination malpractice in Nigeria reveals a progression from rare, individual acts of dishonesty to a complex, organized, and technologically sophisticated phenomenon. This trajectory underscores that examination malpractice is deeply rooted in socio-economic pressures, moral decline, institutional weaknesses, and the excessive valorization of certificates over competence. Understanding this historical progression is essential for developing effective and sustainable interventions capable of addressing both the structural and moral dimensions of the problem.

5. Examination malpractices in Nigeria

The analysis of interviews with students, parents, teachers, and examination officials revealed a multi-layered culture of examination malpractice in Nigeria, shaped by structural, social, technological, and ethical factors. Six main themes emerged from the data: normalization of dishonesty, parental complicity, institutional failure, student rationalizations, technological facilitation, and moral conflict.

Normalization of Dishonesty: Participants reported that malpractice has become a routine part of the academic environment. A final-year secondary student in Lokoja observed, “Honestly, I felt Hurna, Yusuf, Enejo, Achara & Abdullahi

pressure because others were using ‘expo.’ I didn’t use it, but I was tempted” (Personal Communication, June 2023). This reflects a culture in which students perceive cheating as a necessary strategy for survival, corroborating Adeyemi’s observation that over 70% of Nigerian students rationalize malpractice (Adeyemi, 47). From an Islamic perspective, such normalization represents a betrayal of trust and a deviation from ethical responsibility, as highlighted in the Hadith: “Whoever cheats is not one of us” (Muslim, 101).

Parental Complicity and Certificate Culture: Parents admitted influencing malpractice through financial inducements or enrollment in “special centers.” A trader in Abuja recounted, “I also once gave money because I didn’t want my son to fail. I regret it. But in Nigeria, without a paper [certificate], your child suffers” (Interview, July 2023). These testimonies illustrate the tension between societal expectations, parental love, and Islamic ethical teachings, where urgency for certificates conflicts with the Qur’anic injunction to “establish weight in justice and do not make deficient the balance” (Qur’an, 55:9).

Institutional Failure and Teacher Collusion: Teachers and administrators acknowledged compromising academic integrity, often narrowing syllabi or providing leaked questions. A secondary school teacher in Anyigba admitted, “It is against Islam, but some colleagues justify it as survival” (Interview, June 2023). Similarly, a WAEC invigilator in Lokoja disclosed principals sometimes offered bribes to protect students caught cheating. These findings highlight systemic corruption and align with the Qur’anic admonition against consuming others’ wealth unjustly (Qur’an, 2:188).

Technological Facilitation and Student Rationalizations: Participants described sophisticated cheating methods, including smart phones, smart watches, audio devices, and scanned documents. A university student explained, “Some lecturers don’t finish the course. Instead, they focus only on specific areas. We know this means malpractice, but it’s survival” (Interview, July 2023). Technology thus amplifies opportunities for dishonesty, while incomplete instruction reinforces rationalizations for cheating.

Moral Conflict and Ethical Awareness: Despite participation or exposure to malpractice, many respondents recognized its ethical and spiritual wrongfulness. Students and parents frequently referenced Islamic teachings to express guilt or moral tension, illustrating cognitive dissonance between societal pressures and religious values. This highlights the dual nature of malpractice as both an educational and spiritual crisis, consistent with Yusuf’s framing of malpractice as *zulm* (Yusuf, 134).

The findings indicate that examination malpractice in Nigeria is systemic, socially reinforced, technologically facilitated, and ethically condemned, yet perpetuated due to structural weaknesses, societal pressures, and normalized rationalizations. The lived experiences reveal that addressing malpractice requires interventions targeting institutional reforms, parental reorientation, technological regulation, and faith-informed ethical education. Examination malpractice has profound consequences for individuals, institutions, and society at large, extending beyond academic dishonesty to encompass moral, professional, and societal dimensions.

6. Causes of Examination Malpractice

Several scholars have identified multiple, interrelated causes of examination malpractice in Nigeria:

Parental Pressure and Desperation: Parents often exert enormous pressure on children to succeed academically, sometimes engaging in unethical practices such as bribing exam officials or enrolling children in “special centers” for guaranteed success. Denga and Denga note that “parents are not just passive observers but active collaborators in the crime of educational dishonesty” (116). This pressure stems from societal emphasis on certificates as instruments of social mobility and family prestige.

Institutional Failure: Many schools, plagued by underfunding, overcrowded classrooms, and low teacher motivation, fail to adequately prepare students. Some administrators actively collude with examination officials to provide advance information or “areas of concentration” (Adepoju 63). This institutional compromise reflects a broader culture of corruption, where accountability mechanisms are weak or non-existent.

Student Attitudes and Peer Influence: Peer dynamics play a critical role in normalizing malpractice. Students often rationalize cheating when they observe peers achieving better results through dishonest means. Okebukola argues that “peer networks serve as powerful enablers of malpractice, with students pooling money to bribe invigilators or purchase leaked questions” (92). Such collective rationalizations institutionalize dishonesty within academic settings.

Technological Facilitation: The proliferation of smartphones and internet connectivity has transformed cheating methods. Nwankwo observes that encrypted messaging apps, online forums, and social media platforms circulate examination questions in real time, making malpractice more sophisticated and harder to detect (89). Technology, while capable of enhancing learning, is misappropriated for academic dishonesty.

Certificate Culture and Societal Pressures: Adegoke emphasizes that Nigerian society’s obsession with certificates over competence creates incentives for dishonesty: “A society that prizes certificates above knowledge create incentives for dishonesty” (74). Students and parents often view degrees and professional qualifications as necessary for social and economic survival, leading to rationalized shortcuts.

Government Neglect and Teacher Welfare: Poor teacher remuneration, delayed salaries, and lack of professional support contribute to low commitment and occasional collusion in malpractice. The neglect violates both practical and ethical obligations, as the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) stated: “Give the worker his wages before his sweat dries” (Sunan Ibn Majah 2443). Thus, government inaction indirectly sustains malpractice.

7. Consequences of Examination Malpractice

The implications of examination malpractice extend well beyond examination halls. They affect the moral and professional development of individuals, the credibility of educational institutions, and the ethical and developmental trajectory of society, emphasizing the need for comprehensive, faith-informed interventions. It has far-reaching and multidimensional, affecting not only individual students but also educational institutions and the wider society. Rather than being a victimless act, examination malpractice undermines competence, erodes trust, and weakens the moral and professional foundations of a nation.

For Individuals: Examination malpractice severely distorts the purpose of education, which is the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and intellectual discipline. Students who rely on cheating to succeed often graduate without the requisite competence, critical thinking ability, or problem-solving skills needed in their chosen professions. Adepoju observes that such students possess certificates that do not correspond to their actual capabilities, resulting in frustration, poor job performance, and limited professional growth (66). Over time, these individuals may struggle to adapt to real-world demands, leading to loss of self-confidence, dependence on unethical shortcuts, and, in some cases, engagement in further corrupt practices to conceal incompetence. From a moral standpoint, habitual malpractice also weakens character, normalizes dishonesty, and diminishes personal integrity, making ethical decision-making increasingly difficult in later life. Students who engage in malpractice or benefit from it graduate with inflated credentials but lack the requisite knowledge, skills, and critical thinking abilities for their professions. This deficiency compromises their competence, career performance, and personal development. Moreover, participants’ narratives revealed that involvement in malpractice generates moral dissonance, as students recognize the Islamic prohibition against cheating but feel pressured by societal and familial expectations (Sahih

Muslim 101; Qur'an 55:9). Such cognitive and ethical conflicts can negatively affect character formation and long-term decision-making.

For Educational Institutions: examination malpractice erodes academic credibility and institutional legitimacy. When cheating becomes widespread, certificates issued by affected schools and universities lose their value, both nationally and internationally. Employers begin to question the reliability of graduates, while professional bodies may impose stricter screening measures that further undermine trust in the educational system. Examination bodies and schools associated with malpractice scandals suffer reputational damage, reduced enrollment, and declining public confidence. Over time, this credibility crisis discourages merit-based achievement, demoralizes honest students and teachers, and weakens the overall academic culture. Scholars have noted that once integrity is compromised, institutions shift focus from intellectual excellence to mere “credentialism”, thereby undermining their foundational mission of knowledge production and character formation. Schools, universities, and examination bodies lose credibility when malpractice becomes endemic. Certificates are devalued, trust in academic standards diminishes, and institutional reputations suffer. Teachers’ collusion or administrative compromises further erode confidence in the integrity of examinations. This systemic failure perpetuates a cycle where institutional neglect reinforces unethical practices, making reform efforts more challenging.

For Society: The implications of examination malpractice are particularly grave. A society that produces graduates without competence risks placing unqualified individuals in sensitive sectors such as healthcare, education, engineering, security, and public administration. These “half-baked” graduates may endanger lives, compromise organizational efficiency, and contribute to systemic failure. Yusuf conceptualizes examination malpractice as *zulm* (injustice), emphasizing that it unfairly disadvantages diligent students while rewarding dishonesty, thereby weakening societal trust and cohesion (134). When injustice becomes normalized within education, it often extends into other spheres of social life, reinforcing cycles of corruption and inefficiency. More so, when the core values of a society are eroded due to modern trends, the development of such society is impaired (Omosor, 281).

From ethical perspective, both Islamic and Christian moral traditions converge in condemning examination malpractice as a serious moral offense. Christian ethicists, such as Okonkwo, equate it with stealing and bearing false witness, stressing that it violates divine commandments and social responsibility (77). This convergence underscores the universal moral gravity of the act: malpractice is not merely an academic violation but a threat to moral order and social justice. Societies plagued by academic dishonesty often experience declining ethical standards in governance, weakened rule of law, and diminished national development.

Examination malpractice undermines human capital development, devalues educational qualifications, and fuels broader societal corruption. Its consequences reveal that the problem cannot be addressed solely through punitive measures or administrative reforms. Instead, it requires a holistic response that combines institutional accountability with moral education, character development, and value-based leadership. Without such comprehensive intervention, examination malpractice will continue to compromise both educational integrity and national progress.

Malpractice contributes to broader societal corruption by producing unqualified professionals across vital sectors, including medicine, engineering, education, and governance. Adepoju describes it as a “microcosm of the larger corruption that pervades Nigeria” (66). Societies that reward dishonest behavior risk fostering mediocrity, diminishing public trust, and undermining economic development. From an Islamic perspective, such practices constitute *zulm* (injustice) and breach both worldly accountability and spiritual responsibility (Qur'an 2:188). The perpetuation of malpractice thus weakens social cohesion, ethical standards, and national progress, highlighting the urgency for structural reforms combined with moral education.

8. Islamic Perspective on Examination Malpractice

From an Islamic perspective, examination malpractice is unequivocally condemned as a grave moral, ethical, and spiritual violation. Islam places strong emphasis on honesty (*ṣidq*), justice (*ʿadl*), trustworthiness (*amānah*), and accountability (*masʿūliyyah*), all of which are directly contradicted by acts of cheating and academic dishonesty. The Qurʾan commands fairness and integrity in all human dealings: “And establish weight with justice and do not make deficient the balance” (Qurʾan, 55:9). Although this verse addresses commercial transactions, classical exegetes such as al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr interpret it broadly to encompass all forms of fairness and moral conduct, including intellectual and social responsibilities.

The Prophetic tradition provides even more explicit condemnation. The well-known hadith, “Whoever cheats is not one of us” (Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, 101), establishes cheating as an act fundamentally incompatible with Islamic moral identity. Scholars such as al-Nawawī explain that this statement does not expel the offender from Islam but signifies the seriousness of the sin and its contradiction to the ethical ideals of the Muslim community. Examination malpractice, therefore, is not a minor infraction but a moral offense that undermines communal trust and personal integrity.

Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and ethics classify examination malpractice under *zulm* (injustice) and *ghishsh* (deception). Al-Ghazālī, in *Iḥyāʾ ʿUlūm al-Dīn*, argues that deception in any form corrupts both the soul of the individual and the moral fabric of society, because it allows unmerited advantage and suppresses genuine effort and competence. In the educational context, malpractice rewards dishonesty while disadvantaging diligent students, thereby violating the Qurʾanic principle that effort and merit should determine reward (Qurʾan, 53:39).

Unlike many secular interpretations that frame examination malpractice primarily as an administrative, legal, or institutional failure, Islamic ethical discourse situates it within a comprehensive moral and spiritual framework. Cheating is viewed as a breach of *amānah*, the trust placed on students, teachers, and institutions. The Qurʾan explicitly warns against betraying trust: “O you who believe, do not betray Allah and the Messenger, nor betray your trusts knowingly” (Qurʾan 8:27). Education, from an Islamic viewpoint, is a trust from Allah, and examinations are mechanisms to assess knowledge honestly. Violating this trust has implications beyond academic outcomes; it affects one’s standing before God.

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) further linked moral failure in responsibility to societal decay when he said: “When a matter is entrusted to those who are unfit for it, then await the Hour” (Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, no. 59). Examination malpractice contributes directly to this condition by producing graduates who possess certificates without competence, leading to unqualified professionals in critical sectors such as education, medicine, engineering, and governance. This connection explains why Islamic scholars regard academic dishonesty as a root cause of broader social corruption (*fasād*), as referenced in Qurʾan 30:41.

Moreover, Islamic ethics emphasize *taqwā* (God-consciousness) as an internal regulator of behavior. While surveillance technologies and punitive measures may deter malpractice externally, Islam stresses inner moral restraint grounded in awareness of divine accountability. The Qurʾan repeatedly affirms that Allah is All-Seeing and All-Knowing (Qurʾan 96:14; 49:18), reinforcing the idea that cheating, even when undetected by authorities, remains accountable before God. From an Islamic standpoint, examination malpractice is a multidimensional moral crime: it is deception (*ghishsh*), injustice (*zulm*), betrayal of trust (*amānah*), and a contributor to societal corruption (*fasād*). Islamic ethics therefore offer not only condemnation but also a preventive framework centered on moral education, character formation, and accountability to God. Addressing examination malpractice through this lens moves the discourse beyond punishment toward the cultivation of integrity, responsibility, and excellence (*iḥsān*) in education and national development.

9. Conclusion

Examination malpractice in Nigeria has emerged as a systemic crisis, sustained by parental pressure, institutional weaknesses, technological misuse, and government neglect of teacher welfare. The study’s findings reveal that students, parents, teachers, and examination officials all contribute, Hurna, Yusuf, Enejo, Achara & Abdullahi

whether actively or passively to a culture where dishonesty is normalized and rationalized. While participants recognize the immorality of malpractice, societal pressures, certificate obsession, and inadequate enforcement mechanisms perpetuate its prevalence.

From an Islamic ethical perspective, examination malpractice constitutes both a moral and spiritual violation. The Qur'an explicitly forbids injustice and dishonesty (Qur'an 2:188; 55:9), and the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) declared, "Whoever cheats is not one of us" (Muslim, 101). Teachers' collusion and parental inducements further breach ethical responsibilities, violating trust and undermining societal integrity. The phenomenon thus represents *zulm*, a form of injustice that harms both individuals and society.

If unaddressed, examination malpractice will continue to produce unqualified professionals, erode institutional credibility, devalue certificates, and perpetuate mediocrity and corruption across key sectors. Therefore, combating malpractice is both a national imperative and a religious duty. Structural reforms such as stricter monitoring, technological controls, teacher welfare improvements, and full syllabus coverage must be combined with moral and faith-based education emphasizing honesty, justice, and accountability. Upholding academic integrity safeguards Nigeria's educational standards, fosters competent professionals, and strengthens societal ethics in line with Islamic principles, making urgent reform indispensable.

10. Recommendations

Addressing examination malpractice in Nigeria requires a holistic and multi-stakeholder approach that combines structural reforms with moral and faith-based interventions.

- i. **Parental Reorientation:** Parents must be sensitized to prioritize ethical education over certificate obsession. Community forums, parent-teacher associations (PTAs), and faith-based initiatives should emphasize that supporting honesty and gradual learning aligns with both societal well-being and Islamic teachings. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) condemned cheating categorically, reminding parents of their role in cultivating moral integrity (Muslim, 101).
- ii. **Institutional Reforms:** Schools and examination bodies must ensure full syllabus coverage, strict invigilation, and ethical training for teachers. Teacher collusion and selective teaching practices should be actively discouraged through monitoring, professional development, and accountability mechanisms. Integrating Islamic and moral values into the curriculum can reinforce ethical conduct and discourage reliance on shortcuts.
- iii. **Government and Examination Body Interventions:** Agencies such as WAEC and NECO should strengthen surveillance systems, prosecute offenders transparently, and deploy technology to prevent digital malpractice. Improved teacher welfare including timely salaries, fair remuneration, and professional support is crucial to reduce corruption and restore classroom commitment. As the Prophet stated, "Give the worker his wages before his sweat dries" (Ibn Majah 2443), underscoring both ethical and practical imperatives.
- iv. **Student-Focused Strategies:** Students should be engaged through mentorship programs, academic clubs, and da'wah initiatives that promote patience, diligence, and moral responsibility. Ethical education should highlight that cheating constitutes *zulm* (injustice) and violates both societal norms and divine guidance.
- v. **Technology Regulation:** Digital tools should be managed carefully in examination settings, including computer-based testing, controlled access to devices, and awareness campaigns about the risks and ethical implications of digital malpractice.

By combining parental guidance, institutional accountability, government oversight, student moral education, and regulated technology, these recommendations aim to reduce examination malpractice, uphold academic integrity, and foster a morally upright society in alignment with Islamic principles of justice and honesty.

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