

**MAINSTREAMING AFRICAN ETHICS IN RESEARCH AND
SCHOLARSHIP IN PRIVATE HIGHER LEARNING INSTITUTIONS IN
KENYA FOR SUSTAINABLE LEADERSHIP**

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DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.23939.78889

Abstract

The role of African Ethics in sustainable leadership in the 21st Century can never be overemphasized. African cultures value that children succeed in life through genuine hard work. To that effect, there have been efforts to pass the values on to their children through initiation ceremonies and other fora. While these efforts are supposed to reinforce these values, the reality is that these values are watered down in contemporary African societies. Corruption is the order of the day. These vices have also penetrated learning institutions whereby instead of working hard to achieve good grades, some students end up buying certificates and manipulating academic results. This study seeks to establish the extent to which sustainable leadership in the 21st century can be realized through mainstreaming African ethics in research and scholarship in private higher learning institutions in Kenya. It argues that key features of ethics and integrity that are embedded in African culture can be consciously integrated into higher learning institutions for the graduates to mirror the desired ideals for sustainable leadership in the world of work and society in general. This paper is derived from a literature review of ongoing research in which a qualitative approach will be used to gather data from a Private Higher learning Institution in Langata Ward, Nairobi, Kenya on the subject at hand.

Keywords: African ethics, mainstreaming, research and scholarship, Private higher learning institutions, sustainable leadership.

Introduction

Sustainable leadership is an asset that serves both present and future generations, and collaboration and commitment is required for its realization. The need for sustainability is a cry that cuts across different sectors of the society and in terms of leadership, once sustainability is attained to a credible degree; every other thing takes shape for everything rises and falls on leadership (Maxwell, 2010).

Given the growth of higher learning institutions and high student enrolment rates, a call for improvement of quality continues to be an important issue in the global higher education policy. Boeren (2019) noted that in January 2016, a new plan was inaugurated which includes the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that target all countries globally, among which ensuring quality education for all was emphasized. Furthermore, the aforementioned author indicated that generally education acts as a strong engine in ensuring cohesiveness and equality in society. Indeed, Kenya's economic blueprint Vision 2030 identifies higher education as the highway through which its goal of being a middle-income and industrialist country will be realized (GoK, 2007). The attainment of such development agenda and SDG 4 (quality education) requires the collaboration of key players like individuals, institutions of education, relevant stakeholders as well as government bodies. There is a powerful correlation between quality education and other SGDs as it provides the ground for positive and reasonable thinking in engaging and realizing other goals.

Mainstreaming ethics and integrity in research and scholarship is one of the means by which quality higher education can be realized. However, there is a notable continuous challenge towards that achievement, especially currently where seemingly everything goes due to the element of greed and selfishness. Globally, a notable scourge that inhibits human capital formation mostly in developing countries is corruption and fraud in institutions of higher learning (Kirya, 2019). The act of condoning unethical practices within institutions of learning, and most of the time, led by those who should be role models – lecturers and parents who collaborate with learners to buy results, in a way communicates that it is the right thing to do as many youths are negatively impacted by this unethical practice. This in effect endangers sustainable

leadership because these same young people are potential future leaders who due to the lack of sound formation would definitely lack the competence it takes to lead others in the right direction. In addition, it has a negative impact on adult learners given the component of lifelong learning as well as passing on the same to younger generations.

Pillay & Qhobela (2019) asserted that with the fast growing world and increased number of researchers and academics, there is not only pressure for more publications but also the challenge of upholding ethics and integrity in research. Van Dalen (2021) also stressed on the principle of publish or perish and the resulting effects from such pressure. With the continued pressure to pass exams and/or publish for postgraduate students, elements of corruption such as buying of certificates and manipulation of academic results remain a growing concern to be addressed in higher learning institutions due to their enormous implications on sustainable leadership in contemporary society. In a bid to address the above challenge, the paper draws a possible solution from the rich heritage of African ethics that hinges on “ethics of care” and “common good” that takes into consideration formation of ethically conscious individuals for both present and future generations.

Societies have ways of passing on their cultures and values from generation to generation. Societies should uphold and insist on ethical values during the process. Stressing on the need to uphold and pass on ethical values, in a bid to curtail negative events that risks societal welfare due to unethical human activities, Musek (2015) noted that reinforcing and integrating values and ethics into human behaviors is seen as a global and planetary task which is an essential mission and project of the society. Similarly, Argandoña (1991) affirmed that societal ethics and values which guide the actions and behaviors of humans, form the basis for building economic systems. African culture upholds the practice and wishes of better placement of younger generations in relation to older ones and this is indicated by Awoniyi (2015) who affirmed that in Africa, cultural heritage is inherited from past generations, added to or improved and passed on to future generations. Predominantly, African parents wish that their children attain success in all spheres of life through genuine hard work. While these efforts are supposed to reinforce these values, the reality is that these values are watered down in contemporary African societies. Corruption is the order of the day in that it is an insidious plague with a lot of destructive effects that cuts across societies (Argandoña, 2007).

Such vices have also penetrated learning institutions whereby instead of working hard to achieve good grades, some students end up buying certificates and manipulating academic results (Akaranga & Ongong, 2013). Other forms of malpractices include bringing foreign materials into the exam hall, assistance from educational stakeholders such as parents, teachers and security agents, collusion and impersonation (Situma & Wasike, 2020). Sadly, though is that even those that are termed to be role models such as teachers, and parents collude with students to commit these academic malpractices.

The aforementioned vices can also be transferred to the employment sector. Such vices could be a result of competition for employable opportunities. It is sad to note that corruption has penetrated all key sectors of society. While there have been efforts to arrest academic malpractices with policies and punishments in universities, there has been little success (Keter, 2021). Therefore, this study explores the experiences and strategies used in addressing academic malpractices in institutions of higher learning.

Experience of Universities regarding Academic Malpractices

According to Adow et al. (2015), examination malpractice is seen as any display of unfair behavior aimed at fetching more scores for an examinee than the actual marks he or she would earn from honest efforts and natural ability. Furthermore, they argued that examination malpractice glaringly alters examination marks, thereby disabling meaningful interpretation that would have been useful for accountability in public affairs as well as decision processes. Examination malpractice is a phenomenon that is taking deep roots within universities and this is possible through a collaboration of different stakeholders either by direct or indirect persuasion (Peter et al., 2021). Ojwan (2019) indicated that in the 21st century, examination malpractice remains a big global challenge in the education sector. Thus, peer approval or disapproval plays a significant role in determining examination malpractices or not. Referring to Kohlberg's theory of moral development, which is concerned with thinking processes in an individual's mind, Peter et al. (2021) indicated that there are moral dilemmas that come with the idea in the mind of individual students and social persuasion to take part in examination malpractice. Looking at the findings from the study carried out in two Kenyan universities by the above authors, 22.2% of the respondents indicated that role models who went unpunished after wrong doings motivated students to take part in examination malpractice, 30.5% noted peer pressure as a

key factor, 28.9% indicated social approval and then 22.9% noted weak examination rules and regulations in the universities.

Unveiling students' views on examination malpractice in Kenyan basic education, Ojwan (2019) affirmed that students' engagement in writing answers on body parts as well as taking unauthorized materials into examination hall are ways in which cheating occurs in examinations. The aforementioned author found out from 43.4% of the respondents that lack of preparation and too much emphasis on grades as noted by 25.4% are key causes of malpractice. Also, the aspect of examination officials, school administration as well as police officers colluding came out strongly and noted by 50.4% of the respondents, and other most prevalent ways of malpractice are: profit-making through leakage of examination questions as noted by 18.8% as well as students copying from their fellow students' paper as indicated by 11.7%. Sadly enough, 10.3% of respondents from the study noted that pressure from parents, schools and peers contribute to examination malpractices. Similarly, Adow et al. (2015) engaged in a study that focuses on the role of different examination stakeholders regarding their contributions to examination malpractice, i.e. parents, students, invigilators, supervisors, and examination officers just to mention a few.

Ruto et al. (2011) echoed the same issues while looking at factors influencing malpractices in undergraduate examinations in Kenyan universities. Referring to the subsector of higher education, Kirya (2019) indicated that there is engagement in granting academic degrees and unearned credentials to politicians, their relatives and friends. Citing examples, the aforementioned author noted that Grace Mugabe was awarded PhD in 2014, the alleged award of degree in education to Janet Museveni without fulfilling teaching practice as a requirement as well as not going through the required procedures for admission. Similarly, the above mentioned author affirmed that in Kenya, unethical university officials graduated unqualified students from non-existing programs and in 2017, Commission for University Education (CUE) requested several universities to cancel illicitly conferred degrees.

The list of ills is indeed enormous and a cause for great concern because of the many players involved, for example, Kirya (2019) indicated that there is the aspect of unethical practice in licensing and accreditation of universities without required staff or facilities, collusion between parents, administrators, university officials to fraudulently increase scores as in the case of William Rick Singer between 2011 to 2018 and the same was noted in India in 2015 where over 2,000

students were unlawfully granted admission to medical schools. The offenders further sold exam questions, facilitated the increase of grades, and made provision for impersonation to take an examination. Very sad is the created climate of sexual harassment which stereotype females as sexual objects and this has been used to exploit students in a bid to get them sorted with either missing marks or examination results. Ogunji (2011) also indicated sex for marks and leakage of examination among others as ways in which teachers engage in exam malpractice in Nigeria but also around the globe.

Mauti, Rotich & Seret (2021) contend that malpractice among university students is both frequent and sophisticated, ranging from America to Europe and to Africa. They argue that according to lecturers, examination malpractice is a result of a failure of leadership in establishing integrity standards and practices within the institution. The aforementioned authors engaged in a study of 8 Kenyan universities in Kisii County and found out that majority of the participants (73.3%) believe they can pass exams without getting involved in malpractice but also 62.2% believe that it is normal to engage in examination malpractice for example, copying in test or assignment and unfortunately, 68.9% hold that this practice is encouraged by administrators mandated to provide oversight. From the study, the following were considered factors influencing examination malpractices in universities: peer influence (74.2%), pressure to obtain good grades (74.2%), academic overload (72.0%), lecturers' inability to communicate content effectively (72.0%), use of technology (70.2%) and procrastination (70.2%) among others. Mugala et al. (2022) also had similar causes in their study as triggers of academic misconduct. Students also engage in exam malpractice by employing the approach of impersonation, sitting in groups or colonizing a section of the exam hall to get answers from colleagues, use of mobile phones and misappropriation of other students' scripts (Ogunji, 2011).

Stressing the need for African countries to review educational systems and consider including moral teachings, D'orsi (2022) noted the following practices that undermine students' educational opportunities: academic fraud which he terms as "soft marking", copying from others, exam malpractice as well as impersonation. Particularly, he indicated that academic misconduct mostly takes the form of examination malpractice and plagiarism in Ethiopia. Equally, the study carried out in selected universities in Zambia by Mugala et al. (2022), showed a high prevalence of academic dishonesty with particular reference to plagiarism and exam cheating regardless of different mitigation strategies. Hence, calling universities to monitor and address issues of falsification of

academic records, getting sexually transmitted grades, buying grades with money or gifts, and intimidating and assaulting examiners and invigilators.

Wilkinson (2009) carried out a study that assessed and compared the perceptions of staff and students regarding plagiarism and cheating, he indicated that 49% of staff and 39% of students perceived copying some paragraphs without citing the source as a prevalent form of cheating on academic papers. Staff believed that students do not understand the guiding rules while students hold that expectations of better grades as well as too many assessment tasks were motivators for them to cheat and the disparity in perception can be a contributing factor in terms of the messages being passed across concerning the severity of academic cheating.

Unethical examination management practices are crucial in sustaining cheating in examinations as they threaten the security of the process and make regulations unproductive (Ogunji, 2011). The author further noted that teachers, administrators, students as well as parents all form part of examination management. However, teachers and administrators are at the heart of the whole process of management. Lack of integrity on the part of examination managers create a fertile ground for exam malpractices which has negative impacts, for example by engaging in activities for monetary gains, some teachers encourage examination malpractice.

Strategies used to address examination malpractices in universities

Given the fact that higher education contributes to global development, Kirya (2019) argued that consistency in policies is necessary at both national and international levels. Van der Walt (2003) posits that traditional African morality is concerned with obeying set standards and the will of the community in the spirit of caring for the well-being of humans, hence working towards attaining the common good of all. In African ethics, the following are upheld and promoted for the welfare of the community as a whole: respect, generosity, solidarity, charity, loyalty, honesty, truthfulness, justice and hospitality among others (Van der Walt, 2003).

Supporting the aforementioned argument, Awoniyi (2015) indicated that there are set moral and societal values among the African people which are meant to guide relationships among individuals as well as the community in general, and the standards promote social cohesion in the community and prevent people from being rebellious, hence interrupting societal welfare. With the above

assertion, the common good should be a key focal point in educating for the benefit of the larger society. Akaranga & Makau (2016) noted that research ethics has got established standards that guide the conduct of researchers as well as professionals. This requires the protection of dignity by researchers as well as proper publication of writings. Again, African values like honesty, mindfulness, and not taking credit for other people's work are very key in promoting ethics in research and scholarship.

Discussing the origin of research ethics, the above authors noted that the aim of adopting research ethics is grounded in the arena of biomedical research which sprang from the idea of using humans in research as far back as the 18th century. They indicated that the need to establish appropriate behaviors in dealing with humans was really taken into account in 1946 when a tribunal in America began criminal proceedings against twenty-three German physicians and administrators who consciously got involved in participating in war crimes and other inhumane crimes.

Discouraging the practice of plagiarism in African university education, John & Maxel (2013) maintain that the African tradition in general, frowns at dishonesty of any kind. They noted that academic dishonesty of any kind is seen as plagiarism and in a bid to promote academic integrity, most higher education institutions punish such offense. The establishment of policies with regard to academic integrity helps in regulating plagiarism for students in terms of assignments, course works, research proposals, dissertations and any piece of writing (John & Maxel, 2013). However, the challenge of plagiarism has continuously been witnessed in students' academic writing in East Africa and this is a troubling reality for universities.

These negative impact of plagiarism inhibits the attainment of quality education that produces quality candidates who are people of integrity in themselves and who are required to promote innovation because the present challenges facing the world today, need creative minds with good morals for society's betterment (John & Maxel, 2013). The aforementioned authors argued that the intention for all these efforts is to help build and form people of good morals and high academic stature in order to capture the job market as well as enhance the institution's image. The present society has a lot to borrow from African ethics as it promotes hard work. It pays to be hard working and the results are sustainable from one generation to another.

Ojwan (2019) noted the following strategies used by universities in addressing examination malpractice: adequate preparation of students for examination, effective invigilation as well as supervision, installation of CCTV cameras, and employment of strict disciplinary measures against those who violate the rules. Stressing the need for effective procedures and policies in managing examinations in universities, Ruto et al. (2011) recommended employers make provisions for off-days or study leave for their staff who may be upgrading through different courses, as a way of curbing examination malpractice.

Mainstreaming ethics is concerned with establishing moral values using appropriate support systems within an organization in order to ensure the sustainability of the same (Ochola et al., 2012). In the same light, (Mukhwana et al., 2016) assert that it is the mandate of the Commission for University Education to regulate, coordinate and ensure quality in the education offered by universities in Kenya. The commission mainstreams quality by ensuring maintenance of standards, and relevance of education, training as well as research within universities, hence encouraging continuous enhancement as far as quality is concerned in the management of universities.

Velliari & Breen (2016), in their three-stage framework for increasing academic integrity, argue that plagiarism has been a long-standing problem in higher education and even worse now with technology and with easy access to the same. This three-stage framework is a transparent but also useful tool for dealing with student plagiarism and academic misconduct. The three-stage framework as presented by the aforementioned authors include: electronic plagiarism detector check, discipline-specific lecturer check, and academic integrity officer check. These are geared towards preserving the academic credibility and reputation of the institution which also requires a unified effort of all parties involved. The framework is a meaningful one in that its contribution to Australia and to the global community is invaluable when it comes to academic integrity. Thus, constant effort is being made to ensure that there is consistency in applying guidelines on academic conduct. The study carried out in Zambia by Mugala et al. (2022) noted that the following were predominantly used as strategies to curb academic corruption: suspension, dismissal as well as expulsion, however, the experience of academic misconduct continued to increase and the following recommendations were made: compulsory use of plagiarism detection software, Turnitin and also Plagiarism Detect to address the most prevalent form of academic dishonesty. Following the alarming situation of the prevalence of examination malpractices, Ogunji (2011) stressed the

importance of examination managers strictly abiding by the ethical code of conduct in exams.

Mainstreaming of ethics and integrity in research and scholarship needs sound leadership systems that provide an enabling environment for the practice of ethics. Ike & Mbae (2021) argue that it is high time for East African universities to reflect on the benefits that come with ethical leadership practices with regard to job satisfaction and performance, job security, academic performance as well as management of universities. Grigoropoulos (2019) echoes the same following the assertion that it is the responsibility of both organizational and educational leadership to ensure practices like establishing the foundations of resourceful as well as ethical business performance. These are key aspects of ethical leadership that should be taken seriously in the actual running of the various activities within the university environment. In mainstreaming ethics and integrity in the context of higher education, it is believed that faculty members have key roles to play and should be fully committed to modeling the right behaviors in teaching, research as well as community engagement. Bishop (2013) posit that it is not enough to point out unethical incidents because it does little in terms of correcting the situation or preventing future occurrence. Hence ethics ought to act as more than just a guide, ought to be preventive, determine the right course of action, teach and serve as a qualitative standard.

Nurturing responsible stewardship in research and scholarship for Sustainable Leadership

Sustainable leadership is dependent on the kind of graduates higher learning institutions produce. If integrity and responsible stewardship are nurtured in higher learning institutions, then sustainable leadership can be realized. Academic malpractices are evidence of erosion of African value of education for responsible stewardship. In Africa, the community is seen as a system that promotes the common good in order to favor the members, hence nurturing responsibility and virtue (Ogunyemi & Obiorah, 2020). This system according to the aforementioned authors, call members of the community to be responsible in managing resources both as personal as well as organizational goals for the common good, and it resonates with the global effort of setting up responsible and sustainable economies as well as societies and can be translated into management practices.

Ogunyemi & Obiorah (2020) further argue that making the move to be responsible as far as stewardship is concerned, comes from individuals but also systems within the society help to enhance and nurture it. Hence, responsible stewardship can be seen as the sensible use of resources and opportunities for the common good. The call to be selfless herein, is a rich tool provided by the African worldview of responsible stewardship in that, with the mind of considering others both within the present as well as future generations in the use of resources, one is helped to contribute to efforts geared towards sustainability. If this is taken up by all, what a beautiful society will be experienced in no distant time.

The value of genuine hard work as encouraged in traditional African philosophies and which is key in sustainable leadership, is being relegated in the contemporary African society whereby money seems to do almost everything including buying certificates and manipulating academic results. This hampers academic integrity in all ramifications because learning institutions are the backbone of development and sustainable societies. Mosweunyane (2013) argued that informal educational training in precolonial Africa was provided to enable individuals to be competent to serve their societies selflessly and this indigenous knowledge and skills was passed on orally from one generation to the next. Again, the family level was indeed a significant structure in knowledge sharing and acquisition (Mosweunyane, 2013). Similarly, Van der Walt (2003) noted that morality in the spirit of sharing was seen as the strength of the society in traditional Africa, hence the community was characterized by an individual's duties towards other people. There is a lot to borrow from African culture that contributes enormously to sustainable leadership which in turn results in a sustainable society at large.

Results of academic performance and excellence are encouraged in academic pursuit as well as academic integrity, but concretizing this achievement in real life, through competency-based approach is another point altogether and there lies the gap and emphasis of the argument presented in this paper. Mangena (2016) argue that Common Moral Position (CMP) is a moral requirement of *hunhu/ubuntu* ethics given the fact that once implanted in people's minds, gives them a good moral standing in terms of knowing, doing and differentiating right from wrong and these morals are passed on by elders from one generation to the next. The aforementioned author indicated that the CMP is communocratic in nature because of its dialogical and spiritual components in the establishment

processes. The CMP is a strong assertion that in a way describes the idea of a possible solution to addressing academic integrity, presented in this paper.

Codes and policies are predominantly in place, and seminars and workshops are given on the same, yet the problem of academic misconduct continues to be a growing concern. Unless individuals are committed to change, things will continue to get sour. One may ask, how can people be committed to bringing about the desired change? I think CMP answers the question to an extent and reinforcing this, as indicated in the scriptures, Jesus said that time is coming when true worshippers do not need to go to Jerusalem to worship God but will do that in spirit and in truth. The law will be written in their minds and hearts. Unless we tell ourselves the truth and consciously live out stipulated values and principles, things will continue to get worse. Also, things getting sour can be counteracted by implanting those values and principles in our minds so that they become part and parcel of us.

In view of the foregoing, this research is of the opinion that standing firm for what we believe makes the difference and to an extent, it addresses the question – why is it so difficult to maintain consistency in the effort to bring about change within the society and be real people of integrity? Human nature is so complex, and this complexity is a worry in that it in a way opposes the desire to be consistent in committing to integrity in research and scholarship as a matter of discussion in this study. In the search to respond to this and deducing from this paper, an answer that comes closest as a sustainable solution is imbibing the guiding principles in such a way that no law is needed to remind one of what is expected. If we are able to embrace *truth*, then we would have solved 90% of the problem of academic misconduct which has a far-reaching negative impact on society.

It is opined that truth places individuals in a position of being morally grounded in right actions and gives the ability to recognize and realize one's mistake in the event of a wrong doing, but also the flexibility to swiftly atone and make possible amends. Among the many solutions to academic misconduct, one can dare to anchor the realization of academic integrity on *truth – being true* as a key component. Knowing the truth is one thing but *being* it brings in a totally new dimension into the conversation.

Talking about standing firm for what one believes in this research, a question can be asked, do people really believe in stipulated principles/standards in the context of ethics and integrity in research and scholarship? It is puzzling when

people complain of the kind of leadership in the society today and yet, when given an opportunity to serve in a leadership capacity, worse execution of mandate is experienced from the same people who expressed dissatisfaction of corrupt and inhumane system of rulership. This research recognizes the fact that effort has been put in, in terms of passing on positive aspects of African culture from one generation to the next but that effort is still challenged by a new culture of individualism and carelessness that risks sustainable leadership and development.

This research is of the view that truth helps one to go deep within to self-examine and assess in a bid to differentiate and establish right from wrong, and then by probably turning the table around, following the golden rule approach in the event of misconduct that concerns a second party, one is able to be more humane both to oneself and others in handling academic integrity issues. This is accompanied by genuine flexibility to swiftly atone and transcend the complexity of human nature that breaches consistency in upholding integrity and by so doing reinforce the whole aspect of lifelong learning in that we fall at different times, but the ability to rise and forge ahead makes the difference. The paper recommends that with such a genuine effort to uphold truth and so promote ethics and integrity in research and scholarship, ethics will be seen as personified within the society and what a great stride will that be for a sustainable society.

Conclusion

This study sought to establish the extent to which sustainable leadership in the 21st century can be realized through mainstreaming African ethics in research and scholarship in private higher learning institutions in Kenya. Some of the malpractices experienced were taking an exam on behalf of others and copying from others. Several strategies to address the malpractices were discussed and included policies and instilling value systems among the learners. True commitment of individuals as well as organizations in embracing the beauty of African ethics, is a key determinant factor in attaining success in mainstreaming ethics in research and scholarship in private higher learning institutions in Kenya for the common good. By common good, African ethics take into consideration the ethos and wellbeing of both present and future generations, thereby bringing out the element of sustainability and ensuring values formation of future leaders. Thus, anchoring on truth as a key component in realizing academic integrity by being it, and upholding care for the common good as promoted by African

ethics, is one way of ensuring the successful mainstreaming of ethics in research and scholarship in contemporary African society for sustainable leadership.

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Journal of African Studies and Sustainable Development
ISSN: 2630-7065 (Print) 2630-7073 (e). Vol. 5 No. 3. 2022
Association for the Promotion of African Studies

International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, 20(2), 98–105.