

The Challenge of Examination Malpractices in Institutions of Higher Learning in Kenya

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Abstract

The main objective of university education is to furnish the student with the requisite knowledge and skills to enable them to contribute effectively to the national development effort. This training demands periodic assessment and evaluation in form of examinations in order to ascertain the level of knowledge and competence of students. The purpose of this study was to investigate and establish the types, causes and implications of Examination malpractices in institutions of higher learning in Kenya. The study was carried out in five public universities in Kenya using the descriptive survey research design. The study used university students, administrators in charge of Examinations at the university and chairpersons of academic departments as respondents. The study sampled fifty students, four administrators in the Examination offices and five chairpersons of five departments from each of the five Universities. Therefore the total number of respondents used in the study was 250 students, 20 administrators in charge of Examinations and 25 chairpersons of departments totaling to 295 respondents. Data was collected by use of Interview schedule and Questionnaires. University Students and examination administrators filled open-ended Questionnaires while chairpersons of academic departments were interviewed. Data was analyzed qualitatively and presented thematically. The findings indicate that the main types of Exam malpractices include: exam leakage, collusion, unauthorized writings, copying, impersonation among others. The findings show that some of the causes of exam malpractices include: poor preparation for exams, lack of integrity, financial gain, sexual favor, for promotion. The study findings further show that the implications of exam malpractices are: undeserving students awarded degrees, graduates who cannot perform quality of service in the country compromised. The study concluded that actions need to be taken to save our institutions of

higher learning from this vice. This study recommends the following to curb the problem: tough penalties for the culprits, moderation of exams, installation of CCTV cameras, improve on invigilation among others.

Keywords: Examinations, Malpractices, Cheating, Institutions of Higher Learning

Introduction

Education is the foundation upon which physical and technological developments rest. In Kenya, education has been adopted as an instrument for national development. Therefore, governments, communities, private organizations and individuals have established educational institutions with a view of training the citizens for the development of the nation's physical and human resources. The vision for the education sector for 2030 is, to have globally competitive quality education, training and research for sustainable development (Government of Kenya (GOK), 2007). One of the objectives of education in Kenya is to prepare the young ones to face future challenges and develop them to meet the nation's manpower requirements. In educational institutions teaching and guidance activities are supposed to take place so that appropriate skills and knowledge can be acquired by the students.

Furthermore, machinery through which the extent of knowledge and skill acquisition is determined at each stage of education has been set up. This is in form of examination which organized in order to evaluate, assess and test knowledge and skills. Schools need to conduct examinations as yardstick for assessment. It is the most practical way of assessment in education.

The purpose of education is to shape a new human being and to guide an individual to act with independence and face the world around him on his own, (Giuissani, 1995). It is upon the education system to equip learners with practical skills, critical thinking and problem solving skills in preparation for further training, self-employment, the world of work and preparation for life. Education is a tool through which National Development is achieved.

The main objective of university education is to furnish the student with the requisite knowledge and skills to enable them to contribute effectively to the national development effort. This training demands periodic assessment and evaluation in form of examinations in order to ascertain the level of knowledge and competence of students.

The recent spree of examination leakages at the institutions of higher learning in Kenya has awakened the questioning minds of many Kenyans about the caliber of graduates coming out from our public universities.

Objectives of the study

The objectives of this study were:

- i. To establish the types of examination malpractices in institutions of higher learning in Kenya
- ii. To establish the causes of examination malpractices in institutions of higher learning in Kenya
- iii. To state the implications of examination malpractices in institutions of higher learning in Kenya

Literature Review

Exam Malpractice is defined as any deliberate act of wrong doing, contrary to the rules of examinations designed to give a candidate an unfair advantage or able frequently, to place a candidate at a disadvantage (Tambawal, 2013). Nwana (2000), Examination malpractice is described as the "massive and unprecedented abuse of rules and regulations

pertaining to internal and external examinations, beginning from the setting of such examinations through the taking of the examinations, their marking and grading, to the release of the results and the issuance of certificates”.

According to Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary malpractice is a wrong or illegal behaviour exhibited by a person while discharging professional responsibilities. In the light of this definition, examination malpractice is simply illegally obtaining an answer to an examination question from any other source other than the brain of the examinee. According to Ufuoma (2015), examination malpractice is any act carried out by anybody that defies the rules that guides a student whose knowledge or ability is being tested in a particular knowledge or skill with the aim of distorting the student’s true knowledge or ability. In conclusion we can say examination malpractice is any wrong doing before, during and after examination (Obudigha, 2010). From the above definition it is clear that an examination malpractice can be committed by anybody and in institutions of higher learning this can range from students, lecturers, administrators, supervisors, typists, examination coordinators and any staff who works in the examination offices.

According to Akaranga and Ongong (2013), one of the contemporary problems affecting the educational system today is examination malpractice. It is a global problem which has been reported in almost all countries and states in the world. In Kenya examination malpractices have been reported in primary, secondary schools and institutions of higher learning. Every year there are several cases of examination malpractices that have been reported.

Cornelius-Ukpepi, Ndifon and Erukoha (2012) investigated on the correlates of Examination malpractice and Academic performance of primary school students in Nigeria. The study established that high self-efficiency by pupils help them to tackle problems even when the problems to be difficult but low self-efficiency encourages them to want to cheat. The study also established that high moral tone or climate of a school encourages pupils to study and achieve better scores while low moral tone encourages cheating in examinations

Akaranga and ongong (2013) investigated on the phenomenon of examination malpractice in Nairobi and Kenyatta Universities in Kenya. Their findings established that there are several forms of examination malpractices which included collusion among candidates, written notes, exchange of answer booklets, giraffing and impersonation. These issues were also of great interest to this study.

According to Kithuka (2004), examination malpractice in Kenya has attained a frightening proportion and the malpractices are becoming sophisticated and institutionalized. Efforts by the government administration and stakeholders in education sector to curtail the ugly trend have not been easy. The nature of examination malpractice has resulted in high turnover of incompetent graduates by institutions of higher learning (Aullo, 2004).

The rise in examination leakages at Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education experienced in the recent years has made some scholars to think of a pre-university examination to the form four leavers who had qualified for admission at universities. This is because universities have not been sure whether they have been admitting qualified students into various programmes (Gicharu, 2016).

The implications of examination cheating is, university grades obtained, do not effectively separate weak from bright students and authenticity of the certificates awarded to university graduates get into jeopardy. According to Eshiwani (2009); Mutisya (2010), the quality of education in Kenyan universities is lowered by among other reasons, cases of missing marks, sexually transmitted grades and people who write papers and projects for students in return for pay.

A research paper by Ufuoma (2015) on *Sociological perspectives of examination malpractices in Nigerian Universities* established that the vice in Nigerian universities was rising in endemic and epidemic proportions and had led to half-baked graduates and collapse of the education sector. The present study was also interested in establishing the impact of the same vice in public universities in Kenya. Ufuoma's research also established that the use of mobile phones with internet connectivity was a recent manifestation of examination malpractice. Other forms of malpractices established by the researcher included leakage, impersonation, disclosing questions and alteration of scores. The study did not look at the causes of the malpractices which the present study had interest in.

According to a research paper by Obudigha(2010) on *Examination malpractice in Nigerian Schools*, the forms of malpractices were several and included bringing foreign materials into exam hall, assistance from educational stakeholders such as parents, teachers and security agents, collusion and impersonation. This research was done in schools but the present study was interested in establishing the same but in institutions of higher learning in Kenya. Ufuoma's study also established that there were many effects of exam malpractice which included failure in job performance, expulsion and it makes students to lose the ability to study or work hard in their studies. The present study was also interested in establishing the impact of the same but in institutions of higher learning.

Cornelius-Ukpepi and Ndifon (2012) did a research on *Factors that Influence Examination Malpractice and Academic Performance in primary Science* which established that teachers have a significant influence on pupils' cheating behavior which further affected pupils' academic performance in primary science. The study also established that parents had a significant influence on pupils' cheating behavior which in turn had effect on academic performance in science.

Adegoke (2010) research book on *A survey of Examination Malpractices among Secondary School Students-Cause, effects and Solutions in Nigeria* indicate that major reasons for examination Malpractice included parental pressure for good grades and value attached to certificates. This present study sought to establish if the same causes are the same in institutions of higher learning in Kenya.

Tambawal (2013) presented a research paper titled *Examination Malpractices, Causes, Effects and Solutions* to the Stakeholders Forum on raising integrity in the conduct of Examinations in Nigeria Educational System. He identified the following as some forms of exam malpractices: leakage, impersonation, smuggling of foreign materials, copying and collusion. He also established some causes of exam malpractice as poor preparation by students, sexual favour, promotions at work, monetary gains among others. This study sought to establish if the situation is the same in institutions of higher learning in Kenya.

Theoretical Review

The study was guided by the Theory of Planned Behavior as described by Madara, Namango and Katana (2016). The TPB according to Madara et al (2016) evolved from the theory of reasoned action (Fishbein & Ajzen) which posited "intention to act" as the best predictor of behavior. The premise of the TPB is that individuals make rational decisions to engage in specific behaviors based on their beliefs about the behaviors and their expectation of a positive outcome after having engaged in the behaviors. This explains why students engage in examination malpractice, where they hope to benefit by passing examinations and graduating.

TPB hypothesize that cheating happens because of the opportunity as well as the intention to cheat for example a student may have a favorable attitude toward cheating and may have friends who also engage in cheating, but the vigilant level of examination monitoring in a specific class may make cheating difficult or impossible (Madara et al 2016). The TPB therefore explains both the reasons why students cheat in exams and how the strategy of strict supervision of exams can help prevent the same.

Research Methodology

The study was carried out in five public universities in Kenya namely Kisii University, Moi University, Kibabii University, Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology and University of Eldoret between August 2018 and August 2019. The study used the descriptive survey research design. The study used university students, administrators in charge of Examinations and chairpersons of academic departments at the university as respondents. The study sampled fifty students, four administrators in the Examination offices and five chairpersons of departments from each of the five Universities. Therefore the number of respondents used in the study was 250 students, 20 administrators in charge of Examinations and 25 chairpersons of departments leading to a total of 295 respondents. The students' sample consisted of both undergraduates from first year to fourth year and postgraduate students. The students were selected from the five universities using simple random sampling while the administrators and chairpersons of departments were selected by use of purposive random sampling. Data was collected by use of Interview schedule and Questionnaires. University Students and administrators in examination offices filled the open-ended Questionnaires while chairpersons of academic departments were interviewed. Data was analyzed qualitatively and results presented thematically.

Table 1

Summary of sampled respondents

S/NO	CATEGORY OF RESPONDENTS	NO PER UNIVERSITY	TOTAL
1	Undergraduate students	40	200
2	Postgraduate students	10	50
3	Chair of Departments (CoDs)	05	25
4	Administrators	04	20
	GRAND TOTAL		295

Findings and Discussions

This study sought to establish the types, causes and implications of examination malpractices in public universities in Kenya. Findings are presented on the same as follows:

Finding 1: Types of Examination Malpractices

The study found out that the types of examination malpractices were almost the same and they cut across in all the universities that were sampled. The malpractices ranged from carrying unauthorized materials commonly known as *mwakenya* or *mwaks* to the use of smart phones. The study established the following as the common types of examinations malpractice in institutions of higher learning in Kenya:-

Carrying of Unauthorized Materials

This is perhaps the most common form of malpractice. It involves carrying unauthorized material into the exam room and referring to them during exams. The unauthorized materials could be note books, crib notes, charts and answers and are carried into the examination hall in pants, shoes, hems and bras, socks, belts etc. Sometimes it involves carrying gadgets with photos of notes or material related to the exams. This is a malpractice that was practiced in all the five sampled universities.

Examination Leakage

This means accessing questions before the exam and discussing them. This means that the content of examination or part of it is disclosed prior to taking the examination. Usually it involves staff members in the examination office such as typists, printers, proof readers, messengers, papers setters, moderators, secretaries etc. Sometimes it involves the lecturers. This is a malpractice that was common to all the five universities that participated in the study. It also involves hacking into computers that are used for typing exams and managing to download the exam questions. This was mainly done by IT students who used their IT skills

Collusion

This involves unauthorized passing of information between candidates usually by exchanging notes or scripts. Usually involves cooperation among the candidates but can be facilitated by inadequate spacing between desks and ineffective supervision. Sometimes this may involve writing short answers on question papers and exchanging those question papers within candidates.

Unauthorized Writings

This is where candidates strategically put writings of possible answers to some questions on walls, tables, toilets, desks, parts of body. Writing short answers on handkerchiefs and some parts of the body such as thighs, palms etc. The candidates then refer to this unauthorized writings when doing exams. This was also a very common malpractice in all the universities that participated in this study

Replacement of exam scripts

This is a malpractice that took place after an exam has been done and scripts stored awaiting marking. Usually it involves students colluding with a member of academic or non-academic staff to submit a newly prepared answer script to replace the original script that was done

Impersonation

This involves an individual who is not registered as a candidate taking the place of one that is registered and doing an examination for them. Sometimes this involves collusion between the chief examiner and the examination supervisor. It frequently involves students taking the examination for monetary reward or favor for a girl friend or boy friend. Sometimes young employees are coerced to take the examination in place of the rightful examinee.

Reproduction of another student's work

Another form of examination malpractice involves the reproduction of another student's work with or without their permission. This is referred to as plagiarism and was common among post-graduate students. Such a reproduction can be in form of copying written

assignments of fellow students or downloading projects already done and presenting them as your own.

External Assistance

This involved individuals who are not examination candidates giving unauthorized assistance to students. Usually this involved invigilators or exam room supervisors dictating answers, writing answers on the board etc during the examinations or simply acting as couriers of materials into the examination room or hall

Use of smart phones and other electronic gadgets

Some students save important content on smart phones and other electronic gadgets such as electronic watches and access the materials during examinations without anyone suspecting them. This was among the most recent type of examination malpractice and was practiced in all the five sampled universities. Sometimes the students use mobile phones with internet connectivity to quickly download important information related to the examinations.

Copying

This malpractice consisted of reproducing of another student's work with or without their permission. This sometimes happened in the examination halls or rooms and other times it involved assignments given by lecturers to students. This was also found to be in existence in all the sampled universities.

Use of Intimidation

This is where examination officials including supervisors and markers of examination papers are physically threatened usually by people who seek support for individual candidates. This helps in substitution of scripts and replacement of answer sheets handed out during the course of the examination. This usually involves exam office officials, invigilators and some lecturers working outside the examination room

Changing Marks

This examination malpractice involved deliberate changing of marks designed to in most cases increase a student's original mark and put the student at an advantage over others. This can be initiated by examination officers or by students themselves. Sometimes students who have failed particular courses use all possible means to ensure their marks are changed and they pass the course they originally had failed. This was common in universities which allowed several people to enter marks in the Universities Electronic Registration of Persons (ERP) system

Writing Projects and other tasks for students

This is the type of malpractice that involves either members of staff or fellow students writing projects, laboratory or field reports on behalf of a student. The student simply submits the work for examination and in most cases does not have an idea on what he/she submits. Sometimes the work is written in cyber cafes by young people who work in the cyber. In most cases this is done for money

Finding 2: Causes of Examination Malpractices

The study established that the causes of examination malpractices are several and are associated with students, administrators, members of academic and non-academic staff and parents/guardians. Some of the most common causes of examination malpractices included the following:

Poor Preparations for examinations either by students or course lecturers. For students, it might be as a result of engaging in other non-academic activities throughout the semester just to later realize the exams are to be sat. On part of course lecturers, they might not have fully covered the topics to be examined or their style of teaching is poor and students do not understand the content covered. Poor preparations make students not to be ready for the examinations therefore making them to want to cheat in the exams in order to pass and avoid sitting for special or supplementary examinations

Some students could be taking courses they don't have ability to do. This could be as a result of cheating at Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (K.C.S.E) exams leading to such students passing highly and getting admitted to courses with very high cut off points and which require high cognitive ability. Because of the low cognitive ability of the students, they end up cheating in the examinations in order to pass the supposedly difficult course for them. Those already in employment and who would like to get papers for promotion at times do not have enough time to revise for exams. Some of these students are always ready to either buy exam question papers, hire mercenaries to sit exams for them or at worst carry unauthorized material to exam room to assist them pass.

Lack of integrity among staff members who handle exams. Some will sell them at a fee while others will leak examinations to friends and relatives who are in the same institutions. This was common in all the sampled universities.

Financial gain: some members of universities who handle or have access to exams because of their nature of work sell exam papers at a fee leading to exam leakage. They mainly do it for financial gain, so for them it is a business deal.

Sexual favor: Some members of the teaching staff or non-teaching staff may leak the examinations to students for sexual favors. This was common in all the sampled public universities

Learners who cheated in examinations in primary and secondary schools find the courses too difficult and therefore continue with the same vice in institutions of higher learning. This is because when they cheat in primary and secondary schools then it becomes a habit and therefore they continue with the same vice even in institutions of higher learning

To be successful in life. Some students are involved in exam malpractice because of the immediate and long term positive impact on a candidate's life. In Kenya success in exam and university graduation provides an avenue for getting a job and being successful in life. This makes some students to secure examination at all costs including cheating in examinations.

The universities inability to diversify its method of measurement and evaluation of students but rather stick to examinations is one of the main reasons why examination malpractices have increased exponentially. Although examinations are not the only instrument for assessing and evaluating knowledge, it has emerged as the major established yardstick and the most practical way of assessment in Kenya.

In Kenya, a lot of value is attached on paper qualification rather than skill development. Even promotions at places of work are based on certificates and this has led to exam malpractices in institutions of higher learning.

Poor supervision of examination therefore tempting students to cheat in the examination. Some of the universities didn't have enough supervisors and the rooms are also not spacious therefore leading to overcrowding. These two factors encouraged examination malpractices. High expectations from parents and guardians: Some parents and guardians expect very high grades from their children in universities and therefore this makes students to want to get the good grades at all costs including cheating to please parents and guardians.

Finding 3: Implications of Examination Malpractices

Examination malpractice has led to undeserving students being awarded degrees which they cannot defend. That is why some graduates have little or no knowledge in their areas of specialization yet they have a good certificate

Examination malpractice in public universities has led to the labor market in Kenya receiving graduates who cannot perform tasks given to them despite having very good papers. That has made many employers to prefer to employ diploma and certificate graduates instead of university graduates

It has also led to those genuine hard working students being disadvantaged during exam time. It therefore makes them not see the importance of hard work. That is why in Kenya it is common to see students who entered university with very high grades leaving with low grades or classifications

Quality of service in the country has been compromised because those in service lack the knowledge/technical knowhow therefore don't know how to handle issues especially related to work.

Some students do not attend classes because they know they will access examinations therefore end up graduating without understanding what the course entails. When they enter the world of work they also end up not performing well and some are even sacked because they understand their work

Examination malpractices have also led to production of graduates who are lazy and cannot work. This has discouraged many employers from employing graduates from institutions of higher learning. As a result, Kenya has many graduates with degrees from institutions of higher learning who are unemployed. This has affected public universities more than private universities because that is where the vice is widespread.

When a student is caught and expelled from university, there will be no certificate to show for whatever years they might have put into their educational career.

Conclusions

If something is not done to stop this terrible act that is eating into the vital part of our educational fabric then certificates awarded by Kenyan institutions of higher learning would not be recognized both in the local and international level. At the same time employers would no longer respect such certificates from universities. The worst is we cannot attain sustainable development and eradicate poverty if examination malpractices happen in our institutions of higher learning which are supposed to produce high level manpower with skills for development.

Recommendations

To curb the problem of Examination malpractice the study recommends the following:

- Institutions of higher learning should give tough penalties to culprits for example some universities expel such students unlike others which just cancel results or suspend the culprit for a maximum of Two years.
- Staff involved in cheating should also be punished for example by sacking. Apart from those engaged in examination malpractices been dismissed from the universities they must be made to face the full rigors of the Law. This will help bring decency into our educational and examinational system.
- Lecturers should avoid setting recall questions and get used to application questions which tests on students understanding of concepts. This can be achieved through proper moderation of exams
- Institutions of higher learning should invest in Close Circuit Television (CCTV) cameras to curb the vice. All examination Rooms in the Universities should be installed with CCTV cameras to catch those involved in cheating and to discourage those who plan to be involved.
- Universities should improve on invigilation and supervision of exams. Have thorough and enough invigilators to supervise the exams so that it becomes practically impossible for students to malpractice.
- Universities should organize to teach students on the virtue of integrity right from first year. This can be done in the various courses which are taught at the university or through workshops and seminars for students
- Universities should organize for workshops and seminars on administration of examinations for lecturers and university non-teaching staff who handle examinations
- Universities should come up with a clear and effective monitoring system for coverage of course content by lecturers so that students are well prepared in their courses before sitting for exams
- Members of staff of an institution who learn in the same institution should not be allowed to work in sections which handle exams. This is to avoid them from accessing exams
- Students' class attendance should be monitored to ensure they attend classes and learn properly before sitting for exams. This will ensure students learn all that they are supposed and therefore be ready to do exams without copying
- Universities can adopt open book type of examinations which require learners to only apply what they have learnt in class. This will make learners study to understand so that they can be able to apply what they have studied.
- The government should provide the universities with enough funds so that the universities can employ more lecturers and teaching assistances. The purpose here is to allow for each student to be given, say, in a semester a question or project work that will be different from others to prevent students from copying from their colleagues.
- Lecturers and others who participate in supervision of exams should be paid a token of appreciation for the work so that they are motivated to do the work diligently
- Written assignments, projects thesis and dissertations submitted by students should be subjected to plagiarism checker to ascertain if they are student's original work or just copied from somewhere.

- Students should be made aware of the negative consequences of examination malpractices. This should be done at the beginning of their studies in institutions of higher learning

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