

FACTORS INFLUENCING EXAMINATIONS MALPRACTICES AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN KENYA: A CASE OF UNIVERSITIES IN KISII COUNTY

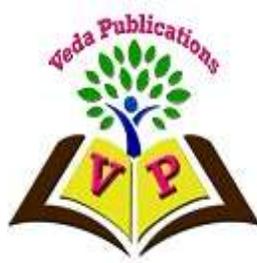
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Abstract



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This study investigated factors influencing examination malpractices by students in universities and university campuses within Kisii County, Kenya. The study had two objectives; to investigate students' perceptions on examination malpractices among students and to establish factors that influence examination malpractices among students in universities and campuses within Kisii County, Kenya. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design within the qualitative and quantitative tradition and it involved 370 students out of the 4,222 third year university students in 8 Universities. Simple random sampling technique was employed in coming up with the sample. A questionnaire was utilised to elicit data from the respondents. The instrument's validity was established by two experts who assured of its content and the usefulness of the scale employed in measuring data. The reliability of the instrument was assessed by employing a test-re-test and split half reliability tests in which the coefficient of correlation was computed. The theory of reasoned action (TRA) underpinned the study. Research data was analysed using descriptive statistics. The study found that sometimes students do not have the correct perception of what constitutes examination malpractices and that institution administrators have done little to fight the vice. The study also found that peer influence, a desire to excel, academic overload and the teaching environment were the leading factors responsible for examination malpractices among university students. Other equally important determinants include use of technology and procrastination. The study recommends that institutions should formulate a code of conduct to be observed by every person involved in the management and practice of examinations.

Keywords: *Examination Malpractices, Academic Dishonesty, Theory of Reasoned Action.*

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1.0 Introduction

The Problem of student cheating in examinations has been a matter of concern for many decades now and still continues to be of concern to the educational community. While figures on the prevalence of cheating among students differ from one study to another, there is a general agreement that the practice among university students has become not only more frequent but also more sophisticated. Academic dishonesty runs contrary to the core purpose of education i.e., the training of the mind and character so that the learner can: (i) acquire practical and theoretical skills; (ii) instil functional ideas for development and the search for truth; and (iii) impart knowledge which in turn is established and communicated as ideas.

Examination malpractice or cheating is in no doubt a global phenomenon with little cultural variations and which has been on the increase in recent times (Czek, 2000). He noted that “wherever the stakes are high and there is an advantage and opportunity to cheat, it seems to happen”. From America to Europe and to Africa, the issue of examination malpractice or academic dishonesty has become an issue of concern for educators. For example, commenting on examination malpractice in Ghana, Annan (2005) said examination malpractices have assumed an alarming trend in recent times. In the same vein Clayton (1999), says cheating has become a major topic at faculty meetings on college campuses across America. It has kept administrators and universities scratching their heads wondering why there has been an increase in academic dishonesty over the past years. McCabe, Linda and Keneth (1999) estimate the cheating extent at nearly 80 percent of the students surveyed.

Cheating is both an institutional and societal problem. Academic dishonesty however, is more injurious to the educational community than perhaps stakeholders realize because it affects lecturers, students, and administrators (Lipka, 2009; Wilkerson, 2009). Academic dishonesty costs institutions administrative time, loss of integrity within the school, and resulting in students lacking respect for ethics and values (Boehm, Justice & Weeks, 2009). On their part, lecturers argue that examination cheating is due to a failure of institutional leadership to establish integrity standards and practices across campuses. Also, many studies indicate that examination malpractices are not confined to particular programmes but seem to cut across disciplines. For example, in their discussion on the culture of cheating, Danielsen, Simon & Pavlick (2006) note that one might assume that cheating among medical and nursing students would be significantly lower than that of other professions since this profession is viewed as highly ethical and is expected to attract students with strong moral principles. However, this does not always appear to be the case.

In another study about cheating involving the process of logging patient information by nurses, Hegmann (2008) noted that 50% of the students admitted cheating, while 90% indicated that they believed that their colleagues cheated too. This suggests that majority of the students believe that cheating is necessary for one to succeed. Furthermore, research suggests that unethical classroom behaviours are positively linked with unethical clinical

behaviours and has proceeded to speculate that students who cheat may go on to endanger the health and safety of their patients (Fontana, 2009).

2.0 Statement of the Problem

Examination malpractice is neither a recent phenomenon nor peculiar to any part of the world. In fact, it is a global problem which is on the rise (Ogunji, 2011). Examination malpractice has some social and psychological dimensions, which counsellors need to address in a holistic manner. However, academic authorities have often either ignored or failed to include academic dishonesty policies and ethics courses that are directed to or specifically geared toward curbing cheating via information and communication technologies. In addition, cheating and unethical behaviours are often tolerated by institutional administrators and lecturers who are concerned about their reputations as well as the associated stress involved in the university disciplinary processes (Boehm, Justice & Weeks 2009). Wilkerson (2009) explained that there is another issue to consider : staff and students have different perceptions about cheating and plagiarism.

Good grades in any examination mean opportunities for further education and entry into the world of work, but only if the value systems of our youths are well constructed through the examination ethics. Regrettably, the general emphasis in our society today is on materialism, bribery, corruption, sexual promiscuity, deception, violence and a host of other social vices which have extended to the academic arena. It is in this context that Aina (1996) asserts that, ethics and integrity are the solution to all the examination ills. Hence, the social, political and economic structure of any nation is dependent on the promotion of examination ethics ; and that honesty is a virtue which once cultivated takes one through life and forms the foundation for an enduring success. It is against this backdrop that the study investigated factors influencing examination malpractices as well as the relationship between ethical conduct and student examination performance at the university.

3.0 Main Objective

This study sought to investigate factors influencing examination malpractices among university students in universities and campuses found within Kisii County, Kenya.

4.0 Research Objectives

1. Investigate students' perceptions on examination malpractices among students in universities and campuses within Kisii County, Kenya
2. Establish the factors that influence examination malpractices among students in universities and campuses within Kisii County, Kenya

5.0 Research Questions

1. What are the students' perceptions on examination malpractices among students in universities and campuses within Kisii County, Kenya?
2. What factors influence examination malpractices among students in universities and campuses within Kisii County, Kenya?

6.0 Methodology

The study employed a descriptive survey research design situated within both the qualitative and quantitative research paradigms. A questionnaire was utilised as the main tool to collect data from 370 students drawn from eight universities within Kisii County. The study sought to establish students' perceptions of what constitutes examination malpractices and the factors influencing examination malpractices, the central and focal point of targeting data for this study was the various universities and university campuses found within Kisii County.

The survey design was preferred for this study instead of any other approach, because it has many advantages, strengths and benefits such as : it collects data from many people within a short time ; it is less expensive and convenient compared to other methods ; encounters little or no observer subjectivity and yields good statistical results.

The selection of Kisii County as the area to perform the study was motivated by among others, two reasons. These are:

1. Kisii and neighbouring Counties have been reported for being notorious for examination malpractices particularly at secondary school level of education for a number of years now. Since majority of the students admitted into universities operating in Kisii County are drawn from the region, there is a higher likelihood that they carry over these behaviours to the tertiary institutions.
2. There have been a number of studies on examination malpractices, that have mostly targeted the secondary level of education. There have hardly been any studies done on examination malpractices involving students in Kenyan universities, particularly those operating in Kisii County.

7.0 Target population

The study targeted university students as the primary objects of the research. It utilised students drawn from both private and public universities. However, the study population was confined to third year students only in these universities. The third-year students formed what we call the accessible population. Third year students were preferred over students from other years in the universities because, they have been in university long enough and did not have the pressure of exams like 4th Years.

Table 1 Kisii County - University Student Population

S/No	Universities		Total No. Students			Third Year Students		
	Category	No	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total
1	Public	8	4,000	5,000	9,000	951	771	1,722
2	Private	14	6,000	6,000	12,000	1,259	1,241	2,500
Total		22	10,000	11,000	21,000	2,210	2,012	4,222

Source: Field Survey, 2013

Table 1 tabulates the total student population versus the population of interest. It shows that in 2013, eight (8) public compared to 14 private universities had set up campuses in Kisii County. The total student population was 21, 0000; of whom, 9,000 (42.9%) were females compared to 12,000 (57.1%) males. Further, the survey revealed that the third-year student population (which is the study population of interest) were 4,222 of whom 2,012 (47.7%) were females compared to 2,210 (52.3%) who were males.

8.0 The Sample Size

The study utilised a sample of 8 Universities selected out of 22 universities with campuses in Kisii County. The purpose was to assist in sampling students from these institutions who would participate in the study. This is according to Mugenda and Mugenda (2003), who assert that 30% of the respondents are adequate for a scientific study. The study further sampled 370 respondents from the universities. Table 2 shows the population of 3rd years and the number of respondents selected for the study.

Table 2 Universities, 3rd Year Population and Sample Size

Name	3rd Year's Population	No Sampled
Kisii	951	126
MKU	712	34
JKUAT	582	12
Nazarene	489	34
Rongo	382	44
JOOUST	265	74
E-SMART	168	34
Bugema	166	12
TOTAL	3,715	370

Table 2 shows that a total of 370 students were selected for the study, a majority of whom were drawn from Kisii, JOOUST (Jaramogi Oginga Odinga University of Science and Technology) and Rongo universities respectively. However, the smallest number of students for the study was selected from Bugema and Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology (JKUAT) university campuses.

9.0 Theoretical Framework

This study was underpinned by the **Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA)**; is one of the three classic models of persuasion. The theory is also used in communication discourse as a theory of understanding. The theory of reasoned action was developed by Martin Fishbein and Icek

Ajzen in 1967 and was derived from previous research that began as the theory of attitude. The theory aims to explain the relationship between attitudes and behaviours within human action. TRA is used to predict how individuals will behave based on their pre-existing attitudes and behavioural intentions. An individual's decision to engage in a particular behaviour is based on the outcomes that the individual expects will come as a result of performing the behaviour. This theory serves to understand an individual's voluntary behaviour. The ideas found within the theory of reasoned action have to do with an individual's basic motivation to perform an action. TRA says that a person's intention to perform a behaviour is the main predictor of whether or not they actually perform that behaviour. According to the theory, intention to perform a certain behaviour precedes the actual behaviour. This intention is known as behavioural intention and comes as a result of a belief that performing the behaviour will lead to a specific outcome. Behavioural intention is important to the theory because these intentions "are determined by attitudes to behaviours and subjective norms". The theory of reasoned action suggests that stronger intentions lead to increased effort to perform the behaviour, which also increases the likelihood for the behaviour to be performed.

10.0 Findings

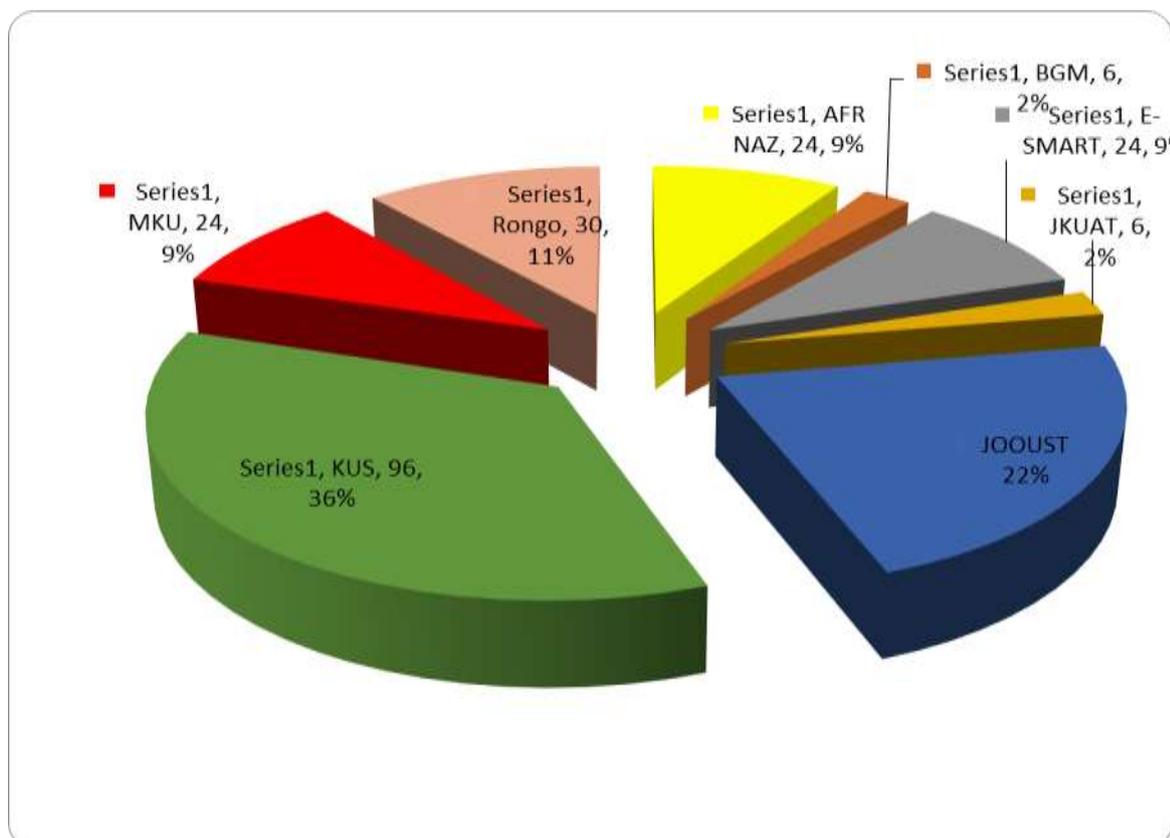


Fig. 1: Respondents per Institution

Figure 1 shows that majority of the students i.e., 96 (36%) were selected from Kisii University while the second highest population was drawn from JOOUST which had 60 (22%) respondents. Universities with the smallest number of respondents were Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology (JKUAT) and Bugema with 6 (2%), and MKU (Mt. Kenya University), African Nazarene and E-SMART with 24 (9%).

From a gender perspective, the sample consisted of 162 (60%) males compared to 108 (40 %) females. The sample did not differ significantly from the gender ratio of 42% females to 58% males for the universities. In addition, 78 (28.9%) of the sampled students were from privately sponsored universities compared to 192 (71.1%) who were drawn from Public Universities.

Further, all selected students professed the Christian faith save that they professed different persuasions. Those who professed the Catholic persuasion were 60 (22.2%) compared to 210 (78.8%) who professed the Seventh day Adventist persuasion. This is significant as the study assumed those who professed religion should be morally upright and therefore less prone to the temptations of examination cheating. Out of the 370 students who responded to the questionnaire, 340 denied having ever been involved in any examination malpractice during their university life, but 30 self-reported having been involved in some university examination malpractice. Further analysis revealed that out of the 30 who self-reported having been involved in examination malpractices, 12 were females compared to 18 who were males. In addition, the analysis revealed that of the 30, 6 professed the Catholic faith while 24 professed the Seventh day Adventist faith and were from four 4 (50%) of the universities.

11.0 Students' Perceptions on University Examination Malpractices

The first objective of the study was to find out students' perceptions of what constitutes university examination malpractices. To be able to address this research objective, the study analysed items 8 – 18 of the questionnaires administered to the respondents. A summary of the results is hereby presented: -

- (i) Although majority of the respondents i.e., 198 (73.3%) believe that students can pass university examinations, assignments or tests without being involved in cheating behaviours such as copying from a fellow student or secretly sneaking unauthorised material to aid in doing the assignment; many of them i.e., 168 (62.2%) also hold the view that it is normal for university students to cheat in any examination, assignment or test.
- (ii) In addition, majority of the respondents i.e., 186 (68.9%) hold the view that examination cheating behaviours among university students are encouraged by the responsible administrators. This is because they do not give punishment which is deterrent enough to those caught cheating which can discourage them being involved in the vice. At the same time, majority of those surveyed i.e., 204 (75.5%) believe that academic dishonesty is a problem with serious consequences both in the educational

process and the society at large. However, slightly over half i.e., 150 (55.6%) believe that although it is wrong to cheat, students cheat in examinations, assignments or tests anyway.

- (iii) A majority of the respondents i.e., 192 (71.1%) hold the view that the fight against academic dishonesty cannot be won by involving everybody (i.e., students, management, lecturers, and examination administrators). They believe it is not correct to involve students, especially those who are apparently not to be involved in cheating behaviours.
- (iv) A majority of the respondents i.e., 192 (71.1%) do not believe that they would probably cheat in an examination, assignment or test although the society has a high expectation which exerts a lot of pressures on them to perform; 162 (60%) would probably cheat given the opportunity. This is because nothing drastic happens to those caught cheating.
- (v) Furthermore; majority of the respondents (i.e., 174 or 64.4%) believe that one does not need to struggle to gain University education because even individuals without it succeed in life. However, those interviewed, did not agree on what constitutes success in life.
- (vi) Whereas majority of those interviewed i.e., 174 (64.4%) believe that the main purpose of university education is to obtain a certificate; a similar number believe that academic dishonesty has become rampant. This is because Universities have become larger, less personal, more competitive and have long ceased to be places to gain knowledge. This result is informed by the fact that examination cheating behaviours were self-reported by 30 or 11.1% of the respondents surveyed.

12.0 Factors influencing examination malpractices among University students

The second objective of the study was to find out the factors that influence examination malpractices among university students. To do this, the study analysed items No. 19 which considered 12 possible factors thought to influence examination malpractices. Respondents were given 12 factors thought to be significant determinants for predicting the extent for university examination cheating to evaluate on a 5-point Likert scale. Response was through a continuum from 1 to 5 whereby those who strongly agreed with the factor were awarded a score of 5 while those who strongly disagreed were awarded a score of 1. The study calculated the total scores for all participants per factor. Total scores obtained per factor were divided by highest possible score (i.e., $5 \times 370 = 1,850$) and multiplied by 100.

The results of the analysis are tabulated in table 4.

Table 4: Factors influencing University examination Malpractices in order of Priority

S/No	Factor	%
1	Peer Influence, including having friends who cheat	74.2
2	A desire to excel or being pressured to obtain good grades	74.2
3	Academic Overload	72.0
4	Teaching environment such as inability of Lecturers to communicate material effectively	72.0
5	Use of Technology	70.2
6	Procrastination	70.2
7	Poor / lack of invigilation	69.3
8	A crowded classroom	66.7
9	A lack of morality	66.7
10	Low probability of being detected or caught	66.2
11	Lack of confidence due to inadequate Preparation	65.8
12	Lack of personal Integrity	64.4

Table 4. shows that all the 12 factors are significant determinants for predicting the likelihood of students cheating in university examinations. Topping the list of the factors are peer influence as well as a desire to excel. These are closely followed by academic overload and the teaching environment. Other equally important determinants include use of technology and procrastination.

Grouping these factors into social influences, student related influences, teaching environment and institutional factors; it was revealed that ‘social-influences’ such as peer influence or being pressured by parents and significant others to obtain good grades were more important determinants for university examination cheating than institutional and student related factors.

13.0 Conclusions

Based on the findings, the study on factors influencing examination malpractices among university students come to the following conclusions:

1. It is possible that students can pass university examinations, assignments or tests without being involved in cheating behaviours. However, cheating in examinations is

rampant due to failure of university administration not doing enough to discourage cheating in examinations.

2. Academic dishonesty is a problem with serious consequences both in the educational process and the society at large. Therefore, curbing it is something that should not involve academic institutions only, but also the society at large. Academic dishonesty costs institutions administrative time, loss of integrity within the school, and resulting to students lacking respect for ethics and values (Boehm, Justice & Weeks, 2009).

14.0 Recommendations

The following were the recommendations made out of this study:

1. To deal with student perceptions', universities should formulate a code of conduct to be observed by any person involved in the management and practice of examination. Universities should sensitize students, lecturers and examination management through seminars, workshops and class conferences. Also, every lecturer should ensure that students have been sensitized on examination cheating in the particular course.
2. All those caught cheating in examinations should be dealt with firmly and fairly according to the laid down principles. The penalty meted to those caught cheating should be commensurate with the offence committed. Evidence should be gathered carefully so that the charges can be sustained. Invigilators should be encouraged to be strict while administering examinations.
3. High level of discipline should be instilled to the university learners. Discipline correlates with performance. Students who are notorious in flouting examination code of ethics should be rehabilitated or expelled from learning institutions to curb down the vice spreading widely.

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