

Exam Ethics and Economic Sustainability Nexus: The Case of Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Economic sustainability involves the optimal use of resources which requires the adoption of an efficient and effective economic infrastructure programme. Economic infrastructure in itself connotes a complex of structures, physical and institutional designed for the sustainability of a given system. At the heart of all economic infrastructure programme is the application of time tested knowledge. The acquisition and application of such knowledge requires individuals with integrity whose knowledge capability have been tested through standard examinations. However, the increasing incidence of unethical practices in relation to examinations in Nigeria makes the application of acquired knowledge unreliable and casts doubt on the quality of education in the country and the reliability of Nigerian certificates. Moreover, the ranking of Nigeria as number one on the world's exam malpractice index in 2012 and the fact that an average of ₦25billion per annum is generated from exam malpractice is a serious cause for concern with implications for sustainable economic development. It is capable of distorting macroeconomic stability and contributing to the social ills of unemployment if left unaddressed. The objective of the research is to highlight the economic implications of unethical practices relating to examinations in Nigeria. Using analytic reasoning, the research found that unethical behaviours relating to exams in Nigeria is capable of adversely affecting the financial system, distorting macroeconomic stability and contributing to unemployment. The research recommends that the craze for certificate acquisition must be de-emphasized and recognition be given to proven time-tested knowledge. There is also the need for all to abide by exam ethics and for the government to support the acquisition and application of standard knowledge through advance learning.

Key words: Exam ethics, Economic sustainability, Exam malpractice, Examination and Economic infrastructure.

INTRODUCTION

Ethics help to define the procedure for any given process or action. It connotes the moral principles guiding an event or a course of action. It defines how we do what we do. The objective of any economic infrastructure programme is to improve the productive potential of an economy by strengthening and supporting the growth of local industries and providing further opportunities for growth in the system through investment in enabling strategic infrastructure. The success of any economic infrastructure programme will depend greatly on the philosophical ethics applied to achieve stated objectives of the economic infrastructure programme. Generally, infrastructure refers to the basic physical systems or amenities of a business or nation which includes transportation, communication, sewage, water and electric systems among others that are necessary for the efficient functioning and sustenance of the system. It refers to the internal facilities of a country that make economic activities possible, such as communication, transportation, and distribution networks, financial institutions and markets, as well as energy supply systems (<http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/html>).

However, at the heart of every economic infrastructure is the application of quality time-tested knowledge and acquired standard skill. Such standard knowledge and skill must be obtained in line with the ethics of knowledge acquisition and international best practice. This is very important in view of the fact that tertiary education is the most efficient and effective way of developing the high technical capacity for economic growth and sustainable development. To test the reliability of such knowledge, individuals who have acquired such knowledge are subjected to tests through examinations – written, oral or practical. The objective of such test is to certify that the individuals with such knowledge can reliably apply their knowledge and skill in such a way that the economy is sustainable. In Nigeria however, examinations are marred with unethical practices. Exam rackets rakes in ₦25billion per annum and Nigeria ranks top on the world's exam malpractice index (EMI) noted the Director General (DG) of the National Orientation Agency (NOA) in July,2012.

Examination is an important tool in assessment. It is by far the best way to tell the efficacy and reliability of someone or something on any matter. Thus it occupies a strategic place in our lives as individuals, our institutions and society at large. While examination could take many forms ranging from oral to written and sometimes practical, the objective is to ascertain if the object under examination can be used for the intended purpose, reliably stand the test of time or live up to required expectation. The functioning of the economic system is based on tested and proven theories that explain the behavior of individuals, firms and industries. The educational system provides the avenue for developing these theories and producing individuals who would use these theories or develop new ones and formulate policies that are in line with international best practice and apply them for the development and sustainability of the economy. However, the rot in the educational system ranging from incessant strikes, mismanagement of funds, cultism and above all examination malpractice, casts a gloomy outlook to the sustainability of the entire economic system. To that end there is an urgent and important need to address the issue of exam ethics in Nigerian institutions. The objective of this research therefore is to (1) bring to the fore the significance of ethics in exams (2) reveal the extent to which ethics in exams in Nigeria had depreciated (3) reveal the various types of unethical behaviors in exams (4) proffer possible best solutions to such unethical activities. The paper has five sections. Section one introduces the topic while section two reviews relevant literatures. Section three discusses the methodology and section four deals with the discussions while section five discusses the conclusions and recommendations.

Literature Review

To begin with ethics, also known as moral philosophy, is a branch of philosophy that involves systematizing, defending and recommending concepts of right and wrong conduct (Wikipedia.com). The term comes from the Greek word *ethos*, which means "character". Ethics refers to the rules of conduct recognized in respect to a particular class of human actions or a particular group or culture, e.g medical ethics; Christian ethics, school ethics and so on. Ethics, according to Collins Concise Dictionary of 21st Century (2001), is amoral principle or a set of moral values held by an individual or group. Succinctly put, ethics is a set of principles that govern good human conduct. Alutu & Aluede (2005) assert that ethics can simply be defined as laid down guidelines, principles, codes of conduct, rules and regulations guiding the behaviour of a group or an organization. According to De Russy (2003) professional ethics begins from college campus and therefore governing boards should establish clear standards for ethical behaviors and ensure compliance with those standards as well as develop procedures to encourage honest scholarship and academic integrity. In his words faulty organizational structures encourage irresponsible actions. Thus he relates poor organizational structure to the cause of unethical behaviors in examinations. However, the free online dictionary defined examination is an assessment intended to measure the test taker's knowledge, skill, physical fitness, intelligent quotient, aptitude or classification in any or several topics. Such examination may take the form of oral questionings, writing on paper, answering questions using a computer or being confined in an area requiring the examinee to perform a set of physical tasks.

Examinations could vary in style, content, rigor and requirements. For instance, there are closed and open examinations. In a closed book examination, the examinee is often required to rely upon his/her memory to respond to specific questions while in an open book examination, the examinee may use one or more supplementary tools such as a reference book or calculator when responding to the questions. In either case examination involves testing ones' ability or knowledge on a given subject with a view to ascertaining his proficiency and reliability in the use or application of such knowledge in a related area. Adeyemi and Akindele (2002) defined examination as the process, which comes after a period of learning, and it is an organized assessment of an individual's performance, on the basis of his or her institutional procedural exposure. In his words Nsude (1998) noted that examinations are tools intended for the evaluation of the progress made by an individual, in the course of acquiring skills or knowledge over a period. Barnard and Lanwerys (1967) defined examination as "a test of knowledge acquired or more generally a means of assessing intellectual capacity or ability. For his part, Good (1973) defined examination, as the process by which the ability or achievement of the students in any subject is tested. Thus examination provides the basis for verifying the value and effectiveness not just of a teaching method but also of a candidate's ability. It serves to measure the student's level of achievement during the period of study. The New Webster's Dictionary of the English Language (1992) defines examination as a formal, written, spoken or practical test especially at school or college in order to examine how much an individual know about a subject or what he can do.

On the other hand, the Examination Malpractice Act of Nigeria (1999), explains examination malpractice as any act of omission or commission by a person who in anticipation of, before, during or after any examination fraudulently secure any unfair advantage for himself or any other person in such a manner that contravenes the rules and

regulations to the extent of undermining the validity, reliability, authenticity of the examination and ultimately the integrity of the certificate issued. Examination malpractice is also defined as a deliberate act of wrong doing, contrary to official rules, and is designed to place a candidate at an unfair advantage or disadvantage; it is a careless, illegal or unacceptable behaviour by a candidate in a formal test of his knowledge or ability in a particular subject (Philemon, 2007). It could also be said to be an act of omission or commission which compromises the validity and integrity of any examination (Okwu, 2006). Examination malpractice is counter-practice that is against ethics of examination, it is an act of disrespect to all rules and regulations guiding the good conduct of any examination or any evaluation process (Badejo and Gandonu 2012). According to Obimba (2002) examination malpractice is a corrupt practice and irregular behaviour exhibited by the candidates or any person charged with conduct of examination in or outside the examination hall before, during or after examination. Further, Wilayat (2009) defined examination malpractice as an intentional and planned unlawful activity to place a candidate at an unfair advantage or disadvantage. From Wilayat's definition we note that exam malpractice is not only seen from an advantageous position but even when an examiner deliberately put an examinee in a disadvantaged position to negatively affect his results that is also an exam malpractice act. Onuka and Amusan (2008) defines examination malpractice as any dishonest, unlawful or unauthorized act or deed performed by a candidate on his own or in collaboration with others like fellow students, guardians, parents, teachers, head teachers, examination officials, supervisors, invigilators, printers, security officers and any person or group of people before, during or after examination in order to get undeserved and unfair marks or grades. Awanbor (2004) Examination malpractice is the utilization of unusual ways and approaches to achieve a score or set of scores that is generally beyond the mental capability or the state of preparedness of a student for that examination. Also Salami (1994), posited that examination malpractice is an improper and dishonest act associated with examination with the intention of obtaining undeserved and unfair advantage. In his words, Sooze (2004) defined examination malpractices as all those illegal and prohibited means which students utilize to pass examinations.

Therefore, we can define exam malpractice as any illegal behaviour by candidates before, during or after the examination which directly or indirectly falsify the ability of the students with a view to attaining success cheaply. Exam malpractice can be carried outside or inside an examination hall and usually involves all indecent and unbecoming acts that violate the ethics of exam. Highlighting the importance of ethical behaviours in institutions of learning Denga & Denga (1998) noted that education is a fulcrum on which all other developmental facets are hinged. This means that our institutions of learning should provide individuals with the intellectual capacity for developing the requisite professionalism that is critical to sustainable development. Achieving this requires that ethics of learning are strictly followed. Thus exam ethics defines the 'rules of engagement' for knowledge acquisition. Exam ethics are designed to prevent exam malpractice in relation to examinations. We can therefore define exam ethics as those rules of conduct recognized as acceptable in respect to individuals both the examiner and the examinee before, during and after examinations.

Since we are relating exam ethics to economic sustainability, it becomes necessary to define what economic sustainability is. Economic sustainability relates to all decisions and activities that involve the optimal utilization of resources available to a nation such that in the very long term nobody is worse off and the economy is on a steady growth path. It has also been defined as the use of various strategies for employing existing resources optimally so that a responsible and beneficial balance can be achieved over the longer term. Thus it is the term used to refer to the various strategies that make it possible to use available resources to their best advantage. The idea is to promote the use of those resources in a way that is both efficient and responsible, and likely to provide long-term benefits. It is about ensuring that organizations or economies are "built to last" and are able to function efficiently over a long period of time. It does not imply being self-sustaining but being able to sustain the economy in the light of the inevitable interdependence nature of every economy. Owing to these definitions, it follows that for an economy to continue on a steady growth path that is to be sustainable, resources (human, natural and otherwise) must be used optimally for long term benefit.

In the case of human resources, its optimal use will require continuous training and acquisition of relevant standard knowledge. The acquisition of such relevant standard knowledge is guaranteed through education and examination. Afterwards, examinations are required to provide proof of knowledge acquisition and the reliability of its application. Where such examinations are marred by unethical behaviors before, during and after exams, the optimal use of human resources for economic sustainability apparently becomes hardly achievable. Who should abide by exam ethics? Since exam ethics are rules of conduct for examinations and since examiners and examinees are to be present during examinations, both must abide by the rule of conduct as prescribed by the institution. While different

institutions may have slightly differing rules for most institutions there are basic examination rules that are generally acceptable. Exam ethic should begin from the lecture halls as the lecturer (examiner) delivers his lectures and prepares the students for upcoming exams and the wider society. This implies that lecturers must be of good conduct in terms of speech, dressing, time-keeping and above all must be up-to-date in their field of study. Being updated creates a psychological feeling of pride, confidence and relevance in the lecturers who are eventual examiners. The lecturer must instill in the student the highest degree of confidence through effective tutoring and mentoring. To that end, intimidations, verbal abuse as well as dullness or what I may term “arm chair” teaching during lectures must be avoided and condemned. Lecturers must refrain from the usual cliché that “students are generally not serious individuals”. Instead, they make their students serious by being effective in their deliveries in class.

Examinations are revealers that unearth as it were the skill, intelligence, aptitude, brilliance or otherwise of an individual. Thus prior to the examination students must be clearly and effectively thought. However, beyond revealing one’s level of skill or intelligence, it serves a number of purposes. According to Nweze, Tina (2012) the following are the importance of examination(s): (i) It inculcates the spirit of hard work and the zeal to study in the candidates. (ii) It affords the authorities the opportunity to ascertain whether or not knowledge has been successfully imparted. (iii) It makes candidates active participants in teaching cum learning process. (iv) A teaching method’s viability is obtained through examinations (v) Learning problems and other difficulties encountered by students can be discovered through examination. (vi) Helps in the identification of students with special skills for placement purposes. (vii) Examination is a source of data and information for administrative decisions. (viii) Examination ensures effectiveness on the part of teachers and students in the educational system. (ix) Examination result is useful in the selection of candidates for employment or educational advancement (placement). (x) Examination serves as a means of control by the government. (xi) Examination serves as a means of officially documenting of academic and other capabilities of students. (xii) Examination results can be used for research purposes. (xiii) Examination results could also be used for guidance and counseling purposes. A close look at point number two (ii) suggests that examinations are the foremost means for ascertaining whether knowledge has been successfully imparted for onward application on key areas to ensure sustainability. Also point number six (iv) and eight (8) reveals that flaunting examination ethics could lead to employment misplacement. By misplaced employment here we mean employing or placing employees in positions and offices which requires an intellectual capacity beyond theirs. Such misplacement could be avoided if exam ethics on the part of the examiners and examinees are strictly abided by.

Conceptual Framework

The link between exam ethics and economic sustainability is captured in the words of Denge & Denge (1998) where they noted that education is the fulcrum on which all other developmental facets are hinged. Put differently, development is contingent on education. Thus by means of education knowledge is acquired, certified and applied. The application of knowledge is putting knowledge to test. Thus Barnard and Lanwerys (1967) defined examination as “a test of knowledge acquired or more generally a means of assessing intellectual capacity or ability. If acquired knowledge must be applied to foster development, then such knowledge must be subjected to test and the test process must not be compromised. This implies that the rules guiding the test process must be strictly adhered to so that the integrity of knowledge certification and application is not in doubt. If an exam or a test whether oral, written or practical is the true test of knowledge then exam ethics must be enforced and upheld and the result of applying such certified knowledge will be positive. Thus, so long as exam ethics are upheld, acquired knowledge can be truly certified and its application will give the expected outcome which will engender growth and development.

METHODOLOGY

The method of analysis will have two approaches, an inferential approach and an analytic approach. The inferential approach requires making inferences from already established statements or reports while the analytic approach requires the analysis and interpretation of data either primary or secondary. In this research, inferences will be made from statements of facts and primary data will be analyzed using percentages to complement the inferential analysis. The data is obtained from a survey of 150 students in a tertiary institution established in 2011 in Nigeria. The choice of 150 students was due to the entire size of the student population which was about 600 as at February 2015. Thus 150 (1/4) is a sample size representative of the population. The responses of the respondents are presented below under four headings namely, copying, gift giving, dating and parental influence.

Copying Tactics

Questions	Yes	No
1. Would you like a particular lecturer to always invigilate your exams?	132	18
2. Would you like to sit close to your colleagues during exams?	140	10
3. Would you like an open exam?	135	15
4. Would you accept help from an external source during exams?	141	09
	XX	XX
TOTAL	548	52

Percentage of those using copying tactics equals: $548/600 * 100 = 91.33\%$

Gift Giving Tactics

Questions	Yes	No
1. Would you love to give a gift to your lecturer?	88	62
2. Would you expect your gift to influence your grades?	84	66
TOTAL	172	128

Percentage of those using gift giving tactics equals: $172/300 * 100 = 57.33\%$

Dating Tactics

Question	Yes	No
Can you date your lecturer?	19	131

Percentage of those using dating tactics: $19/150 * 100 = 12.67\%$

Parental Influence Tactics

Questions	Yes	No
1. Would you like your parents to meet with your lecturer?	39	111
2. Would you invite your lecturer to a family event?	40	110
TOTAL	79	221

Percentage of those using parental tactics: $79/300 * 100 = 26.33\%$

DISCUSSIONS

We begin the discussion with the inferential approach making inferences from established statements of fact and elucidating its implications. We recall with dismay the report of a one-time Director General of the National Orientation Agency (NOA) in Nigeria in 2012 that an average of ₦25billion is generated annually from exam racketeering. This money changes hands in the economy without accruing to the government. What are the economic implications of such funds that are unaccounted for? Firstly, the ₦25billion generated per annum illegally does not accrue to the government and so does not form part of the nation's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Hence, it is not available to the government for productive expenditures in infrastructure development and in assisting small and medium enterprises, in order to create the much needed job opportunities. Secondly, ₦25billion is the minimum capital base requirement for commercial banks to commence financial operations in Nigeria. If such an amount is legally made available to commence business in the banking sector, the positive ripple effect in the economy will be great in terms of employment generation, credit facilities for investors and a boost of the entire financial system. Conversely if such an amount is withdrawn from a financial institution, this might result to a situation of illiquidity and an eventual closure of such an institution. The negative consequences of bank closure are better imagined than experienced as Nigeria has gone through that in the past. Apart from further exacerbating the unemployment problem, it will cast a dark shadow on the financial system with distortive effect on macroeconomic stability. Thirdly, although such ill-gotten wealth does not accrue to the government, it is spent within the economy, this distorts the macroeconomic projections and expectations of the monetary authority. Lastly, because such money is not earned through the appropriate channels, government is not able to deduct income tax from it and so government

loses tax revenue. In addition, with regards to the valuation of certificates from Nigeria, it casts doubt on its reliability and makes it difficult for its holders to compete favourably for jobs, especially at the international level. The implication of being less competitive in the labour market, is a backlog of unemployed individuals and an unproductive economy. The essence of highlighting these implications is to expose the invisible destructive effects of exam racketeering on the economy. Also by demonstrating its link to the economy we are discouraging the rising trend of exam malpractice with a view to facilitating smooth conduct of exams and above all to ultimately ensure that the results of examinations reflect the true ability and capacity of the examined. Hence, such tested knowledge can equally be applied in the system with great reliability for sustainable economic growth and development.

From the pilot survey of 150 students conducted in a tertiary institution in the south eastern Nigeria, it was revealed that 137 (about 91.33%) of the respondents have a high tendency to be involved in one form of unethical behavior or the other before, during or after their exams. These unethical behaviors ranges from using written notes (micro chips), copying from others, using a blue tooth, impersonation, gift giving to lecturers, direct cash payment, using parental or public office influence to grant favours to lecturers or examiners and sometimes a willingness to offer oneself in the case of females. In all, copying either from someone or from external materials seems to be most common as about 91% are involved in it. Also 57.33% are willing to falsify their intellectual capacity through gift giving in kind or cash while about 13% can date their lecturers with a view to falsifying their intellectual abilities. In addition, 26% are willing to use parental influence to affect their intellectual abilities. What is noteworthy here is that the students surveyed are from a new generation university that is yet to graduate its first set of grandaunts. This goes to suggest that unethical behaviors in examinations are not just widespread among Nigerian students but deep-rooted. It seems that the students have imbibed the ideology, long before they entered tertiary institutions, that unless they get involved in unethical exam behaviors, they may not get the required grades for a pass. Owing to this, some students have developed a non-challant and complacent attitude towards reading and study, hoping to sort themselves out before, during or after exams. This is outrageous and calls for immediate action on the part of the education authority and the governing councils in institutions to address such a malignant mentality by punishing culprits and rewarding hard work. However, this awful attitude in students can be nipped in the bud from home by parents and in the lecture halls by lecturers. Parents and especially lecturers can imbibe a principle in the bible recorded at Luke chapter 6 verse 40 which states that “a pupil is not above his teacher but everyone who is perfectly instructed will be like his teacher”. Yes, by means of perfect instructions students will not only be equipped to confidently face exams but will know that the result of hard work is dignifying and that unethical behaviors are degrading and inimical.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, this research highlights the socio-economic implications of allowing unethical examination behaviors to continue in the Nigerian educational system. Apart from casting doubts on the reliability of Nigerian certificates, it has the capacity to negatively affect the financial system, government fiscal and monetary projections, distorting macroeconomic stability and contributing to the social ills associated with unemployment. There is therefore, a compelling need for this cankerworm that is rapidly destroying our citadel of learning to be addressed. This will require an all-encompassing approach involving the parents/guardians, examiners, examinees and education authorities. As noted in the introduction, economic sustainability depends largely on economic infrastructure and at the heart of all economic infrastructure programme is the application of reliable time-tested knowledge critical to solving modern socio-economic problems. Thus, unethical behaviors in examinations are inimical to sustainable development and remain highly unacceptable. Conclusively, exam ethics- acceptable code of conduct- before, during and after exams remains pivotal to the sustainability of an economy. Education is an economic tool for development and is at the heart of any economic sustainability programme. It behooves all education marshals (all those directly involved in examination procedures) to protect the essence of acquiring education for the lasting benefit of the nation. As highlighted, exam malpractice or exam racketeering or unethical behaviours in relation to exams negates the economic sustainability efforts of any society.

Therefore, abiding by exam ethics is integral to sustainable economic development and nation building. We therefore recommend as follows:

For a developing economy like Nigeria, while the acquisition of certificates are essential, the idea that certificates are what we need for growing and sustaining the economy must be de-emphasized. Emphasis must be laid on knowledge acquisition, sharing and application for the development and sustainability of the economy.

Also, knowledge disseminators who are themselves examiners must continuously update their knowledge in their respective fields to pride themselves as it were and not resort to unethical behavior wittingly or unwittingly thereby avoiding the falsification of the intellectual ability of any student. To that end, the increased vigor with which the Tertiary Education Tax Fund is encouraging research and advance- knowledge acquisition is highly commendable but its activities must be done with the highest level of transparency in individual institutions and in line with the overall national objective.

Again there must be a continuous effort at re-orienting students from the grass root on the long run negative implications of unethical activities relating to examinations not just on the part of the culprit but also on the economy as a whole as well as the need for students to imbibe the culture of dignity of labour through hard work and feeling of self-worth.

Also, examinations must be conducted under very strict supervision without affecting the psychology of the examinees.

Further to these, Parents/Guardians must avoid heaping undue pressure on their children/wards to graduate with a first class or better still a second class upper division in their final grades at all cost. This competitive spirit is a disservice both to the student and the nation.

In addition, appropriate sanctions as prescribed by the law must be administered on defaulters such that others are deterred from engaging in such destructive acts and in such a way as to make defaulters advocates of exam ethics. This could be achieved through appropriate and effective counseling.

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BIO-DATA

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