

## **Do Religiously Committed Students Engage in Less Examination Malpractice Behaviours?**

By

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### **Abstract**

*Religion is a powerful motivator of behaviours. Many have claimed that their religions have transformed their lives positively. This study therefore investigated relationship between students' religious commitment and level of involvement in examination malpractice behaviours. This was to determine whether the claim of transforming effect of religion on human behaviours has influence on level of involvement in examination malpractices. A sample of two hundred and eight randomly selected senior secondary school students in eight randomly selected secondary schools in Ogun State, Nigeria was used for the study. Data were analysed using simple linear regression, Pearson product-moment correlation and t-test statistics. There is negative significant relationship between student religious commitment and level of involvement in examination malpractice behaviours ( $r = -0.196, p < 0.05$ ). Thus the higher the level of religious commitment, the lower the level of involvement in examination malpractice behaviours. Thus religiously committed students are less likely to engage in examination malpractices. Male students engaged more in examination malpractices than their female counterparts ( $t = 2.123, p < 0.05$ ). Religious leaders need to emphasise principles of honesty and integrity in their preaching so that religion can be used as a tool for reducing the menace of examination malpractices.*

**Keywords:** Religious commitment, students, examination malpractices, religion, morality, Nigeria

### **1. Introduction**

Every religion tries to preach morality. No religion will admonish its devotees to cheat in examinations. This has to do with religion and morality. In fact religion needs morality in order to gain acceptance as genuine, whereas morality may not have anything to do with religion. Many people who practice one religion or the other live immoral lives, while a number of atheists and agnostics who practice no religion lives exemplary lives of high moral standard. Omoregbe (2007) asserted that religion is a perspective from which morality can be viewed and that high moral standard can be attained with or without religion.

Stevens (1996) noted that religion is an extremely powerful motivator of behaviours and it forms a strong basis for cultural identify and is a common yardstick by which people compare themselves with others. Religion among other things provides explanation or comfort and unifies the different social groups. Religious instructions can therefore help to structure people's lives. Religion cannot be separated from culture since every culture has its own religion(s). Any belief embraced by any religion can therefore be passed into the cultural system even in multi-religious and multi-lingual society like Nigeria. Scholars

like Reynolds and Tanner (1983) therefore believe religious structures enhance human survival, adaptation and reproduction.

In Nigeria, for example, many people have claimed that their religions have transformed their lives. Religion therefore can probably be harnessed to transform some bad behaviours in human beings such as examination malpractices. Many studies have reported that religion reduces the tendency towards or incidence of deviant and immoral behaviours (Sharma,1996; Schludermann, Schludermann, Needham & Mulenga, 2001; Olatoye,2007; Strawbridge, Shema, Cohen & Kaplan, 2008). However, Johnson (1987) reported no significant relationship between religious commitment and incidence of deviant behaviours. This implies religious commitment may have nothing to do with expression of good behaviours. Another view about religion is expressed by La Barre (1991) who described religion as an “archosis” contributing to human ignorance by providing false explanations in people. He asserted that religion inhibits natural development of the society. With this view, religion may not be a tool in curing societal vices such as examination malpractices. Similarly, Gledhill (2005) reported that religious belief can cause damage to a society, contributing towards high murder rates, abortion, sexual promiscuity and suicide. She further explained that higher rates of belief in and worship of a creator correlate with higher rates of homicide, juvenile and early adult morality, STD infection rates, teen pregnancy and abortion in prosperous democracies. People who have negative view of religion will not recommend religious instructions as a mean of curbing the menace of examination malpractices.

Examination malpractice can be regarded as any action taken, by an individual or groups of individuals to violate the laid down rules guiding the conduct of an examination. Such violation of rules can be committed before, during or after an examination by the candidate(s) sitting for the examination, friends, teachers, invigilators, examination officials, printers and any individual with the sole aim of influencing the mark or grade of the candidate(s). Question papers can be bought before an examination, the candidate can exchange answers during an examination and marks can also be altered after an examination. These fact shows that examination malpractice can also take place outside the examination hall.

Many reasons have been advanced for examination malpractice. Chuta (1995) noted that the chief among the factors responsible for examination malpractice is undue importance that society attaches to certificate and paper qualification. In Nigeria, you can only secure appointment into most of the vacant positions only if you posses certain certificates to show that you have passed certain examinations. Balogun (1995) also observed that promotion of teachers and principals in certain places depends on the success of their students in their final examinations. This tends to abet malpractice as teachers and principals in such schools collude with examination officials to perpetuate examination malpractices.

In Nigeria, establishment of schools especially private primary and secondary schools usually have religious undertone. Many institutions provide significant amount of time for religions instructions during the school hours. In such schools, students’ class time, meal time and leisure hours are partly focused on religious issues. If religion commitment is therefore found to have positive significant relationship with examination malpractice, religious instructions would therefore be a good way to change students’ orientation about examination malpractice. This study will therefore provide empirical information on the relationship between religious commitment and examination malpractice behaviours.

### ***Research Questions***

The following research questions guided the researchers in the study:

- (i) What is the relationship between student level of religious commitment and level of involvement in examination malpractice?
- (ii) To what extent would level of religious commitment influence level of involvement in examination malpractice
- (iii) Is there any significant difference between male and female students’

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- (a) religious commitment and
  - (b) level of examination malpractice?
- (iv) Is there any significant difference between Christian and Muslim students' level of examination malpractice?

## 2. Methodology

### *Research Design*

This study adopted an *expost facto* research design. In such design, the dependent and independent variables have already occurred, the researcher cannot manipulate them.

### *Sampling Procedure*

Eight secondary schools were randomly selected from the major zones in Ijebu Area of Ogun State (in Nigeria) namely Ijebu-Ode, Ijebu-Igbo and Ago-Iwoye. A sample of two hundred and eight students was randomly selected from these schools. All the schools selected are government-owned. Questionnaires were administered to the Senior Secondary School three (SSS3) students in each school. Twenty-six students from each selected school participated in the study. The reason for choosing this level is because many students at this level have been exposed to different types of examinations both within and outside their schools and should have developed some attitude towards examinations. This category of students who are in their final year in secondary school are also matured and would be able to read and respond to the items on the questionnaires better than other categories of students. The average age of the students is 17.2 years.

### *Instruments*

Two questionnaires were designed and used to collect data. They are:

- (i) Students' Religious Commitment Questionnaire (SRCQ)
- (ii) Students' Examination Malpractice Questionnaire (SEMQ).

Both questionnaires are four-point Likert scale type. In SRCQ, students were asked to indicate their feelings by ticking any of "Strongly Agree", "Agree", "Disagree" and "Strongly Disagree" in front of each statement. In a similar manner, students were asked to indicate their feelings by ticking "Always", "Most of the time", "Sometimes" and "Never" in front of each of the SEMQ items.

#### *Examples of items on the SRCQ:*

- 'The totality of ones life should not be committed to any religion'
- 'My religion does not take too much of my time'
- 'I hardly miss, any programme in my church/mosque/ religious centre.'

#### *Examples of items on SEMQ:*

- 'Straining and rotating my neck to catch a glimpse of other students' answers'
- 'Writing of materials into the examination hall'

The SRCQ and SEMQ respectively have 14 and 25 items on them. The students were not asked to indicate their names on the questionnaires so as to make the responses anonymous. In Nigeria students freely respond to questionnaires on examination malpractices once they know their responses will not be used against them. Many students freely confess the nature of malpractices they engage in when discussing with their friends after an examination. The instruments were given to experts for suggestions and comments before coming up with the final versions. The Cronbach alpha reliability co-efficients of SRCQ and SEMQ are 0.791 and 0.723 respectively.

### *Data Analysis*

Data were analysed using Pearson product-moment correlation, t-test and simple linear regression. Research questions 1 and 2 were answered using Pearson product-moment correlation and simple linear

regression respectively. Research questions 3 and 4 were answered using t-test. All the research questions were answered at 0.05 level of confidence using a two-tailed test.

### 3. Results

#### Research Question 1

What is the relationship between student level of religious commitment and level of involvement in examination malpractice?

**Table 1: Relationship between students’ religious commitment and involvement in examination malpractice**

Variables	Religious Commitment	Examination Malpractice
Religious Commitment	1.000	
Sig(two-tailed)	0.000	
N	208	
Examination Malpractice	-0.196*	1.00
Sig(Two-tailed)	0.000	0.000
N	208	208

*\*Significant at 0.05 level of confidence (2-tailed)*

Religious commitment has a negative but significant relationship with level of examination malpractices. This implies that the more committed students are to religion, the less they engage in examination malpractice. There is an inverse relationship between religious commitment and examination malpractices. Thus the higher the students’ religious commitment, the lower the level of involvement in examination malpractices. Also, the lower the student religious commitment, the higher the level of involvement in examination malpractices.

#### Research Question 2

To what extent would level of religious commitment influence level of involvement in examination malpractice?

**Table 2: Influence of students’ religious commitment on involvement in examination malpractice behaviours.**

Variables	R	R Square	Adjust R Square	Std Error of the Estimate	F	Sig.	Remark
Religious commitment	0.196	0.038	0.134	15.667	8.160	0.005	*

*\* Significant at 0.05 level of confidence.*

The independent variable; religious commitment significantly predicts examination malpractice. Religious commitment accounts for 3.8% (R Square = 0.038) of the variance in examination malpractice. Though this percentage is low, it is however significant. The low percentage merely indicates there are other factors not considered in this study that could also be responsible for examination malpractices.

#### Research Question 3

Is there any significant difference between male and female students’ (a) religious commitment; (b) level of examination malpractice?

**Table 3: Comparison of Male and Female Students' Religious Commitment and Involvement in Examination Malpractices.**

Variables	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Std. Error	df	t	Sig.	Remark
Religious Commitment	Male	111	37.586	4.111	0.390	204	-0.186	0.853	NS
	Female	95	37.695	4.322	0.444				
Exam. Malpractice	Male	111	44.469	17.050	1.618	204	2.123	0.35	*
	Female	95	39.779	14.207	1.458				

\* Significant at 0.05 level of confidence

NS=Not Significant at 0.05 level of confidence

There is no significant difference in religious commitment between male and female students. However, male students engage in examination malpractices more than their female counterparts.

#### Research Question 4

Is there any significant difference between Christian and Muslim students' level of examination malpractice?

**Table 4: Comparison of Christian and Muslim students' involvement in examination malpractice**

Variables	N	Mean	Std.	Std. Error	df	t	Sig. Value	Remark
Christians	118	40.907	15.847	1.459	199	-1.397	0.164	NS
Muslims	83	44.060	15.638	1.717				

NS = Not Significant at 0.05 level of confidence (2-tailed)

There is no significant difference between Christian and Muslim students' level of involvement in examination malpractice.

## 4. Discussion of Findings

Religious commitment has a negative but significant relationship with level of examination malpractices. This implies that the more committed students are to religion, the less they engage in examination malpractices. Mere religious affiliation is not the solution to examination malpractices but allowing religious teaching to guide one's behaviours. Students' religious commitment significantly predicts examination malpractice behaviours. This implies that religious commitment has a kind of influence or association with examination malpractices.

Ugodulunwa (2001) reported that most students from Catholic, Protestant and Islamic backgrounds have positive disposition to cheating in examinations. She also reported interaction effect of gender, course of study and religion on students' disposition to examination malpractices. This also tends to suggest that mere religious affiliation does not influence students' disposition to examination malpractices. In the present study, religious affiliation seems not to be important in students' level of involvement in examination malpractices. This fact is buttressed by the fact that there is no significant difference in Christian and Muslim students' involvement in examination malpractices. The higher the level of religious commitment, the lower the level of involvement in examination malpractices. This inverse relationship suggests that religious instructions in schools can be a way of curbing examination malpractices. Odumuyiwa (2001) opined that lack of religious and moral instructions in schools is responsible for the increase in the rate of crime in the society.

Fagbemi (2001) described the various anti-malpractice efforts being adopted by West African Examinations Council (WAEC), which include public enlightenment campaign. This campaign was formally launched in 1984, which indirectly gave birth to Examination Ethics Crusade. It is hoped that if religious leaders in the country are well involved in this campaign, it can be a way of reducing the menace of examination malpractices.

There is no society that is devoid of religion and religious activities. Even in an atheistic society, it is presumed that such society recognises the place of religion because believing that there is no God is a kind of belief (Odumuyiwa, 2001). Religion as an integrative force preaches social, political and economic morality. Every religion that is worth the name prohibits killing, lying and other social vices. There is no other phenomenon which moulds and controls human life as much as religion does. Human beings have given up not only their possessions, but even their lives for their religious beliefs (Adefarasin, 2004). Human beings have given themselves up to be slaughtered, to be eaten by lions, to be thrown into fire and be burnt alive, rather than renounce their religious beliefs. Thus, religion has such a powerful grip on human beings such that it cannot be ignored in human society. Unfortunately, religion which is meant to be the platform of peace, stability, progress, development and unity, has apparently been used by many to disrupt the wellbeing of persons and society. Religion if properly used can be used to preach against the menace of examination malpractices.

Odumuyiwa (2001) is of the opinion that lack of religious and moral instructions in schools, colleges and even universities in Nigeria is responsible for increase in the rate of crime. It is unfortunate that though religious centres are proliferating in Nigeria, the country is still engulfed in social and moral decadence and crime perpetrated by some followers of Christianity and Islam.

Male students are reported in this study to be more involved in examination malpractice behaviours. This is contrary to the findings reported by Salami (1994), Omotosho (1999) and Ugodulunwa (2001) that there is no significant difference between male and female students' attitude to cheating. On gender and religious commitment, the present study reported no significant difference between male and female students. However, Stark (2002) reported that women were more likely than men to belong to and attend church, pray, to say religion is a very important part of their lives, to read the Bible and believe in life after death. Stark further revealed this is not limited to Christianity; various religious movements have generally converted more women than men.

## **5. Conclusion and Recommendations**

Mere religious affiliation without being committed to the principles and practice of religion will not positively affect behaviours. The time has come when religious leaders in the society and religious instructors in schools should emphasize the need to practice the tenets of their religions. No religion allows cheating in examinations. Teachers and counsellors should enlighten the students that there is no shortcut to success than hard work. Success is more of a product of handwork than mere luck. Luck works for people who are hardworking. Students should also be taught on the value of honesty and moral integrity. Extra classes for teaching and revision should be organized when examination is approaching. Students should also be tutored on principles of studying and writing examination. They should be taught on how to answer different questions and importance of time management in examinations.

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