

Combating the Menace of Examination Malpractice: The Islamic Perspective

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Abstract

Education represents the cornerstone of the society and the major instrument through which it can attain accelerated development. To date, there is not any acceptable measurement of formal education other than examination. It is however unfortunate that this globally embraced yardstick has been abused and compromised through examination malpractice. The main objective of this paper is to emphasize the essence of education in the society, examine the concept of examination malpractice, identify its causes and document its negative effects on the society. Generally, expository methodology was used for the study while historical approach was resorted to where necessary. The paper finds that although there are no categorical Islamic texts on examination malpractice, there are various Qur'anic and Prophetic texts that condemn cheating, deceit, and non-fulfillment of obligations which are manifestations of examination malpractices. Based on the above, the paper suggests God-consciousness, better funding of education and more pro-active participation of parents as measures that would serve as antidote to this educational bane.

Keywords

Examination, malpractices, Islam, Muslim, cheating, morality

Introduction

The fact that Islam puts high premium on knowledge acquisition cannot be over-emphasised. This is the reason why the first revealed word in the Glorious Qur'ân is "Read". It is noteworthy that the word "Read" is broader than "Recite". While the former deals with all aspects of knowledge, the latter focuses on religious verses alone. In fact, Allâh dwells on reproduction and the developments of foetus or embryo which are scientific issues in the first verses He communicated to His most beloved Prophet (P.B.U.H.) thus:

"Read in the name of your Lord Who created. He created man from a clinging substance (i.e. sperm). Read, and your Lord is the most Generous. (It is He) Who taught through the pen. He taught man which he knew not". (Q 96: 1-5)

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In the light of the above, it is apparent that Islamic education covers all aspects of knowledge and it is not limited, contrary to popular belief, to spiritual or religious education alone. As rightly observed by Muhammad Asad (1934: 80)

Islam has never been a barrier to progress and science. It appreciates the intellectual activities of man to such a degree as to place him above the angels. No other religion went so far in asserting the predominance of reason and, consequently, of learning, above all other manifestations of life. If we conform ourselves to the principles of this religion we cannot wish to eliminate modern learning out of our life. We wish to learn and to progress and to become scientifically and economically as efficient as the western nations are.

While Islam enjoins its adherents to acquire and embrace all useful forms of knowledge, it is noteworthy that religious education occupies a vantage position in what a Muslim should familiarise himself/herself with. From the Islamic point-of-view, spiritual education is the bedrock of all knowledge. So, in Islam, to be truly religious, one has to acquire some basic religious knowledge which will not be only useful in the worship of one's Creator but also serve to guide one in relating harmoniously with other creatures (man and other animals). Islam thus is an agent of positive change and a torch to lighten the way for others who have gone astray.

In other words, the totality of knowledge and education implies that without knowledge about God, about life, about creation, about the requirements of worship and about the fulfillment of man's mission, one cannot worship God and, consequently, one cannot live happily and successfully within oneself and with one's other country-men. Therefore, a devout Muslim is expected to regularly read the Glorious Qur'an so that he/she will know Allah's injunctions on how to live the best way and relate with others (Adedimeji, 2015).

The educational system is the instrument a society uses to equip its entire people to lead productive public lives and fulfil personal lives according to their talent and interest. This system must be such that gifted individuals have full opportunity to develop their skills; it must give scope for the training of a leadership group and at the same time provide for the development of all the vocational abilities needed for the creation of a progressive and democratic society.

The quality of education that we impart to our youth and the priority at which we rate it contribute largely to the formation of the attitudes they carry over into public life. So whatever kind of seed we sow in the classroom, the manner in which we nurture it and the strength which it imbibes in its various stages of growth will all determine the harvest that the nation will reap in the

form of its educated youth coming out of the schools, colleges and universities. The imprints of these institutions of learning will become indelible marks clearly visible in all fields of our national life; be it a clerk in an office, a soldier in the battle field, a school master in a village school, a University Professor, a bureaucrat running the administration in a seat of power. This great impact of education on the national character is understandable once we recognise both the short term as well as long term power education wields over all who go through its process. Historical evidence proves that nations were made or unmade, battles lost and won, revolution wrought, so much so that entire empires collapsed or emerged due to the educational systems of various peoples of the World. Ancient Greece and Rome at the peak of their political glory were also the seats of learning and a source of intellectual guidance and inspiration for the entire known world, but when intellectual decadence struck, it attacked the very fabric of society and Greece and Rome were no more.

Conceptual Clarifications

Examination malpractices can be defined as those conducts during examination that can be regarded as unethical or improper (See: <http://dawahigeria.com/articles/education-and-science/examination-malpractices>). In other words, examination malpractices are acts of deliberate wrong doings that are contrary to official examination rules designed to place a candidate at an unfair advantage or disadvantage. To some other people, it is any form of illegal and unauthorised assistance given to a single candidate or group of candidates in an examination. Illegal and unauthorised in the sense that these actions are prohibited by examination bodies concerned (See: <http://www.asorock.com/-People/asorockdefault.aspx?tabid=24&FeaturesID=472>). These acts are illegal, irreligious and immoral in whatever way they are perpetrated as experience shows that they can be carried out singlehandedly by a student or a group of students or in collaboration with others such as parents, teachers, supervisors, invigilators, printers and anybody or group of people before, during or after examination in order to obtain undeserved marks or grades.

It is amazing as well as mind-boggling that in the contemporary world, and Nigeria in particular, some people don't even write the examination at all. All that they do is to connive with other fraudulent people in the examination boards who eventually will help them in slotting in their solved papers directly awarding them the results for papers they did not write. When the result is eventually released, these people end up scoring higher grade than those who genuinely worked for their grade. Any morally upright individual will be shocked by the submission of a man who has been involved in examination monitoring and supervision in Nigeria for many years that "despite the malpractice in Nigeria in the last almost a decade, Nigeria remains the poorest in Mathematics and English language in WAEC amongst the other four West African Countries. About seventy percent of Private and Government schools across the country indulge in examination fraud. More than seventy five

percent of SSCE certificate holders in the last five years are brandishing results that are not their effort. Many of these students today have 'As' in English but can hardly construct flawless sentences in English or speak fluent well tensed English" (See: <http://www.asorock.com/People/aso-rockdefault.aspx?tabid=2-4&FeaturesID=472>).

Examination Malpractice: Forms and Manifestations

Well-meaning researchers and sanity-seekers in the polity have identified various ways people who indulge in these nefarious activities commit this heinous crime. They include, but not always limited to the following:

1. Allotment of choice examination centre.
2. Appointment of choice invigilating staff.
3. Leaking information about question papers, identification of invigilating staff and paper setters/examiners.
4. Bribing/influencing/terrorising examination staff, invigilators and paper setters/examiners.
5. Possessing cheating material (written/printed/electronic device etc.) or copying from such material.
6. Giving/receiving assistance to copy in examination centre.
7. Misrepresentation/impersonation.
8. Changing/replacing roll numbers and answer books.
9. Disclosing candidates' identity in answer books.
10. Misconduct, carrying offensive weapons, refusing/resisting the lawful orders of supervisory staff, creating disturbance, instigating other candidates, threatening or assaulting the invigilating staff, impeding the progress of examination in or outside the examination.
11. Smuggling answer books in or outside the examination centre.
12. Addition to answer books after examination.
13. Manipulating marks through fictitious entries in award list/examination register.
14. Sale of examination centre to organised gangs where cheating/unfair means are arranged.
15. Helping the candidates to use unfair means in any form and by any one in or outside the examination centre.
16. Helping the candidates in viva voce, practical examination.
17. Attempting or abetting the commission of any of the afore-said acts.
18. Any other act considered dishonest, unfair, corrupt etc (See: research-education-edu.blogspot.com/2009/07/examination-malpractice.html).

Islamic Perspective of Examination Malpractice

Since there was no formal education during the time of Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H.), his rightly-guided successors and, indeed, the first and middle

generations of Muslims, it would be difficult to pinpoint Islamic texts that speak about the subject matter of discussion. However, a closer look of the forms of examination malpractices shows that our all-encompassing religion does not completely overlook this menace.

Firstly, since learning, sponsorship of wards, enrolment in schools and participation in examinations are exercises and activities with laid-down rules and regulations that a Muslim freely enters into, a Muslim is religiously bound to respect and honour the terms of his agreements with other party/parties. Since all the above-mentioned aspects of cheating come under non-fulfillment of obligations, all these acts are totally unislamic and are, therefore, punishable by Allâh. The Exalted Allâh says:

[O You who believe! fulfill (all your) obligations]. [Q, 5:1]

In another instance in the Glorious Qur'ân, He also said:

[Fulfill (every) engagement/covenant. Surely, engagement/covenant will be questioned about (on the Day of Reckoning!)]. [Q, 17: 34]

Reiterating the fact that terms of mutual agreement should be honoured, the Messenger of Allâh (P.B.U.H) said: **(Muslims are bound to the conditions of their contracts) {Narrated by Abu Dawood}**

So when the results come out and he has now excelled because he cheated; how can the Muslim be proud enough to look people in the face and claim what he did not merit? How would he feel within himself knowing fully well that he does not deserve the grade he has?

Cheating and deception are despicable characteristics that are beneath a decent person. Intentionally distorting the truth in order to mislead others contradicts the values of honesty, which requires an attitude of sincerity, straightforwardness, and fairness that leaves no room for cheating, lying, trickery, or deceit. There are many texts from the Qur'ân and the Sunnah conveying the meaning that cheating, whether the target be Muslims or non-Muslims, is forbidden.

Accepting the guidance of Islam leads a person to truthfulness, which means a person completely avoids distortion, cheating, and back-stabbing. The Prophet of Islam (P.B.U.H.) said:

"Whoever bears arms against us is not one of us, and whoever cheats us is not one of us." (Saheeh Muslim)

According to another report, the Prophet (P.B.U.H.) passed by a pile of food in the market. He put his hand inside it and felt dampness, although the surface was dry. He said: **"O owner of the food, what is this?"** The man said, 'It was damaged by rain, O Messenger of God.' He (P.B.U.H.) said, **'Why did you not put the rain-damaged food on top so that people could see it! Whoever cheats us is not one of us.'** (Saheeh Muslim)

Muslim society is based on purity of feeling, love, sincerity towards every Muslim, and fulfilment of promises to every member of society. Its members are endowed with piety, truthfulness, and faithfulness. Cheating and deception are alien characters in contrast to the noble character of a true Muslim. There is no room in it for swindlers, double crossers, tricksters, or traitors.

Islam views cheating and deception as heinous sins, a source of shame to the one guilty of committing them, both in this world and the next. The Prophet, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, did not merely denounce them by excluding them from the Muslim community in this world, he also announced that on the Day of Judgment every traitor would be raised carrying the flag of his betrayal. A caller will cry out from the vast arena of judgment, pointing to him, drawing attention to him. This ugly scenario in which cheats and betrayers of trust will find themselves is what the Prophet (P.B.U.H.) paints thus:

"Every traitor will have a banner on the Day of Resurrection and it will be said: This is the betrayer of so-and-so." (Saheeh Al-Bukhari)

The shame of traitors – men and women - will be immense. Those who thought that their betrayal had been forgotten will find it right there, exposed for the whole world to see on banners raised high held by their own hands!

Their shame will increase even more when they meet with the Prophet of Mercy (P.B.U.H.), the advocate of the sinners on that terrifying and horrible Day. Their crime is of such enormity that it will deprive them of divine mercy and the Prophet's intercession. This fact is affirmed by the Prophet of Islam (P.B.U.H.) thus:

"God said: There are three whom I will oppose on the Day of Resurrection: a man who gave his word and then betrayed it; a man who sold a free man into slavery and kept the money; and a man who hired someone, benefited from his labor, then did not pay his wages." (Saheeh Al-Bukhari)

One should steer clear of all the various forms of deceit and deception present in today's society.

Predisposing Factors of Examination Malpractice

The major cause of all forms of examination malpractices is lack of faith or weakness of morality prevalent in the modern-day society. It is unfortunate that despite the fact that several hundreds of mosques and other so-called houses of religious worship abound in our midst, examination malpractices and other forms of criminalities are still prevalent among our youths who unfortunately are being encouraged by some elderly undesirable elements of the society. As Muslims, what we must first understand is the basic connotation and

requirements of our religion. As we all know and seem to always forget, the root meaning of the word Islam which the Arabic word "*Silm*" is to enter into peace. Islam therefore, means entering into peace. In this sense, a Muslim is one who makes peace with God and man. Peace with God implies complete submission to His Will, and peace with man is not only to refrain from evil or injury to another but also to do good to him. The name "Islam", was given to the religion by Allâh Himself when He says:

[This day I have perfected for you your religion and completed My favour on you, and chosen for you Islam as a religion]. [Q, 5:3]

It is a fact that any religion worthy of the name should make better human beings of its adherents. Good manners and noble qualities of mind and character enjoy a place of crucial importance in the Structure of Islamic Teachings. As the Holy Qur'ân says, Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H.) was evolved by Allâh as the best example in all patterns of sound morality. The essence of taking Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H.) as our role model in all ramifications is unequivocally mentioned by Allâh in these glittering words:

[Indeed, in the Messenger of Allâh you (all Muslims) have a good example (to follow) for anyone who hopes In (the Meeting with) Allâh and the Last Day and remembers Allâh much]. [Q, 33:21]

His immediate followers too emulated these patterns, hence, the reference to them as *Raashiduun* (properly guided). The Prophet (P.B.U.H.) himself was quoted to have said: **"I have been sent by God to teach moral virtues and to promote them to highest perfection."** [Reported by Imam Malik in his popular *Al-Muwattâ*]

Apart from this major cause, there are other mundane causes that are either traceable to students, teachers and the society at large. I will try to enumerate them in line with these three categories.

The cause that emanates from the students is their inadequate preparation and desire to pass at all costs. As proper preparation prevents poor performance, as the popular saying goes, there is no doubt that poor preparation promotes poor performance.

On the part of the teachers, it is observed that most of them are not devoted to their profession. Closely related to this factor is the fact that most of them are ill-trained and ill-equipped to discharge their duty efficiently and effectively.

On the part of the government and the society at large, we could see that influence of the peer groups, higher expectation of the parents, poor learning environment, absence of observational strategies, poor monitoring by the invigilators, aiding and abetting of crime by those who should put checks to this nefarious activity, to mention but a few, are all contributory factors to the phenomenon of examination malpractice.

Consequences of Examination Malpractices on the Society

There is no doubt that examination malpractice promotes laziness, indolence and idleness that are detrimental to the mental and intellectual growth of our students. It is unfortunate that the attitude of a great percentage of our students now is "Why do I have to work so hard, not sleeping in the day and night, when I can easily pass my examination by just parting with a small amount of money?" Good candidates are tempted to believe that 'if you cannot beat them, join them' especially as they see other candidates get away with their corrupt behaviours. This behaviour may be contagious as more and more candidates tend to join in examination malpractice. They believe that even if they are caught, they will get away with it and the end will justify the means. As far as the Muslim is concerned, his attitude must not be part of this evil.

Closely related to the above effect is the fact that many good students have been denied admission opportunities into learning institutions by the corrupt ones who through examination malpractice have better scores and grades. The best brains that could help in research and development are likely to be thrown out or frustrated while seeking admission.

Also, examination malpractices lead to undue delay of processing of examination scores and grades. Every year, many students are caught for engaging in various examination malpractices which need to be investigated before results are released. Though some results are withheld pending the determination of the cases, some are decided before results are released. This extends processing time.

Another effect is incompetence on the part of the products of our schools and tertiary institutions which leads to inefficiency of labour. The gravity of this effect can be viewed from the reality of a medical student who cheated throughout his/her academic sojourn in the university and was adjudged to be a qualified physician upon completion of his/her studies. The consequences of his/her prescription of drugs and/or carrying out of medical operation on the patients that patronise him/her are better imagined than experienced. What about teachers who cannot competently handle the subject they are trained to teach? There is a chain effect of examination malpractices on the educational system and the society as a whole. This has a serious implication on the gross domestic product of the country. It also has effect on the general quality and standard.

The last but not the least of these effects is the fact that candidates who possess certificates they cannot defend are dissatisfied. They have psychological problems arising from the way they acquired their certificates. In some instances, they will not be bold to present the certificates because they can be presented with tasks that will require them to defend the certificates.

Combating the Conundrum of Examination Malpractices: The Way Forward

Allâh's consciousness is the most veritable solution and most effective deterrent from engaging in examination malpractice and other forms of sins and criminalities. A Muslim should always be conscious of his Lord in whatever he does. It is the unbelievers who adopt the saying "the end justifies the means". As for the Muslim, the end and the means through which it is achieved must both be justified. A Muslim should remember Allâh any time he feels like committing any act that is a sin, against the laws of Allâh. He should always remember that even if all the people of this world cannot see him, Allâh is forever aware of what he does, and his act is being recorded. Allâh says:

[Fear Allâh, and know that Allâh is well acquainted with all things]. [Q, 2:231]

Closely related to the above is the fact that all stakeholders in the educational sector should always remember that the Prophet (P.B.U.H.) said:

"... and he who made a claim of anything, which (in fact) did not belong to him, is not amongst us; he should make his abode in Fire". The punishment of the Fire cannot be compared to any punishment. Allâh says: **[Fear Allâh much and know that Allâh is Severe in punishment]. (Q2:196)**

Collaborating this fact, the Prophet (P.B.U.H.) was reported to have also said: **"On the Day of Resurrection the feet of the son of Adam will not move away till he is questioned about five matters: ". .. how he acquired his property, on what he spent it, and what he did regarding what he knew."** (Tirmidhi)

How will the person who has cheated to get a certificate and earned property through it answer this question "how he acquired his property ... " May Allâh save us from this evil (Aameen).

Another weapon through which examination malpractices and other social vices can be totally eradicated or drastically reduced in our society is the inculcation of virtues and teaching of essence of morality to our teeming youths. History reveals that a large number of the polytheists embraced Islam on account of their being impressed by the sublime morals and manners of the holy Prophet (P.B.U.H.). In the same manner, it has been suggested that the main reason for the largest conversion to Islam between 1906 and 1910 among the Russians was the higher moral level of life in Muslim society (See: <http://unilorin.edu.ng/publications/agboola/MORALITY%20IN%20THE%20PERSPECTIVES%20OF%20ISLAM%20AND%20AFREL.htm>).

Hâfiz Ibrahim, an Arab Muslim poet and moralist in one of his poems identifies morality as pre-requisite for success in the human endeavours. He says:

فإذا رزقت خليفة محمودة فقد اصطفاك مقسم الأرزاق

(Meaning: If you are endowed with a praise-worthy character, you have indeed been blessed by the Dispenser of fortunes).

فالنَّاسُ هَذَا حَظَّهُ مَالٌ وَذَا عِلْمٌ وَذَاكَ مَكَارِمُ الْخُلُقِ

(Meaning: Men are gifted differently, some are endowed with wealth and some with knowledge while others are blessed with noble conduct).

وَالْمَالُ إِنْ لَمْ تَدْخُرْهُ مَحْصِنًا بِالْعِلْمِ كَانَ نَهَايَةَ الْإِخْفَاقِ

(Meaning: Money if not saved and fortified with knowledge, it will lead to object of poverty).

وَالْعِلْمُ إِنْ لَمْ تَكْتَفِهِ شَمَائِلٌ تَعْلِيهِ كَانَ مَطْيَاةَ الْإِخْفَاقِ

(Meaning: And knowledge, if not surrounded with good morals, which will extol it, is just a mount ridden to failure).

لَا تَحْسِبَنَّ الْعِلْمَ يَنْفَعُ وَحْدَهُ مَا لَمْ يَتَوَجَّ رَبِّهِ بِخُلُقٍ

(Meaning: Do not expect that knowledge alone will be useful, if its owner is not crowned with virtuous conducts) (Abubakar I.A. (n.d.), 6/64-65)

Lastly, teachers in our private and public educational institutions should be better paid as the level of their motivation will surely influence their level of knowledge dissemination. The unqualified among them should either be weeded out or re-trained to make them relevant to their professional call. Measures should also be put into place to make sure that students learn in conducive environment. Parents should also play their part to ensure that their wards study ahead of time so that they would not have to resort to cheating before they pass examinations.

Conclusion

The grave dangers of examination malpractice have been clearly established in this paper. Also, its negative effects have been identified consequent upon the forms the menace takes. Islamic approach of God-consciousness and fear of Allah is suggested as the major antidote to this hydra-headed problem. The paper equally calls on all relevant stakeholders to be alive to their responsibilities in order to ensure that sanity is instilled in the twin processes of education and evaluation.

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