

Full Length Research Paper

Perceived psycho-social and school factors contributing to malpractices in internal examinations among secondary school students in Kakamega-Central Sub-county: Implications for counseling

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Examination malpractice is rated as one of the greatest problems that undermine the foundation of educational practice in Kenya today. The magnitude of the problem and the dangers posed by the phenomenon have been identified by stakeholders as national malady that requires drastic solution. Thus, this study attempted to investigate the view of students about the psycho-social and school causes of and roles of guidance and counselling in addressing the malpractices in internal examination in Kakamega Central Sub-county. A total of three hundred and fifty nine students were randomly sampled from twelve schools selected at random for the study. Data were collected using researcher developed questionnaires. Four research questions were raised and answered using frequency counts, simple percentage and means scores. However, results indicated that poor study habits, laziness, lack of self confidence, family pressure to excel and host of others were considered by students as the major psycho-social causes of examination malpractice. Inadequate preparation for examination, poor teaching, overcrowded exam rooms and poor invigilation were considered by respondents as the causes of examination malpractice. On the roles of the school guidance and counselling units most of the respondents indicated that the G&C unit exists and talks to them about self esteem, peer pressure management, self confidence and that exam cheating is wrong. However, most of them did not agree that G&C can assist students involved in exam cheating to change. The psycho-social factors are the predisposing factors to exam malpractices while the school factors are the environmental causes. Most schools have active guidance and counselling units. However, these units do not seem to be effective in addressing the problems of malpractices in internal examinations in secondary schools. Based on these findings, it was recommended that students and teachers should be given enlightenment campaign that will highlight the consequences of examination malpractice. Also, government should sensitize all citizens to basic ethical values of selfworth, dignity of labour, integrity and personal responsibility. Professional guidance counselors should be employed and posted to secondary schools to help students in self understanding and self management as well as the development of effective study habits in relation to how they can utilize their assets and manage their abilities for optimal development. Further, all schools should be adequately equipped and staffed to address issues of overcrowding and poor invigilation.

Key words: Examination malpractice, secondary schools students, counselling.

INTRODUCTION

Evaluation in the education process provides the means of finding out whether educational objectives are being attained (Wheeler, 1997). According to Nevo (1995) evaluation in education has also come to be viewed by different scholars as: providing information for decision makers; the systematic investigation of the worth or Merit of some object and an act of collecting systematic information regarding the nature and quality of educational objects. Evaluation should therefore be carefully designed and undertaken in a manner that it ensures fairness and objectivity on the outcome of the process. Examinations are a form of evaluation that would be internal or external. Internal examinations are set by teachers in form of tests, reports, and end term examinations. Public or external examinations on the other hand are conducted in public interest by Kenya National Examination Council (KNEC). The outcome of the examination is used as a basis for decision-making on the examinee's ability (Fasasi, 2006). The examinee is consequently promoted to another level or awarded a certificate which could qualify him for admission into a school, promotion into higher level of an institution or offered employment opportunities. However, many decisions, which emanate from examinations may not be valid due to involvement of examinees in malpractices (Oniye and Alawaye, 2008). Malpractice occurs in both internal and external assessment of educational outcome.

The World Bank Group (2002) defined malpractices in public examinations as a deliberate act of wrong doing contrary to official examination rules that are designed to place a candidate at an unfair advantage. It is a problem which has been afflicting the education system for many years (Oniye and Alawaye, 2008). It seems to have defied solutions, as all antidotes applied so far have been faulted by fraudsters.

It is evident that a lot has been documented in Kenya on examination malpractices especially in national examinations (KCPE and KCSE). However, there is very little documentary evidence on examination cheating in internal examinations at secondary school level. Further examination cheating is a learned behaviour and seeks a rewarding outcome. There is no evidence to show that guidance and counselling principles have been applied to address the problem.

School factors are those aspects associated with the learning environment that may lead to exam cheating. They may include the teacher, management and school facilities. Research has demonstrated that cheating behavior in examinations is influenced by students' actual

academic performance (Onuka and Obialo, 2004). According to Singhal (1982), as much as 68% of students regarded the wish to get good grade points as the main reason for cheating. These findings were confirmed by Davis and Ludvigson (1995) who also pointed out that pressure for good grades in higher education, student stress, teachers' attitudes and an increase in lack of academic integrity are important determinants of cheating in examinations.

In a study carried out in North America it was observed that schools' obsession with performance spurs cheating and that classrooms that emphasized on high grades and test scores may drive students to cheat (Anderman and Midgley, 2004). They also identified examination scheduling, poor supervision and a badly organized course as other causes of exam dishonesty. Fasasi (2006) revealed that cheating in examinations is motivated by; desperation to acquire certificate or get placed in a programme or be selected for a position, carelessness on the part of the teacher/examiners in safeguarding the examination paper before it is administered, emphasis on grades, poor arrangement, poor invigilation, and use of objective tests, among others.

Many psycho-social factors have been attributed to cause examination malpractices. Psycho-social has been defined as a study that examines the relationship between a person's fears and how he relates to others in a social setting (www.wikipedia.org/wiki/psychosocial). It has been noted that students who are encouraged to learn for the sake of learning and who exhibit higher intrinsic value of education are less likely to cheat than those who are encouraged primarily by grades and other extrinsic rewards (Bowers, 1964). Bowers found that some students may feel pressured to develop unorthodox means to get competitive and credentials. He also noted that fear of failure is the most important reason for students to cheat in examinations and that most students doubted their capability to pass in examinations. Psychologists note that all people tend to follow the norms of their peer group, which would include norms about academic dishonesty. In an environment where students experience their peers cheating and are not caught they too will develop an attitude of "everybody else does it."

This is supported by a study which observed that peer pressure is an important cause of academic dishonesty (Pope, 2007). Thus students who believe that their peers disapprove of cheating are less likely to cheat. Fear of failure, peer pressure and lack of confidence in their abilities has been cited by other researchers (Okoh, 1996;

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Onuka and Obialo, 2004) Indeed when asked why they engage in examination malpractices, fear of failing examinations was listed as one of the top reasons for engaging in malpractice in the United States of America (Schab, 1991) and in Nigeria Fatai (2005) outlined the fear of failure, craze for certificate, desire of parents to have their children in choicy university and profession, pressure on students to pursue courses for which they have no aptitude, pressure on teachers who want to gain favour of student, inordinate ambition of some people to get rich quick, and overcrowded sitting arrangement as causes of examination malpractices.

This researcher is not aware of any study that has been conducted to quantify perceived school and psycho-social causes of malpractices in internal examination among secondary school students in Kenya. The study therefore investigated the students' perceived Psycho-social and school causes of examination malpractices in internal exams with a view of proffering effective guidance and counselling solutions to curb the menace among secondary school students in Kakamega Central Sub-County, Kenya.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out in public secondary schools in Kakamega Central Sub-County, Kenya. The Sub-county is located in Kakamega County. It lies between longitude 34°34' East and 0°20' North. It borders Mumias Sub-county in the north, Kakamega South and Kakamega East Sub-counties in the east and Kakamega North Sub-county in the west. It consists of three divisions namely, Municipality, Shishiru and Nambacha. The three divisions are managed by area Education Officers. The Sub-county has 43 secondary schools out of which 39 are public and 4 private. Of the 39 public secondary schools, 6 are girls' only, 3 boys' only and 35 are co-educational (S.E.O'soffice, Kakamega Central Sub-County, 2011).

The research was conducted among 3590 secondary school students drawn from 43 secondary schools. Purposive and simple random sampling techniques were used to pick respondents. The study sample comprised 359 students from 2 girls only schools, 1 boys only school and 10 co-educational schools representing 30 percent of the population.

The self-administered questionnaires were completed by respondents themselves. Closed ended questionnaire were used to collect information on perceived Psycho-social and school causes of examination malpractices and their opinions on roles of guidance and counselling to address the malady (Appendix 1).

The respondents had to score items on Likert type scale by checking one of the five possible responses from each item. It was scored on five point grades as follows: Strongly Agree (SA) = 5 Points, Agree (A) = 4 Points, Undecided (UD) = 3 Points, Disagree (D) = 2 Points and Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1 Point. A score indicative of most favourable response was given 5 while the least favourable response was given 1. Scores eliciting Strongly Agree and Agree responses were collectively rated positive or favourable while scores eliciting Strongly Disagree and Disagree responses were collectively rated negative or unfavourable and finally Undecided was rated neutral. Pilot study was carried out before the main study on two schools. The research tool was administered on 10% of form three students in these schools. Content validity and reliability of the tools was ascertained using Pearson Product Moment Correlation. The schools used in the pilot study did not

participate in the main study.

The reliability of the measurement of instrument was assessed using Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient which is a test for internal consistency in items. Reliability analysis in the current study was conducted for the three scales measuring Psycho-social and school causes of examination malpractices and roles of guidance and counselling services.

Data collected were sorted out, edited, coded, classified and then tabulated and analyzed using SPSS version 17 software. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics such as frequency counts, means and percentages. Inferential statistics such as Analysis of Variance was used to determine the impact of various demographic aspects. Besides any appropriate statistical procedures found valuable was used.

DATA PRESENTATION, INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION

A total of 359 copies of questionnaires were distributed to respondents. Out of 350 copies of questionnaires distributed 297 copies of questionnaires were returned out of which 11 copies were discarded for lack of response and some for incompleteness. This left a total of 286 copies of usable questionnaires amounting to 81.7 percent response rate. This response rate was deemed acceptable since according to Fowler (2002), there is no agreed-upon minimum response rate; the more the responses received the more likely it is that statistically significant conclusions about the target population will be drawn.

Question one: What are the perceived psycho-social causes of examination malpractices in examinations in secondary schools in Kakamega Central Sub-County?

In addressing question two, data on the psycho-social causes of examination malpractices as perceived by the students were collected from the responses to the questionnaire and analyzed using percentages. The findings are shown in Table 1. The opinions of the respondents varied on the psycho-social causes of examination malpractices in the Sub-county. Some of the major causes according to the survey included; poor study habits (89.9%), not reading well (88.6%), laziness (87%), lack of self confidence among the students (73.4%), family pressure to perform well (68%) and to please parents, peer pressure (66.8%).

This findings are in agreement with a study by Pope (2007) in which it was observed that peer pressure is an important cause of academic dishonesty. Thus students who believe that their peers disapprove of cheating are less likely to cheat. Fear of failure, peer pressure and lack of confidence in their abilities have been cited by other researchers (Okoh, 1996; Onuka, and Obialo, 2004) as causes of exam cheating. Indeed when asked why they engage in examination malpractices, fear of failing examinations was listed as one of the top reasons for engaging in malpractice in the United States of America (Schab, 1991) and in Nigeria (Onuka and Obialo, 2004). The research observed that all the respondents were admitted to secondary schools because they qualified and were therefore above average in intellectual ability. They therefore engage in exam cheating due to laziness and peer pressure.

The study further revealed that peer pressure, pressure from parents and the school management make students to resort to cheating. These findings are in agreement with observations by Davis et al. (1992) that pressure for good grades, stress and ineffective deterrence were some of the determinants of cheating.

Question two: What are the perceived school causes of examination malpractices in examinations in secondary schools in Kakamega Central Sub-County?

As shown in Table 2 the opinions of the respondents varied on

Table 1. Perceived psycho-social causes of examination malpractices in secondary schools in Kakamega Central Sub-County.

Perceptions	% Responses		
	Agree	Undecided	Disagree
A student will be interested to buy the exam question paper before the examination	144(45.6%)	37(11.7%)	135(31.6%)
Students cheat in examination due to lack of self confidence	232(73.4%)	15(4.7%)	69(21.8%)
No matter how hard you read, if you don't cheat you will fail the exam.	48(15.2%)	17(5.4%)	251(79.4%)
Students cheat in examination in order to please parents and friends.	211(66.8%)	12(3.8%)	93(29.4%)
Students with good study habits can avoid cheating in exams	284(89.9%)	7(2.2%)	25(7.9%)
I can allow my friend to copy from my paper during exams	41(12.7%)	17(5.4%)	258(87.6%)
Involvement in extra-curricular activities makes students to cheat in exams	97(25.6%)	16(5.1%)	219(69.3%)
Students who cheat in exams perform well	102(32.3%)	33(10.4%)	181(57.3%)
Family pressure for high exam achievement contributes to cheating in exams	215(68%)	26(8.2%)	75(23.8%)
Laziness among students causes them to cheat in exams	275(87%)	12(3.8%)	29(9.1%)
Cheating is not necessary if one has read well before the examination	280(88.6%)	6(1.9%)	30(9.5%)

the perceived school causes of examination malpractices in the Sub-county. Some of the major causes of examination malpractices according to the survey include; poor preparation for examinations (86.4%), overcrowded examination rooms (78.2%), poor invigilation of examinations (71.9%), pressure to improve on the ranking of the school (52.6%) and poor teaching (51.6%).

A significant proportion of respondents (45.6%) agreed that they will be interested to buy an exam question paper if they were offered before the exam, while 11.7% were undecided. 232 (73.4%) respondents out 316 interviewed disagreed that students cheat because they are not aware of examination rules and regulations. Most (71.9%) of the respondents disagreed that cheating is encouraged since many people who cheat often escape punishment and 71.1% disagreed that it is difficult to stop cheating in examinations in our schools. 51.6% of the respondents disagreed that one will not feel guilty to cheat if the teacher has not taught well, however 37.6% agreed with the assertion.

The aforementioned causes and others conform with the ones listed by Oniye and Alawaye (2008), Ogerinde (2000), Onugbu (2003), malpractice in Asa local government: implication for counseling; Oniye and Alawaye (2008) found societal preference for paper qualification; inadequate preparation by Fatai (2005) and Ibinaye (2006). For instance, on a study on female students' perceived causes of and solution to examination for examination, lack of self confidence, ill equipped schools, lack of good study habits and host of others were considered by female students as the causes of examination malpractice.

Teachers are employed to teach students and the quality of teaching should therefore aid retention ability of students. Students can only recall or reproduce what is retained through teaching. It has been observed that poor quality teaching aggravates the urge to cheat in the examination by students with low academic ability (Ewangle, 1997). In a similar study Gesinde (2002) noted that some teachers commence teaching a few days to exams, others concentrate on areas to be set in exams; some are not qualified to teach while others use wrong teaching methods. The same author further observed that teachers also serve as invigilators to watch over examinees. They are therefore expected to be vigilant to prevent cheating and to report any such cases. However, the author observed that most teachers spent their time either reading newspapers or discussing with their colleagues instead of watching over the examinees. This encourages cheating and even very few bother to report cases of cheating.

In a related study on student factors influencing cheating in undergraduate examinations in universities in Kenya, Ruto et al.

(2011) observed that majority of the students ranked as first lack of preparedness for examination with mean of 2.99 on a 1-5 scale. This was followed by factors such as peer influence (2.93), poor attendance of lectures (2.58), lack of confidence (2.35) and pressure from parents to perform well (1.96).

The survey revealed occurrence of various causes of examination malpractices in secondary schools in the sub-county. Among prominent causes of cheating was lack of preparedness. Students may not adequately prepare for examination if they know from past experience that they can engage in various of cheating without being caught due to weak invigilation. This collaborates with the study by Davis and Ludvickson (1995) who established in a study that those who cheat in the university level studies cheated in earlier studies or examinations.

Question three: How effective does guidance and counselling programme address examination malpractices among secondary school students in Kakamega Central Sub-County?

In addressing question three, data on the effectiveness of guidance and counselling in addressing examination malpractices in secondary schools in Kakamega Central Sub-County, Kenya as perceived by the students were collected from the responses to the questionnaire and analyzed using percentages. The findings are shown in Table 3.

As shown in the table the opinions of the respondents varied on the effectiveness of guidance and counselling in addressing examination malpractices in the Sub-county. However, 94% of the respondents indicated that there were Guidance and Counselling Units in their schools. An overwhelming majority indicated that the Guidance and Counselling unit often talks to them about self-esteem, peer pressure management, good study habits and proper time management among other topics. Further, most of the respondents felt that from the guidance and counselling talks they know that exam cheating is wrong. 95% of the respondents were in agreement that guidance and counselling has taught them self-confidence to face the exams and 68.4% follow examination rules and regulations. 72.2% will feel guilty if they cheated in exams. However, 59.5% do not think guidance and counselling assist exam cheats.

Further analysis (Table 4) indicated a highly significant difference among schools in students' perception of the effectiveness of guidance and counselling in management of examination malpractice among students in secondary schools in Kakamega Central Sub-County.

Table 2. Perceived school causes of examination malpractices in secondary schools in Kakamega Central Sub-County.

Perceptions	% Response		
	Agree	Undecided	Disagree
Students cheat in examinations because their friends cheat.	115(35.4%)	27(8.5%)	174(56.1%)
Students cheat to improve on ranking of their school	166(52.6%)	38(12.0%)	112(35.4%)
It is difficult to stop cheating in examinations in our schools	78(24.7%)	14(4.4%)	224(71.1%)
Cheating is encouraged since many people who cheat often escape punishment.	71(22.5%)	18(5.7%)	227(71.9%)
Students cheat because they are not aware of exam rules and regulations	74(22.4%)	12(3.8%)	232(73.4%)
Lack of proper invigilation by teachers encourages cheating in exams	227(71.9%)	24(7.6%)	65(20.5%)
Overcrowded exam rooms encourage exam cheating	247(78.2%)	18(5.7%)	51(16.1%)
One will not feel guilty to cheat in the examination if the teacher fails to teach well.	163(51.6%)	33(10.4%)	119(37.6%)
Poor preparation makes students to cheat in examinations	273(86.4%)	13(4.1%)	30(9.5%)

Table 3. Students perceptions of effectiveness of guidance and counselling programme in secondary schools in Kakamega Central Sub-County.

Perceptions	Respondents categories		
	Agree	Undecided	Disagree
Our school has a guidance and counselling unit	297(94%)	5(1.6%)	14(4.4%)
The guidance and counselling unit often talks to students	263(83.3%)	11(3.5%)	42(13.3%)
Need for self-esteem, peer pressure management, good study habits and proper time management are some of the topics discussed in the meetings	294(93.1%)	6(1.9%)	16(5.0%)
From the guidance and counselling discussions I know that exam cheating is wrong	299(94.6%)	5(1.6%)	12(3.8%)
Guidance and counselling has taught students to have self-confidence to face the exam	300(95%)	4(1.3%)	12(3.8%)
Students follow school rules and regulations in regard to examinations	216(68.4%)	22(7.0%)	78(24.7%)
Cheating in examinations makes students feel guilty.	228(72.2%)	36(11.4%)	52(16.5%)
Guidance and counselling can assist students involved in exam cheating	125(39.6%)	3(0.9%)	188(59.5%)

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It was noted that malpractices are caused by numerous factors that could be categorized as either school factors or psycho-social factors. The most prominent school factors noted in the survey were poor preparation of students for exam, overcrowded exam rooms and poor invigilation. These factors are mainly centered around the teacher as he is the one responsible for preparation of students and provision of the right atmosphere for teaching and examination. The most prominent psycho-social causes of cheating in the survey were poor reading habits, laziness, lack of self confidence and peer pressure. Laxity in the school environment provides the right motivation for psycho-social factors that cause exam cheating.

Rampant examination malpractices are witnessed despite the overwhelming evidence of the existence and relatively active Guidance and Counselling units in most schools. School managers have used retribution, deterrence and societal protection methods to address the malpractices but this does not seem to effectively curb the menace. The Government has also enacted the revised KNEC Act (2012) that provides for stiffer penalties against the offenders. However, the legislation

is targeted at offenders at national examination but not internal examinations. It therefore does not nib the menace in the bud but allows it to metamorphosise. The Act does not also provide for rehabilitative methodologies for offenders.

From the survey it may be concluded that the guidance and counselling methods chosen to address exam malpractices should be based on whether the cause is either school or Psycho-social. School causes should be addressed mainly administrative that is through proper teacher recruitment and management and provision of adequate teaching and learning facilities. Psycho-social causes may require appropriate guidance and counselling method to effectively address.

Recommendations

Since the whole segments of the nation's life are unfortunately connected to the issues of examination malpractice, there is a need to sensitize all citizens on basic ethical values of self-worth, dignity of labour, integrity and personal responsibility.

Only teachers who are qualified, certificated, competent and of good moral standing need to be employed to

teach the students. They should be dedicated teachers who would serve as role models in matters of punctuality, self-discipline, accountability, integrity and sound leadership styles.

Furthermore, well-equipped functional libraries should be in place to promote good reading habits. Facilities, like laboratories, and amenities for basic needs should be available.

Continuous assessment procedure should be given to students to ignite the zeal to study and develop self-confidence with less emphasis on certification.

Competent counselors should be employed and posted to secondary schools and other tertiary institutions. They should help students in self-understanding and self-management, in relation to how they can utilize their assets and manage their abilities, and capabilities for optimal development.

Further research should be carried out on the effectiveness of the schools Guidance and Counselling units to manage examination malpractices especially internal examination. Examination cheating is a learned habits and the rampant cheating in national examinations would have a linkage to the malpractices in internal examinations.

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