

A philosophical justification for a paradigm shift to the metaphysical approach in combating examination malpractices among teachers in Kenya

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Abstract

This paper undertakes a philosophical inquiry into the teachers' involvement in examination malpractices in the school examinations in Kenya. It examines the initiatives to combat the malpractices with regard to the role of mind, soul and body in determining human conduct. Analysis of the empirical strategies employed by the Kenya National Examinations Council (KNEC) in arresting the vice reveal that they are superficial in the sense that they do not stimulate the teachers' mind to reason, and ultimately internalise moral virtues that relate to the conduct of examination. The study proposes a paradigm shift to the metaphysical approach that serves to develop moral conduct that is entrenched in the human essence.

Key Terms: Examination, Examination malpractice, Metaphysics, Reason, soul, mind, body

Introduction

Examination is the main yardstick used to evaluate the teachers' competence, learners' ability and determine the learners' placement in higher institutions of education. The discriminative role of examination propels teachers, students and schools to engage in a stiff competition in order to excel. Such competition culminates into the use of unfair means by some teachers to attain undue advantage so that their students excel in the national examinations. In Kenya, the issue of examination malpractices is a perennial problem that has prompted the national examinations body-Kenya National Examinations Council (KNEC) to institute a series of measures to combat it. This paper evaluates KNEC's initiatives to combat examination malpractices and proposes an alternative approach. The paper is divided into four sections. The first section illustrates the functions of examinations, while the second section analyses incidents of teachers' involvement in examination malpractices, and KNEC's initiatives to combat examination malpractices. Section three analyses the concept of metaphysics as it relates to human conduct. Section four analyses the main themes discussed in the paper and proposes a metaphysical strategy to combat examination malpractices among teachers.

1. Functions of examination

Examination refers to a test taken by a specific group of candidates under similar circumstances with all variables controlled. It is meant to measure a student's achievement of knowledge, skills and aptitude covered during the course of instruction (Kaukab and Mehrunnisa, 2016). In many education systems across the world, examination is a common tool of assessment. Examination results determine the learners' progress to the next level of education. Examination is not only a tool for assessing the learners' progress, but also identifying their academic abilities and evaluating the teachers' pedagogical skills (Malik, 1987; Shah, 1998). School examinations measure the learners' mastery of content and the teachers' effectiveness in content delivery (Nyamwange et al., 2013). Terminal examinations determine the placement of students in the job market, besides provision of feedback for the teaching and learning processes (Ongeri, 2009).

In Kenya, examinations are conducted at all levels of education. Although candidates are expected to be honest when taking examinations, research findings reveal that some candidates cheat in examinations (Mituka, 2001). Due to the crucial role of examination in an individual's future life, some device dishonest means of passing examinations (Fasasi, 2006; Wilayat, 2009). Nyaswa (2010) elaborates that the role of national examinations in an education system is to assess the student's competence in learning, in relation to some established criteria. Second, the examination results serve to discriminate among students with regard to their preferred careers, or placement into the societal strata. Better careers and high chances of further education that are dependent upon good performance in examinations greatly contribute to examination malpractices. Therefore, the role of examinations in evaluating learners, instructional material and pedagogical strategies require examinations to be conducted in an honest manner.

2. Examination malpractices

Examination malpractice, also referred to as examination cheating, points to any irregular behaviour exhibited by a person in relation to the conduct of examination either before, during or after examination (Oluyeba and Daromola, 1992). Candidates engage in examination malpractices for the purpose of attaining good results (Fasasi, 2006). Examination malpractice as a deliberate attempt to offer a candidate(s) unfair advantage in examination. When this occurs, the validity of examination and the authenticity of the results become questionable (Wilayat, 2009). Examination malpractices as unethical acts encourage mediocrity in that the students who benefit out of it are unfairly equated to those who struggle on their own to excel (Akaranga and Ongong, 2013).

Currently, the credibility of the KCPE and KCSE examinations, together with the validity of the results remain questionable. This owes to the recurrent incidents of examination malpractices and anomalies associated with these examinations. A survey report by the Institute of Economic Affairs (2016) indicates that examination malpractices have adversely affected the credibility of the school examinations in Kenya. Numerous cases of examination malpractices were reported in the 2015 KCSE and KCPE examinations in which some teachers were implicated (KNEC, 2016). The said report cites collusion by teachers as the main form of examination malpractices. Collusion entails advance arrangement by interested parties to have prior access to examination material before the day of examination. It may also involve making alterations on the original answer scripts in favour of a particular candidate(s) (KNEC, Act 2012). Announcing the 2015 KCSE examination results, the Education Cabinet Secretary revealed that 50 teachers had been arraigned in connection with examination offences (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 2016).

In the 2017 KCSE examinations, 26 teachers were interdicted for alleged involvement in examination malpractices (Oduor, 2018). The following table shows reported cases of teachers' indulgence in the KCPE and KCSE examination offences.

Table: Statistics of teachers' involvement in the KCPE/KCSE examination malpractices from the 2012/2013 to the 2017/2018 contractual years

CONTRACT YEAR	CASES REPORTED
2012/2013	7
2013/2014	1
2014/2015	3
2015/2016	6
2016/2017	63
2017/2018	10
GRAND TOTAL	90
CONCLUDED CASES	80

**Source: Teachers Service Commission, Discipline Department.
(January 19, 2018)**

The statistics shown in the table reveal that teachers' involvement in examination malpractices is a recurrent phenomenon that requires immediate attention. Although in some years the numbers appear to be negligible, the importance attached to the summative examinations makes examination

cheating an issue of great concern. In Kenya, terminal examinations are indicators that gauge the learning outcome, the teachers' competence and the success of the entire instructional process. At times, teachers' promotions are dependent on their students' performance in the national examinations. Any examination irregularity therefore attracts a lot of attention from the stakeholders, as it may compromise the examination's credibility and the teachers' integrity.

The teachers' professional conduct is governed by the Teachers Service Commission (TSC) Code of Conduct and Ethics and the Code of Regulations, whereas the KNEC Act of 2012 governs their examination integrity. The TSC Code of Conduct and Ethics establishes standards of ethical conduct to be upheld by teachers in order to maintain the nobility and integrity of their profession (Republic of Kenya, 2014a). The TSC Code of Regulations spells out offences for which teachers may be taken into account and the mechanisms of effecting the disciplinary actions in case of breach (Republic of Kenya, 2014b). The KNEC Act of 2012 is an Act of Parliament that provides for the establishment of KNEC. It spells out the examination rules and regulations, and the penalties attached to examination offences (KNEC, 2012). The teachers contracted by KNEC to undertake the national examinations process undergo examination briefing prior to the commencement of examinations, to enable them get abreast with their expected moral conduct with regard to examinations. They are hence conversant with the rules and regulations underlying the conduct of examinations.

KNEC's initiatives to combat examination malpractices is based on the outlined rules and regulations governing the teaching profession and the conduct of examinations. The penalties attached to examination related offences include prescription of hefty court fines and lengthy jail terms, as stipulated in the KNEC Act of 2012. It is on the basis of the said Act that some teachers have been interdicted and others arraigned in connection with examination offences. However, the teachers' persistent indulgence in examination malpractices as shown in the table demonstrates that the empirical strategies employed to combat examination vices have yielded insignificant success. Efforts to facilitate teachers' adherence to examination integrity necessitates the establishment of the rationale behind the teachers' inability to comply with the examination rules and regulations. Since human conduct emanates from the mind, then a paradigm shift to the metaphysical approach in the fight against examination malpractices is deemed appropriate.

3. Human conduct as a metaphysical construct of the mind

Human conduct is a product of an individual's mental processes that are manifested in overt behaviour. The soul, mind and body are important components of the human person that greatly influence an individual's behaviour. Analysis of the concept of metaphysics provides an understanding of how the link between the soul, mind and body determine the human conduct. As observed by Loux (2006), Aristotle conceives metaphysics as the "first philosophy" (or wisdom) because it deals with questions pertaining the nature of reality, existence of the world and influence of the mind on the physical body. The Naturalists of the 17th and 18th Centuries on the other hand, associate metaphysics with the relationship between the mind and body, the immortality of the soul and freedom of the will. Mastin (2009) notes that metaphysics is a branch of philosophy concerned

with the nature of existence, thus it is the foundation of philosophy. Grayling et al. (2017) categorize metaphysics into: (1) the study of existence; (2) the study of reality and (3) the investigation into the world. Regarding the study of reality, metaphysics seeks to attain the ultimate real. Three aspects are brought into focus in connection with the ultimate reality. First, reality is the authentic nature of things. The ultimate reality of things refers to the genuine nature of things as they are; the unchanging state of something. Secondly, reality is original but not derivative; it is independent. Thirdly, reality is intelligible as opposed to the sensible, which is derivative and deceptive. Therefore the essence of the human person is metaphysical and the ultimate reality can only be attained through rational inquiry.

Rational Psychology (or Philosophy of the Mind) is a component of metaphysics that studies the nature of the mind. This includes mental events, functions and properties, as they relate to the physical body. The central concern here is to establish how the mind and body influence each other. Although the mind and body are separate entities, as held by the Dualists, they influence one another. The mental phenomena of the human person are metaphysical while the body is the physical entity (Mastin, 2009).

Regarding how the mind and the body influence each other, Howard (2017) observes that the human person constitutes both the mental and physical properties that influence each other in thought and action. The physical body comprises attributes such as size and shape, while attributes like consciousness and intentionality are associated with the mind. As explained by Feser (2006), the mind is a thinking entity, distinct from the body, though it interacts with it. Processes in the body lead to changes in the mind and vice-versa. When the body's sensory organs detect food for instance, a message is relayed to the mind, causing the effect of hunger and the intention to eat. When the mind's intention to eat the food is activated, the body salivates and proceeds to eat it. This illustration demonstrates the role of the mind in directing human actions.

The role of the mind in determining human conduct justifies the application of metaphysics in morality. As Maslin (2001) argues, the mind is the source of our beliefs, thoughts, emotions and desires. A human being comprises the physical body and the non-physical soul. The ideal human person is the soul, which is the incorporeal nature of humankind. It is the personal 'self' that inhabits the body and in turn acts through it. The corporeal human is endowed with the faculties of thought, emotion and action. The soul is hence the eternal essence of a human being that determines and directs human actions. The mind on the other hand is the human's faculty of thinking, reasoning and applying knowledge. A person's overt actions are a manifest of their soul that is expressed by the mind. The connection between the soul, mind and body depicts that human behaviour is metaphysically determined. Quoting Descartes, Maslin (2001) explains that the thinking process is not only confined to the cognitive domain but also influences the bodily sensations and emotional status. Such sensations form an intermediary between the pure acts of intellectualism of the soul and the physical occurrences in the body. The interconnection between the soul, mind and body with regard to human conduct implies that moral education requires a metaphysical approach.

4. Analysis

The cited incidents of the teachers' indulgence in examination related offences in Section 2 depict that the problem of teachers' indulgence in examination vices in Kenya is yet to be ameliorated. In an attempt to mitigate the menace of examination malpractices, KNEC relies on the enforcement of examination rules and regulations. It liaises with the Teachers Service Commission to enforce the examination rules as stipulated in the Teachers Code of Conduct and Ethics and the Teachers Code of Regulations. To this effect, KNEC mounts examination briefing sessions to prepare teachers, who double as examiners, on how to administer examinations. Such briefings are meant to acquaint examiners with the examination rules and regulations, and consequently comply with them (KNEC, 2017a). The examination briefings focus on the expected conduct of examination in accordance with the established rules and regulations (KNEC, 2017b; KNEC, 2018). The main purpose of the briefing exercise is literary to reinforce examination rules and regulations.

However, recurrent incidents of teachers' indulgence in examination malpractices depict that the briefing sessions they undertake do not achieve their intended purposes. Examination integrity cannot be attained through strict enforcement of examination rules. The deterrence mechanism employed by KNEC to curb examination malpractices only offers a tentative remedy to the problem, which eventually recurs. The use of a metaphysical approach would facilitate the development of concrete moral conduct among teachers, due to the fact that the mind is the author of human behaviour. Since the essence of a human being resides in the soul, then it is the custodian of the human's moral capacity. Moral integrity then has to be attained through intellectual discourse that activates the human's faculty of thinking, reasoning and knowledge application. It is through reason that an understanding and internalization of the dictates of examination integrity is attained.

As Chukwu (2002) puts it, reason is an essential philosophical tool that persistently enquires into the truth about everything, in order to attain clarity. It is the power in human beings which enables them to engage in reflective thinking, leading to proper judgment. Reason then is an important ingredient of any moral education programme. Reason enables one to distinguish reality from appearances, thus it is a source of authentic human knowledge. As stated by Kiruki (2004), reason is an authority in ethical judgment. It enables an individual to arrive at informed rational judgment which subsequently translates to moral actions. Therefore the basis of moral obligation lies in human reason. It is through reason that human beings can reach the apex of their rational activity that eventually guides moral action. Morality is hinged on the application of reason in order to discover the guide to human conduct (Aquinas, translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province, 1981). Ethical judgments are hence justified by reason. For one to be moral, their actions ought to proceed from reason. Reason concretizes concepts well at the sub-conscious level of our minds. Such concretization develops and cements the harmonious relationship between the mind, soul and body. When these three attributes of the human person relate harmoniously, the human moral conduct becomes perfected such that it cannot be easily reversed. Such behaviour is metaphysically determined, hence it propels one to act in consonant with their reasoned direction. Moral education should then entail a rigorous rational discourse between the educator and the learner, so as to stimulate the latter's faculty of reason. Once this is achieved, their thinking and

acting would be governed by reason. The human conduct that is governed by reason is entrenched in the human psyche, thus resistant to external influence.

Inculcation of examination integrity among teachers then requires the rational approach that strikes the human psyche. In order to achieve this, KNEC should organize formal examination integrity courses for examiners in preparation for the national examinations. The courses would guide them to think reflectively on the conduct of examinations through a structured reasoning that is directed at the examination process. Such a thinking process should focus on the professional expectations regarding examination, the role of examination in an education system and the impact of examination malpractices on their moral integrity and credibility of the examination results. The education programme should employ the dialectical approach that engages both the teachers and the programme facilitators in intellectual discourse. Such approach enables them to utilize reason so that their thoughts strike their psyche. At this level, reason strikes the harmony between the mind and soul. Once this happens, a state of equilibrium is restored in the soul, enabling one to accurately make moral decisions. Ultimately, teachers would attain moral autonomy to author their personal examination rules. They in turn internalize and eventually comply with them.

The metaphysical approach would focus on professionalism and integrity as they relate to the conduct of examination. It would engage teachers in intellectual discourse, based on the basic examination procedures such as the setting of examinations, moderation of the question items, administration of examinations, marking and compilation of examination results. At every stage of the cycle, examiners should undertake a formal examination integrity course.

The methodology of the examination integrity course encompasses the essential components of an ideal education such as dialogue, questioning, debate among other approaches that constitute intellectual discourse. The essence of such methodology is to create a conducive environment for teachers to freely think for themselves, question their circumstances and ultimately create their own interpretation of morality regarding the process of examination. Interactive learning provokes the thinking processes, thereby activating the faculty of reason. Since the mind is the author of moral laws, each individual person has a unique rational capacity that obligates them to act in consonant with the moral laws. Intellectual discourse is deemed necessary in the attainment of the ultimate reality. Such reality unearths the underlying truth about examination integrity and the need to maintain professionalism. The reality that morality is anchored on humanity would intrinsically obligate teachers to uphold examination integrity so that they fulfil their rational humanity. This culminates to individual legislation of moral laws that intrinsically propels one to comply with without coercion.

Conclusion

The use of empirical approach to inculcate examination integrity among teachers only serves as a deterrent mechanism to bar them from indulging in examination vices. Such mechanism is superficial as it fails to develop a moral conduct that is entrenched in the human essence. This necessitates the development of a metaphysically determined moral conduct which emanates from harmonious relationship between the soul, mind and body. The teachers' examination integrity education programme should hence take the form of an intensive dialectical discourse that stimulates the faculty of reason, which in turn strikes the sub-conscious region of the mind where metaphysical realities are exhibited. The resultant metaphysically determined moral conduct is resistant to deceptions of appearances and passions. Maintenance of examination integrity is a metaphysical obligation not an empirical one; but if an empirical one, it must be premised on metaphysics where human mind or spirituality is based.

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