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ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE STATUS OF STUDENTS INVOLVEMENT IN EXAMINATION MALPRACTICES AND THEIR LEVEL OF RELIGIOSITY IN LAGOS STATE

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ABSTRACT

This paper interrogated how and why students who claim to be religious still take part in exam cheating. It asks why some students go to church or mosque but still break school rules during tests. The study also checks if being religious really helps students behave better during exams. Many students now face pressure to pass at all cost. Some copy or use phones to cheat. Some buy answers or get help from others in illegal ways. These acts go against school rules and moral teachings. The paper explains that religion alone is not enough to stop cheating. A student can pray and still cheat if the faith is not real. Some religious students cheat because their friends do too. Social media adds more pressure. Students want good results to post online. The paper says exam malpractice is a deep problem. It is not just breaking school rules. It is also a moral issue. If students really follow the values of their religion, they will not cheat. Schools, families and religious groups must work together to fix this. Teaching morals and showing good examples are key. Real faith plus strong values can help reduce cheating and bring back honesty in schools.

Keywords: Ethical implications, Examination malpractices and Religiosity

Introduction

Examination malpractice, the practice of cheating or breaking rules during tests or exams in schools, is a problem common in many schools today. It includes copying answers, using notes secretly, or getting someone else to take the exam for one (Dajwan *et al.*, 2021). Many students take part in different forms of examination malpractice, which affect the whole education system because it gives wrong results about what students really know (Olabode, 2019). An issue of concern, and of course which motivates this study is the fact that Nigerians, including school students, are highly religious people and religiosity is often thought to help students behave better, maintaining moral values and standards. Religion teaches many values like honesty, respect, and self-control. These values should help students avoid cheating. On the contrary, this is not always true in practice.

Sometimes students who claim to be religious still cheat when the pressure is too much (Okoye *et al.*, 2024). Religiosity means how strong a person's faith or religious belief is. It shows how much a person follows religious rules and values in daily life. Some believe that religious students are less likely to cheat because their faith teaches honesty and fairness (Isibor, Dania & Osagie, 2020). This raises a big question: Do religious students cheat less? The answer is not clear because even in religious communities, exam cheating happens. Ethics in schools is very important. It helps build good character and trust. When students cheat, they hurt themselves and others. They lose respect for rules and may keep bad habits into their work life. Schools must teach both knowledge and good moral values to prepare students for life (Olabode, 2019).

This paper argues that even though many students say they are religious, cheating during exams remains high. This is a serious ethical issue. Ethics means knowing what is right and wrong and acting in a fair way. When students cheat, they break these ethical rules. This hurts other students who study hard and lowers the trust people have in the school system (Mkwachu & Mwila, 2024). Examination malpractice has grown fast. Many students cheat to get good grades and meet family or school pressure, which creates a big problem for teachers and schools who want to keep education honest. It also makes it hard for employers to trust that graduates have the skills they need (Dajwan *et al.*, 2021).

This paper discusses the link between religiosity and exam malpractice. It shows that having strong religious beliefs does not always stop cheating, and why this is a serious ethical problem for schools and society. The discussion shows the connection among religiosity, moral thinking and behavior. The idea is that if religiosity is strong, moral thinking should be strong too, which should lead to less cheating. On the contrary, the reality is different. Examination malpractice is a serious problem in Lagos State and Nigeria. Religiosity is about how much someone follows their faith. Many believe religious students cheat less, but exam cheating still happens a lot. This is an ethical problem that schools and society must address to keep education fair and honest. It is therefore imperative to examine the ethical implications of the status of students' involvement in examination malpractices and their level of religiosity in Lagos state.

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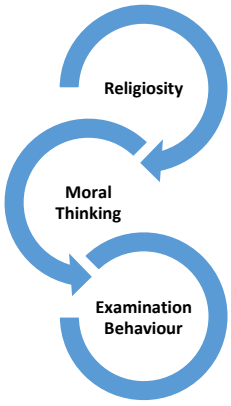


Figure 1: Link between Religiosity and Ethics

Overview of Examination Malpractice

Examination malpractice, which is the practice of breaking rules during exams to get unfair advantage (Sampson & Williams, 2020), a form of cheating that negatively affects the education system. When students cheat, their grades do not show what they really know. This can make it hard for schools and employers to trust exam results (Obasi & Okereke, 2021). There are many types of exam malpractice. Copying from another student is the most common. Some students bring notes or cheat sheets into exams. Others use phones or electronic devices to find answers during tests. Impersonation happens when someone else takes the exam for a student. Some students even bribe exam officials or teachers to get good grades (Uchenna & Osuji, 2020; Uzoma *et al.*, 2022). Students cheat for many reasons. One big reason is pressure. Many students feel they must pass exams to avoid failing or disappointing their families (Miller & Stokes, 2022). Fear of failure drives some to cheat. Some students also copy because they want to keep up with their friends who cheat (Nwafor, 2021). Poor teaching and lack of preparation can make students feel cheating is the only way to pass (Ugochukwu *et al.*, 2019).

Many students have been caught cheating during important exams like the WAEC and JAMB. Some cases involve using phones or bringing written notes into the exam hall (Olatoye & Ige, 2022). In some schools, students openly talk about cheating as a normal way to pass (Olajide, 2022). This shows the problem is not just hidden but part of the school culture. The exam bodies in Nigeria try to stop cheating by setting strict rules. They use surveillance cameras, search students before exams, and punish those caught cheating (Uchenna & Osuji, 2020). However, these measures have not stopped cheating fully. Many students still find ways to cheat because the pressure is strong and enforcement is sometimes weak. This

problem affects not just schools but the whole country. When students cheat, they do not learn what they should. This lowers the quality of education and the skills available in the workforce (Uzoma *et al.*, 2022). Nigeria loses trust in its education system and faces challenges in development because graduates lack true knowledge (Ogunyemi, 2023). Efforts to reduce exam malpractice include teaching students about honesty and ethics. Schools also try to improve teaching quality so students feel ready for exams. Some use technology to monitor exams and prevent cheating. Stronger laws and punishments are also suggested to stop repeat offenders (Olatoye & Ige, 2022).

In summary, examination malpractice is cheating during exams. It takes many forms such as copying, impersonation, and bribery. Students cheat because of pressure, fear, peer influence, and poor teaching. Cheating is common and harms education quality. Though efforts exist to stop it, the problem continues. This shows the need for more action to protect exam fairness.

Religiosity and Moral Behavior in Students

Religiosity means how serious a person is with their religion. It is not just about going to church or mosque. It also includes how people act when no one is watching. It covers what they believe deep in their hearts and how they live their daily lives (Thompson *et al.*, 2019). For many students, religion teaches them to avoid bad actions and to follow rules. Religion usually teaches values like truth, kindness, respect, and self-control. These values help students make better choices in school and life. A good student who follows religious teachings may not cheat during exams because they know it is wrong (Adeyemi & Adewale, 2020). They learn that cheating is not just breaking school rules. It is also a sin. Many religions speak clearly about honesty. The Bible says do not steal. The Quran warns against lying. These messages are shared often in churches, mosques, and religious gatherings. So, when students take part in prayers and listen to sermons, they hear these lessons again and again. Over time these messages shape their actions (Balogun, 2021).

However, not all students who go to church or mosque behave well. Some only follow religion on the outside. They may pray in public but cheat in exams. This means that while they show religious habits, their actions are not shaped by true belief. In many Nigerian schools, some students still cheat even though they say they are religious (Aina & Akinyemi, 2019). Religiosity can be broken into two parts. One is outward actions. These include attending services, fasting, or praying. The other part is inward belief. This shows how much a person fears God and avoids wrong even in secret (Situma & Wasike, 2020). Students with strong inward belief are less likely to cheat. They know God sees them even when no one else does. Research in some Nigerian universities shows that many students do religious activities. But not all of them act right during exams. This gap shows that some people

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follow religion only for show. They fear what people think more than what God thinks (Brown & Clarke, 2021). When students truly believe in their religion, it affects their moral actions. They are more likely to act with discipline and honesty. They see cheating as a sin, not just a school offence. But if they only act religious for people to see, it has little effect on their choices (Longkat *et al.*, 2021).

A study by Eze (2021) found that many students use smart devices to cheat. Yet some of them still go to religious meetings. This shows that outward religion does not always stop wrong behavior. True belief must go beyond public acts. It must reach the heart. Ezeani and Imoize (2021) also shared that, values from religion must be real and deep to change students. In schools today some students show high levels of religious behavior. They attend all the services. But during exams they still cheat. Others may not show much religion outside but fear God deeply and avoid cheating. What matters most is not how loud a student prays but how well they follow what their religion teaches (Adeyemi & Adewale, 2020). Let us also not forget that some students are pushed into cheating by pressure. Even religious students may fall if they face hard school systems or fear failure. That is why schools need to teach values and not just punish bad behaviour.

Table 1: Levels of Religiosity Among Students and Their Moral Outcomes

Level of Religiosity	Religious Behavior	Moral Behavior During Exams
High Religiosity	Attends services and prays	Avoids cheating
Moderate Religiosity	Sometimes prays	May cheat under pressure
Low Religiosity	Rarely joins religious acts	Often cheats during exams

The table above shows a simple link. Students with stronger religious belief tend to avoid cheating. Those with weak belief often cheat. But this is not always the case. Some students with low outward religion still act right if they have strong personal values. To reduce cheating, schools must help students build deep moral values. They must support honest living not just punish cheating. Religion can help if it is real and true. But it must go beyond words and public acts. Students must believe in what is right and act it out every day. In the end, true religion should make students better people. It should guide them to do the right thing even when no one is looking. If religiosity is true and not fake, it helps reduce cheating in exams. But if it is only for show, it changes nothing.

Ethical Concerns and Social Implications of Examination Malpractices

Cheating in exams is not just breaking school rules. It is a big moral issue. It shows dishonesty. It shows a lack of self-control. It also harms the values students are meant to learn. When students cheat, they pretend to know what they don't. This is a lie and it goes against the truth (Catacutan, 2019). Lying is

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wrong in all cultures and religions. Cheating weakens a student's character. It builds a habit of looking for shortcuts. A student who cheats today may lie at work tomorrow. Such habits affect trust in schools and in society (Odongo *et al.*, 2021). When people stop trusting one another everything falls apart. Teamwork fails. Leaders lose respect. Honest people feel cheated. Religious teachings speak clearly about cheating. Christianity says, "Thou shall not steal." Copying answers is the same as stealing someone's work. It is also stealing a grade that was not earned (Akunne *et al.*, 2021). Islam teaches against lies and false actions. It warns people to avoid dishonesty in all forms. Impersonating someone in an exam is clearly wrong in Islam (Adzrolo *et al.*, Asamoah-Gyimah, Cobbinah & Annan-Bre, 2021).

Traditional African religion teaches that actions that bring shame to family or community are wrong. Giving bribes to pass an exam brings shame. It destroys the value of hard work (Adekunmisi, 2021). These beliefs all agree that cheating is wrong and shameful. Many students who cheat are not caught. But that does not make them clean. Inside their hearts they know they did wrong. It can affect their peace of mind. It may also make them believe cheating is normal. This weakens their honesty in future (Ntuli & Gumbo, 2019). A student who cheats may later lie on a job or in marriage. Cheating also kills fairness. Exams are meant to show who worked hard and who didn't. But when some students cheat, they get high scores without effort. This makes others feel like hard work does not pay (Shrestha *et al.*, 2019). It can make good students feel frustrated. When cheating becomes common it leads to a fake society where people pretend to be what they are not. A society built on fake success cannot grow well. Leaders who cheated in school may cheat with public money. Doctors who cheated may give wrong treatment. Engineers who cheated may build poor roads. All this brings danger and loss to many people (Thompson *et al.*, 2019).

Table 2: Ethical Teachings of Different Religions on Cheating

Religion	**Key Ethical Teaching**	**Exam Malpractice Equivalent**
Christianity	"Thou shall not steal"	Copying answers
Islam	"Avoid dishonesty and falsehood"	Impersonation
Traditional Beliefs	"Do not bring shame to your family"	Bribery in exams

Some students still say everyone cheats so it is no big deal. Meanwhile, wrong things do not become right just because many people do them (Adzrolo *et al.*, 2021). Wrong is still wrong. Education should help students grow in good behavior not just in knowledge. Teachers and schools also have a role. When schools fail to watch over exams properly students feel free to cheat. Some teachers even help students cheat for money or favor. This makes things worse (Adekunmisi, 2021). Schools must stand strong and teach students why cheating is harmful. Parents too must talk to their children. They must teach

values at home. If a child learns truth and honesty from home they are less likely to cheat at school (Akunne *et al.*, 2021). Religious leaders should also talk about exam cheating often. Some students pray but still cheat. This shows they don't really follow the values they claim to believe (Catacutan, 2019). To stop cheating we must teach students that real success comes from hard work. Exams should not be about fear. They should be about learning and showing what one knows. When students feel safe and supported, they are less likely to cheat (Shrestha *et al.*, 2019). Schools should reward honesty and discipline. They should also punish cheating fairly so others learn. In the end cheating in exams may look small. But it brings big problems. It affects the person who cheats. It hurts others. It damages trust and honesty in society. It also goes against all major religious beliefs (Odongo *et al.*, 2021). We must take strong steps to stop it for the good of all.

Factors Affecting the Connection between Religiosity and Examination Behavior

A student's moral choices do not depend on religion alone. Many other things shape their actions. These include home training, peer group, and school life. A child who grows up in a home where parents lie or cheat may not see anything wrong with exam cheating. What children see at home often becomes their normal (Longkat *et al.*, 2021). When parents pressure them to pass at all costs, many students feel they must cheat to meet expectations (Brown and Clarke, 2021). School also matters. When schools lack rules or teachers ignore cheating, students think cheating is fine. If the school does not punish wrong actions, students keep doing them. Many schools lack clear discipline on this issue. Some teachers even help students cheat to protect the school's name (Mkwachu & Mwila, 2024).

Peer group has a strong pull. If a student's friends cheat, they may feel forced to copy them. They do not want to feel left out. Some fear failing or being laughed at if they do not join in. This pressure can be stronger than their faith or home training (Ezeani and Imoize, 2021). Sometimes students go into exams planning to do the right thing but end up cheating because of group influence. Religious teachings are clear. Most religions say cheating is wrong. But many students still cheat. This shows that some students only act religious in public. They attend prayers, wear religious clothes, or quote holy texts, but their actions tell a different story. This is called religious hypocrisy. The person looks holy but acts otherwise. Some students do this to fit into religious groups or avoid being judged. But deep inside, their values may not match their actions (Balogun, 2021).

External religiosity means being religious only on the outside. It's about following religious customs for show. This does not always stop someone from doing wrong. A student may fast or go to church or mosque but still lie or cheat during exams (Okoye *et al.*, 2024). The fear of being caught may be the only thing stopping them. The pressure to succeed has also grown because of social

media. Today's students are always online. They see pictures of people who seem successful and happy. Many want to be like them. This can make students feel like passing by force is the only way to have a good life. Students may cheat not because they are lazy but because they are scared of failing. Some think good grades will bring them the life they see online (Eze, 2021). Also, students believe society respects grades more than hard work. Some think they need high scores to get jobs or respect. This belief pushes them to cheat during exams. It becomes worse when they see others cheat and go free. In many places, those who cheat and pass get rewarded. Those who fail get mocked. This teaches young people that cheating works (Ezeani & Imoize, 2021).

Religion should teach truth and self-control. But when it becomes only about going to church or mosque, it loses meaning. True faith shows in actions. If a student truly fears God or follows the values of their religion, they will not cheat, even when they can (Mkwachu & Mwila, 2024). But sadly, some students use religion only when it is easy. They drop it when it becomes hard. In many African homes, shame is a strong tool. Traditional belief says children must not bring shame to the family. Cheating in school is shameful. Yet, when parents support or ignore it, the child gets confused. The family loses the power to correct the child's path (Ndukanio & Silas, 2023). So, cheating in exams is not only about the student's faith. It is about what they see at home, who their friends are, how their school behaves, and the kind of society they live in. Even the most religious student can fall if the pressure is too much. Real change must start with parents, teachers, and leaders living by example. If society starts to value truth over quick success, students will stop seeing cheating as the only way out.

Review of Related Studies

Dajwan *et al.* (2021) studied what causes exam malpractice in Nigerian schools and how it affects the nation. They said this problem is serious and hurting the education system. The study explained what exam malpractice means and listed common types like cheating and impersonation. It also looked at reasons why students cheat, such as pressure to pass, poor study habits, and weak punishments. The paper showed how this issue affects national growth. It harms job quality and lowers trust in education. The study used a questionnaire titled "Examination Malpractices: A Threat to Educational Reforms in Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria." It had 28 questions and was tested on 150 people. The tool showed strong reliability with a score of 0.84. Four assistants helped collect data. Results were checked using simple percentages to make the findings clear. The authors gave key suggestions to stop exam cheating. These include better counseling for students, strong awareness campaigns, and careful checks during school admissions and job recruitment. The authors said more focus should be on practical skills and not only on paper certificates. They warned against turning education into a political tool. The

study made it clear that cheating hurts not just schools but also the country's progress.

Isibor *et al.* (2020) looked at why university students plan to cheat in exams. The study focused on how common cheating is and who starts it. It also checked how student age, gender, and feelings about exams relate to cheating. The study used a survey with 350 students from three types of universities in Edo State—one federal, one state, and one private. Students answered questions about their experiences and plans around cheating. The answers were studied using simple charts and deeper analysis. The results showed that "giraffing"—copying from others during exams—was the most common form of cheating. More males and students in public schools were found likely to cheat. Two big reasons stood out. First, students felt they had not prepared well. Second, they thought the exams would be hard. These feelings made them want to cheat more. The study said fixing these problems may reduce cheating. Schools and the government should help students study better and make exams less scary. This could lower the need or wish to cheat. The reearchers gave new facts on who cheats and why, which can help school leaders plan better ways to stop it. Their work moved beyond just talking about cheating by showing real data from students. The study shows how feelings and school type play a role in examination cheating.

Olabode (2019) studied how exam cheating is handled in Christian-based schools. The study said exam cheating has become too common. It happens in almost every level of education and even outside school systems. The author focused on how this problem grows inside Christian schools. These schools often stress morals and religious values. They teach students to follow Christian rules during classes, meals, and prayers. But cheating still happens in these schools. This worries school leaders who expect better behavior from students raised on faith. The paper asked why such behavior still grows in faith-based places. It suggested that even with prayer and moral talk, students face pressure to pass and may still cheat. Olabode looked at the moral and spiritual parts of exam behavior. He said it was wrong for such acts to happen where values are taught every day. The paper called for a full change in how schools train students, not just in books but also in morals. It asked schools to teach values daily and make students proud of being honest. The author said leaders in faith-based schools must set good examples and take the problem seriously.

Mkwachu and Mwila (2024) studied how exam malpractice hurts learning in schools in Kinondoni, Tanzania. The authors wanted to know how this problem affects school quality and trust in the system. They found cheating in exams is common and is now seen as a threat to education. This research used both numbers and stories to get full results. The team asked 20 teachers, 80 students, 20 parents, 4 school heads, and 4 education officers from public and private schools. The data came from forms, talks, and watching behavior during exams. They used simple

math and theme checking to study answers. The tools were checked for truth and quality. The findings were clear. Students who cheat may pass but learn less. This brings down the value of their certificates. It also reduces trust in the schools and makes it harder for honest students to get jobs. The study said cheating damages long-term progress. To stop this, schools must follow strict rules. They should also use better checks and involve the whole community. The authors said using technology like CCTV and computer-based exams may help. They called for schools and leaders to take action fast. This study warns that if cheating continues, more students will leave school without real skills.

Okoye *et al.* (2024) looked at why exam cheating is rising in Nigerian colleges. They wanted to find out how this problem affects schools and society. The study pointed to poor systems, lack of morals, and low job chances as key reasons. They used forms and talks to gather their data. Their work focused on facts and real voices from schools. Two theories helped guide the study. The first was Strain Theory by Robert Merton. It showed how students cheat due to pressure and lack of support. The second was Social Learning Theory by Albert Bandura. It explained how students copy bad habits from others around them. The study found that cheating is now very common in Nigerian schools. It weakens values and trust. It also slows growth in the education system. Some cheat to pass, while others do it because they see others get away with it. This hurts fair competition and good learning. The study said this problem now affects other parts of life like jobs and law. It called for strong punishment to stop cheating. The authors said action must be serious and not taken lightly. They also said schools should teach honesty and keep a close watch during tests. The study ended by warning that cheating could ruin the future if left unchecked.

Ndukanio and Silas (2023) studied why some students cheat in exams in Kenya's medical colleges. They looked at five schools and used forms to ask both teachers and students. Each campus gave four teachers and twenty final-year students for the study. The total number of people asked was 120. The study used simple tools and looked at numbers like percentages to find answers. The main goal was to learn what makes students cheat. Most people thought students did not cheat because they were unprepared. Instead, the study found strong rules were in place. Teachers were alert during exams and knew how cheating was done. Many said teachers did not help students cheat. Most said they did not allow any smuggled papers in the exam hall. Also, most teachers said the way students sat during exams did not cause cheating. The study found teachers took the problem seriously. They made sure students followed rules. Only a few said teachers were part of the cheating problem. The study showed that strong exam checks work. It said school leaders must close all weak points that allow cheating.

Conclusion

This paper looked at how students cheat in exams and how their faith connects to it. It

showed that being religious does not always stop students from cheating. Some students go to church or mosque but still cheat during tests, which means faith alone is not enough. What matters is if the person truly follows what their religion teaches. Some students are only religious on the outside. Inside, they still lie and cheat when they get the chance. The study also showed that home training, peer pressure, and school system play big roles. Students who grow up in homes where truth is not taught may not see cheating as wrong. When they see friends cheat and pass, they feel pushed to do the same. Schools that do not punish exam cheating also help make the problem worse. Today's students also face pressure to do well by force. Many believe that success is all about grades. This pushes them to cheat during exams, even when they know it is wrong. Social media has made this worse. Students want to show off results online. Some even cheat just to get praise from others. The main point is that exam malpractice is not just a school problem. It is an ethical and social problem. It shows that many students lack deep moral training. Real faith should stop a person from doing wrong even when no one is watching. When a person truly fears God, they will choose to do what is right. If students live by real religious values, cheating will go down. But this can only happen when the faith is real, not fake. Religion must reach the heart. It must guide what the person does in secret and in public. That is the only way to stop this problem from growing.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. Moral training must begin early. Schools should teach good values alongside religion. Subjects like civic education should be taken seriously. Students must learn that cheating is wrong and that truth is better than high grades earned through lies.
2. Religious groups in schools must also help. It is not enough to pray and preach. They should guide students and offer real support. They should talk about the pressure that students face and how to deal with it in honest ways; these groups can become safe spaces where students feel free to ask for help.
3. Parents also have work to do. They must show their children the right path. If parents lie or cheat in business or daily life, children may copy them. Parents should teach truth by action, not just by words.
4. Schools must be firm on exam rules. Cheating should come with clear punishment. But schools should also help students handle exam stress. Guidance counselors should talk to students and help them plan better. This will make them feel less pressure to cheat.
5. Lastly, religion must not stay on the surface. It must guide real life. A student who prays but cheats is not truly religious. Faith must show in how the student lives. This is what will reduce exam cheating in schools.

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