

Christian Ethics and Examination Malpractice: A Biblical and Theological Response

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Article History	Abstract
Original Research Article	<i>Examination malpractice has become one of the most pressing moral and educational challenges confronting Nigeria's school system today. The problem lies in the growing contradiction between the nation's widespread religious identity and the continued tolerance of academic dishonesty. Despite repeated institutional campaigns and sanctions, cheating in examinations persists, revealing a deeper moral and spiritual crisis that threatens the credibility of education and the moral formation of learners. This paper sets out to present a biblical and theological response to examination malpractice from the standpoint of Christian ethics. Using a library-based qualitative methodology, the paper engages scriptural teachings, classical ethical theories, and African moral thought to examine the moral roots and theological dimensions of the problem. The findings reveal that examination malpractice is not merely an administrative or disciplinary offence, but a violation of divine and communal moral order. It reflects the prioritization of success over virtue and the erosion of honesty in the pursuit of quick results. It also reflects the erosion of conscience, the neglect of Christian moral formation, and a growing tendency to value what is convenient rather than what is true. Finally, the paper recommends the need for moral and spiritual renewal through Christian Religious Education, faith-based mentorship, and institutional accountability. Schools, churches, and policymakers are urged to collaborate in rebuilding a culture of integrity grounded in biblical values. When truth, diligence, and honesty become the foundation of learning, education can once again fulfil its transformative purpose of shaping both intellect and character.</i> Keywords: Christian ethics, examination malpractice, morality, biblical theology, academic integrity, Nigeria.
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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Education, in its truest sense, is not merely the transmission of knowledge but the cultivation of character, integrity, and social responsibility. In Nigeria, however, the educational enterprise has been repeatedly undermined by the epidemic of examination malpractice. The phenomenon, which includes impersonation, the use of unauthorized materials, leakage of examination questions, bribery, and digital cheating, has become a recurring moral and academic crisis (Olusesan, 2019). The West African Examinations Council (WAEC) and the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board

(JAMB) continue to report rising incidents of malpractice despite repeated campaigns and sanctions.

From the Christian moral standpoint, this situation reflects a crisis of conscience. The Scriptures emphasize that “a false balance is abomination to the Lord, but a just weight is His delight” (Prov. 11:1, NIV). Truthfulness, honesty, and faithfulness—cardinal Christian virtues—are the moral foundations of genuine education. When students, teachers, or parents collude to subvert academic standards, they not only erode educational credibility but also rebel against God's moral order. Christian ethics insists that moral

behaviour flows from one's relationship with God and neighbour; thus, academic dishonesty violates both divine command and communal trust (Eph. 4:25; Luke 16:10).

Christian Religious Education (CRE) therefore bears a critical mandate: to form morally upright individuals who see learning as a sacred trust. As Ayuba (2023) argue[s], moral instruction grounded in Christian principles is indispensable for national transformation. Examination malpractice, by contrast, represents the triumph of expediency over virtue—a negation of Christian morality and the goals of education itself.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The persistence of examination malpractice in Nigeria reveals a widening gap between moral knowledge and moral action. Despite the presence of Christian Religious Studies in school curricula and the public profession of Christianity by many students and educators, acts of dishonesty remain rampant in examination settings. The problem is not merely one of weak enforcement but of ethical collapse—where conscience is dulled, truth becomes relative, and success is valued above righteousness.

Many Christian students rationalize cheating as a harmless means to survive a corrupt system, while some teachers, invigilators, and administrators, who are also professing Christians, compromise their integrity for personal gain. This contradiction between belief and practice calls for a renewed theological reflection on honesty, accountability, and moral responsibility in education. If Christian ethics does not find practical expression in the conduct of examinations, then its relevance to public life becomes questionable.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this paper is to offer a biblical and theological response to the problem of examination malpractice within the framework of Christian ethics. It seeks to:

- i. Examine the ethical principles that guide Christian conduct in relation to truth and honesty.
- ii. Explore biblical teachings that illuminate the moral implications of cheating and deceit.
- iii. Propose a theological and educational framework for restoring integrity within Nigeria's academic institutions.

1.4 Significance of the Study

This study contributes to the interdisciplinary discourse between theology, ethics, and education. By addressing examination malpractice from a Christian ethical

perspective, it seeks to restore the moral dimension of learning—an area often neglected in secular educational reforms. The paper will be useful to Christian educators, policy makers, and theologians who aim to integrate moral formation into teaching and institutional culture. It also adds to Nigerian scholarship on applied ethics by demonstrating how biblical principles can inform contemporary educational challenges.

1.5 Methodology

This study employs a library-based qualitative method, relying on secondary sources such as journal articles, theological treatises, and biblical texts. The approach is analytical and interpretive, using Christian ethical theory to evaluate examination malpractice as a moral problem. Scriptural analysis provides the theological basis for ethical reflection, while relevant Nigerian and global literature supply contextual depth.

1.6 Scope of the Study

This study is limited to a conceptual and theological analysis of examination malpractice within the context of Christian ethics. It does not involve empirical fieldwork or quantitative data collection. The discussion is confined to Nigeria's educational setting as a representative moral context for the broader African society. The analysis draws on biblical principles, classical ethical theories, and Nigerian scholarly perspectives to evaluate the problem. In this way, the study aims to illuminate the moral and theological implications of examination malpractice rather than to measure its statistical prevalence.

2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Conceptual Clarifications

Examination malpractice, in the context of education, refers to any deliberate act of wrongdoing before, during, or after examinations with the aim of obtaining an unfair advantage. Scholars such as Olusesan (2019) and Ayuba (2023) describe it as a social vice that erodes the moral and intellectual credibility of both students and institutions. The issue is not simply a breach of academic rules; it is a violation of moral order. It constitutes an ethical failure that reflects the weakening of conscience and disregard for integrity—values central to both education and Christianity.

Christian ethics, on the other hand, may be defined as the disciplined reflection on human behaviour in light of the teachings and example of Jesus Christ (Francis, 2020). It is the application of biblical moral principles—such as honesty, justice, love, and faithfulness—to human conduct. Christian ethics is distinct from mere social morality in that it is rooted in divine revelation and guided by the Holy Spirit. Hence, any conduct inconsistent with biblical truth,

including dishonesty in examinations, is a deviation from Christian ethical standards.

2.2 Theoretical Framework: Classical and Theological Foundations

a. Kantian Duty Ethics

Immanuel Kant's *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785) provides one of the most influential bases for moral reasoning. Kant argues that moral actions are those performed out of duty, not self-interest, and that the moral law—expressed in the categorical imperative—demands that one act only according to a maxim that can be universalized. In applying this to examination malpractice, cheating fails Kant's test of universality: if everyone cheated, the very idea of examination would lose meaning. From a Christian viewpoint, this resonates with the biblical call to integrity, where truth is not situational but absolute (Prov. 11:1; Eph. 4:25). Both Kantian and Christian ethics insist that duty must be guided by moral law, not expediency.

b. Fletcher's Situation Ethics

Joseph Fletcher's *Situation Ethics: The New Morality* (1966) emphasizes that moral decisions should be guided by love (*agape*) rather than rigid laws. Fletcher proposes that love is the only absolute norm in Christian decision-making. Applied to examination malpractice, however, this principle cannot justify dishonesty, since genuine love seeks the good of others and upholds justice. To cheat is to harm both oneself and others by corrupting the process of merit and trust. Thus, even within Fletcher's flexible moral reasoning, examination malpractice remains incompatible with Christian love and moral integrity.

c. African Moral Thought

John Mbiti's *African Religions and Philosophy* (1969) highlights that African morality is communal and the welfare of the community is the supreme moral end. Within traditional African society, truthfulness and hard work are esteemed virtues, while deceit brings shame to the individual and dishonour to the community. The communal dimension of African ethics complements Christian teaching that believers are "members of one body" (Rom. 12:5), responsible for each other's moral welfare. Examination malpractice, therefore, is not merely a personal failure but a disruption of communal trust and moral solidarity.

2.3 Integrative Summary

From the foregoing literature, it is clear that examination malpractice cannot be solved merely through administrative reforms; it requires moral reorientation. Kant provides the philosophical basis of moral duty; Fletcher emphasizes the primacy of love; Mbiti adds the

communal dimension of responsibility; and Nigerian theologians highlight the need for faith-based moral renewal. Collectively, these frameworks offer a comprehensive ethical lens for interpreting and responding to examination malpractice from a biblical and theological standpoint.

2.4 Identified Gaps in the Literature

Although numerous studies have addressed the moral and social consequences of examination malpractice in Nigeria, most of them focus on administrative control, punitive measures, or civic ethics rather than on a distinctively theological and biblical foundation for moral reform. Scholars such as Olusesan (2019) and Ujata and Ujata (2024) highlight the prevalence of the problem and its implications for education, but they rarely engage Christian ethical theory as a framework for moral evaluation.

Likewise, works by Ayuba (2023) and Francis (2020) emphasize the role of Christian Religious Education in character formation, yet they stop short of developing a systematic theological argument that integrates Scripture, ethical philosophy, and the Nigerian moral context. There is therefore a conceptual gap in linking classical ethical models (Kantian duty, Fletcher's *agape*, and African communal ethics) with biblical theology as a coherent response to academic dishonesty.

This paper fills that gap by constructing a biblical–theological model of Christian ethics that interprets examination malpractice not merely as a disciplinary offence but as a moral failure before God, requiring spiritual renewal, ethical education, and institutional transformation.

3. BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL RESPONSE

3.1 Biblical Foundations of Moral Integrity

The Bible consistently portrays integrity as an indispensable virtue for God's people. In the Old Testament, moral uprightness was the measure of covenant faithfulness. Proverbs 11:3 declares that "the integrity of the upright guides them, but the unfaithful are destroyed by their duplicity" (NIV). This principle affirms that truthfulness is not optional; it is the moral compass that preserves both individual and communal righteousness. Similarly, the Mosaic commandment, "You shall not steal" (Exod. 20:15), forbids every form of dishonest gain—including cheating and deceit. Examination malpractice, therefore, is not a mere academic infraction but a breach of divine law.

The prophetic writings also link integrity with justice. Amos denounced those who "make the ephah small and the shekel great" (Amos 8:5, NIV)—a metaphor for dishonest practices in trade and judgment. In the same way, dishonest

academic practices pervert justice by rewarding deceit over diligence. The Psalmist's prayer, "Teach me your way, O Lord, that I may walk in your truth" (Ps. 86:11, NIV), captures the heart of Christian ethics: knowledge and truth must coexist in harmony.

In the New Testament, Jesus reinforces this moral demand. His declaration, "Let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'" (Matt. 5:37, NIV), extends to all human dealings, including academic evaluation. The Apostle Paul insists that Christians must "provide things honest in the sight of all men" (Rom. 12:17, KJV) and warns that "a man reaps what he sows" (Gal. 6:7, NIV). Such teachings reveal that dishonesty undermines not only one's relationship with others but also one's standing before God.

3.2 Theological Reflections on Sin, Conscience, and Moral Responsibility

From a theological standpoint, examination malpractice is a manifestation of sin—the willful deviation from God's moral order. Augustine defined sin as turning away from God to the self, a description that fits the selfish pursuit of success through deceit. When a student cheats, the act is not only against institutional regulations but also a rejection of divine authority and personal conscience.

In Christian theology, conscience functions as the inner moral voice that bears witness to the law of God written in the human heart (Rom. 2:15). The repeated violation of this inner witness through habitual malpractice leads to moral desensitization—a hardened conscience that normalizes sin. Such erosion of moral sensitivity explains why some students or even teachers no longer perceive cheating as wrong. Reawakening this moral consciousness through Christian education and discipleship becomes an essential part of the Church's ethical task.

Furthermore, Christian ethics views human responsibility as a divine trust. Every student is accountable to God for the use of talents and opportunities (Matt. 25:14–30). To cheat in an examination is to betray that trust and mismanage divine grace. The parable of the faithful steward (Luke 16:10–12) underscores this truth: "Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much." Moral faithfulness in small things—such as honesty during examinations—reflects readiness for larger responsibilities.

3.3 The Role of the Church and Christian Education

The Church, as the moral and spiritual community of believers, bears a prophetic responsibility to confront ethical failures within society, including educational malpractice. In Nigeria, where many students and educators identify as Christians, silence on the issue reflects moral complacency. Preaching, catechesis, and youth ministry must intentionally address issues of academic honesty,

linking them to broader Christian virtues such as truth, diligence, and stewardship.

Christian Religious Education (CRE) offers a powerful platform for this moral reformation. When properly taught, it shapes conscience and reinforces the biblical vision of learning as a vocation under God. As Francis (2020) asserts, the integration of faith and learning transforms education from a secular pursuit of credentials into a spiritual process of character formation. Hence, Christian educators must model integrity both in conduct and assessment, demonstrating that knowledge without morality is destructive.

3.4 Implications for Moral Renewal in Nigeria's Education System

A biblical–theological approach to examination malpractice has significant implications for educational reform. First, it redefines success in moral rather than material terms. True education should form persons of character, not merely achievers of grades. Second, it calls for a re-evaluation of curricula to include moral and spiritual education that reinforces honesty and accountability. Third, it challenges Christian institutions to lead by example through transparent examination policies and ethical mentorship.

Ultimately, combating examination malpractice requires not only institutional regulations but spiritual renewal. The prophet Jeremiah records God's promise: "I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts" (Jer. 31:33, NIV). Only when moral law is internalized—written on the heart—can external reforms endure. Christian ethics, grounded in the gospel, thus provides a holistic solution to a problem that is as spiritual as it is academic.

4. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

4.1 Integrating Faith and Learning

The relationship between Christian ethics and education is inseparable. Genuine education must not only sharpen the intellect but also form the conscience. In many Nigerian schools, however, the intellectual component has been overemphasized at the expense of moral and spiritual formation. This imbalance explains why students who can recite moral principles still participate in malpractice. Christian Religious Education (CRE) offers a corrective model by integrating cognitive, affective, and behavioural learning outcomes under the authority of Scripture. As Ujata and Ujata (2024) observe, the moral function of Christian education is to rebuild the moral will and purify the motives of the learner.

In practice, this means that teaching Christian ethics should move beyond theoretical exposition to intentional moral cultivation. Students must be guided to see examinations

not merely as institutional hurdles but as opportunities to express honesty, diligence, and stewardship before God. When Christian ethics becomes the interpretive lens through which learners approach all forms of knowledge, examination malpractice ceases to appear as an acceptable shortcut, and moral integrity becomes a habit of the heart.

4.2 The Role of the Christian Teacher

Christian educators stand at the front line of moral formation. They are not only transmitters of knowledge but also moral exemplars whose actions either reinforce or contradict the ethical values they teach. Francis (2020) stresses that moral instruction without moral modelling is ineffective because students learn more from what teachers do than from what they say. Thus, teachers of Christian Religious Studies and other disciplines must embody the biblical virtues of honesty and faithfulness (Luke 16:10).

Moreover, teachers should cultivate classroom environments that reward integrity and discourage dishonesty. This involves transparent grading systems, strict adherence to examination ethics, and consistent disciplinary measures that are fair and redemptive. When educators practice what they preach, they become living testimonies of Christian ethics in action, inspiring students to internalize moral truth.

4.3 The Church as a Partner in Moral Reformation

The Church, both at the congregational and denominational levels, possesses a crucial role in restoring moral consciousness among students and educators. Sermons, youth fellowships, and campus ministries can intentionally address the ethics of academic honesty. Regular ethical seminars and mentorship programmes organized by church bodies can equip young Christians to resist the cultural pressure to cheat.

Beyond preaching, the Church should advocate for public morality through partnerships with educational authorities. By promoting integrity campaigns, Christian schools and seminaries can model ethical best practices and provide policy frameworks for wider adoption. Francis (2020) maintains that when the Church exercises its prophetic responsibility within society, it becomes a moral compass that shapes civic and academic life.

4.4 Educational Policy and Curriculum Reform

At the institutional level, policy reform must integrate moral education into the entire curriculum, not merely as a separate subject. Ethical formation should be a cross-cutting theme embedded in every discipline. This approach aligns with the biblical concept of holistic education—training the head, heart, and hands. Christian institutions, in particular, should ensure that their mission statements and

examination policies reflect clear biblical principles of honesty and accountability.

Furthermore, the inclusion of ethics of assessment courses in teacher-training programmes would prepare future educators to handle examinations responsibly. As Kant's duty ethics implies, obedience to moral law must not depend on convenience but on conviction. Students and teachers who act from duty, motivated by love of God and respect for truth, become the foundation for national moral renewal.

4.5 Towards a Culture of Integrity

Finally, a culture of integrity must replace the prevailing culture of success at any cost. Such transformation begins with a change of worldview—seeing success not as the accumulation of grades but as the development of character. The Christian worldview defines achievement as faithfulness to divine calling rather than the manipulation of systems for personal advantage.

Therefore, educational institutions inspired by Christian ethics must evaluate students not only by what they know but by who they are becoming. When truth, diligence, and honesty are consistently rewarded, a new generation of morally responsible graduates can emerge—men and women who can rebuild Nigeria's collapsing moral infrastructure through the power of example.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

Examination malpractice remains one of the most persistent ethical crises undermining the credibility of Nigeria's educational system. It has eroded moral values, promoted mediocrity, and destroyed the sense of responsibility among students. From the biblical and theological perspective, examination malpractice is not only an academic offence but a sin against God and humanity. It is a theological violation of truth, justice, and faithfulness—virtues central to Christian moral life. The Scripture declares that "Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord, but those who deal truthfully are His delight" (Prov. 12:22, NIV). Therefore, any act of deceit in examinations contradicts the moral expectation of God for His people.

This paper has demonstrated that the problem of examination malpractice in Nigeria is deeply moral and spiritual. It cannot be solved merely through punitive or administrative measures but through moral and spiritual reformation. The integration of Christian ethics into education is crucial because it places truth, love, and responsibility at the heart of learning. Christian Religious Education, when properly taught, can help students to internalize biblical values that promote honesty, diligence, and accountability.

In line with Olusesan (2019), the moral renewal of the Nigerian education system must begin with a re-awakening of conscience and the restoration of integrity among teachers, students, and administrators. The true test of education is not the certificate earned but the character it forms.

5.2 Recommendations

- i. **Re-emphasize Christian Moral Education:** Christian Religious Studies should be taught not only as a cognitive discipline but as a practical guide to moral living.
- ii. **Model Integrity:** Teachers and administrators should serve as moral examples to students by demonstrating honesty and transparency in the conduct of examinations.
- iii. **Strengthen Church–School Partnerships:** Churches should collaborate with schools in promoting integrity campaigns and establishing mentorship programmes that discourage cheating.
- iv. **Institutionalize Ethical Policies:** Educational authorities should develop and enforce policies that promote ethical conduct among teachers and students in both public and private schools.
- v. **Cultivate a Theology of Work and Faithfulness:** Students should be taught that diligence and faithfulness are acts of worship and obedience to God.
- vi. **Further Scholarly Engagement:** Researchers in theology and education should continue to explore ways of integrating biblical principles into academic practices for the moral transformation of society.

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