



Examination Malpractice and Its Impact on Educational Integrity and Quality in Secondary Schools: A Case of Kinondoni Municipality, Tanzania

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration between both authors. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the impact of examination malpractice on educational integrity and quality in secondary schools within Kinondoni Municipality, Tanzania. The increasing prevalence of malpractice in schools has raised concerns about the long-term effects on the credibility of the education system and the competencies of graduates. Using a mixed-methods research design, the study involved a sample of 20 teachers, 80 students, 20 parents, 4 heads of schools, and 4 education officers from four secondary schools (two public and two private). This sample was obtained using both probability and non probability sampling techniques. Data were collected

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through questionnaires, interviews, and observation, and analyzed using thematic analysis for qualitative data and descriptive statistics for quantitative data. Content validation, member checking and trustworthiness were used to ensure both validity and reliability of the instruments results. The findings reveal that examination malpractice significantly undermines educational quality, leading to the production of graduates with low academic value, a loss of credibility in the education system, and reduced job opportunities for genuine graduates. The study concludes that addressing examination malpractice requires stricter regulatory frameworks, enhanced monitoring, community engagement, and the implementation of technological solutions to restore integrity in the examination process.

Keywords: Examination malpractice; educational integrity; education quality; secondary schools; Tanzania; Kinondoni Municipality.

1. INTRODUCTION

Examination malpractice has emerged as one of the most pressing threats to educational integrity in secondary schools globally, and Tanzania is no exception. In a knowledge-driven economy, the quality of education is crucial in shaping a nation's future workforce and overall societal development. In Tanzania, education remains the cornerstone of social mobility and economic prosperity, enabling individuals to access better career opportunities and contribute meaningfully to national development [1]. However, the rising tide of examination malpractice, especially in Kinondoni Municipality, has compromised the credibility of educational assessments, leading to the production of under-qualified graduates (Emaikwu, 2012). This unethical behavior undermines not only the integrity of the educational system but also Tanzania's efforts to meet global educational standards as outlined in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) [2].

Examination malpractice can take many forms, including cheating, impersonation, and bribery, all of which devalue the qualifications obtained by students. The competitive nature of the job market has put immense pressure on students, teachers, and even parents to ensure high exam performance, sometimes at the expense of ethical standards [3]. In Tanzania, this culture has been fueled by various socio-economic factors, including inadequate teaching resources, large class sizes, and a lack of sufficient regulatory frameworks to monitor and punish offenders [4]. As a result, examination malpractice has become normalized in many schools, particularly in both public and private secondary institutions in Kinondoni, where high-stakes exams drive the motivation to cheat.

Despite the government's efforts to enhance the quality of education through policies like the

National Education and Training Policy [1], the persistence of examination malpractice continues to erode the public's confidence in the Tanzanian educational system. The implications are far-reaching: not only does it diminish the trust employers place in Tanzanian qualifications, but it also threatens the nation's ability to produce a capable and ethical workforce. This study seeks to explore the dynamics of examination malpractice in Kinondoni Municipality, analyze its impact on education quality, and propose strategies for restoring academic integrity. By examining both theoretical frameworks and empirical evidence, this research aims to contribute to the broader conversation on improving educational quality in Tanzania and globally.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory [5] provides a foundational framework for understanding how students engage in examination malpractice through observational learning. Bandura posits that individuals learn behaviors by observing others, particularly those in positions of influence such as teachers, parents, or peers. In the context of schools, students who observe their classmates engaging in cheating may adopt similar behaviors, believing that these actions lead to academic success. This theory is particularly relevant in Tanzanian secondary schools where cheating has become so ingrained in the culture that students may view it as a norm rather than an exception [6]. Moreover, social learning theory suggests that behavioral change can occur when positive behaviors, such as academic honesty, are modeled by authority figures like teachers and administrators [5].

Jean Piaget's Cognitive Development Theory [7] further explains how students rationalize

examination malpractice based on their developmental stage. Piaget theorized that as children grow, they progress through stages of cognitive development that influence their ability to reason and make moral decisions. Adolescents, who make up the majority of secondary school students, are in Piaget's formal operational stage, characterized by abstract thinking and moral reasoning [7]. However, if students are raised in environments that normalize unethical behavior, they may incorporate cheating into their cognitive framework as a justifiable action, especially if they perceive academic success as unattainable through legitimate means [8].

B.F. Skinner's Reinforcement Theory [9] adds another dimension to understanding why students continue to engage in examination malpractice. According to Skinner, behavior is shaped by its consequences, and actions that are positively reinforced are likely to be repeated. In many Tanzanian schools, the lack of stringent consequences for cheating has created an environment where students feel emboldened to engage in malpractice without fear of reprisal [4]. This lack of deterrence has been identified as a key factor in the persistence of cheating in Kinondoni's secondary schools [10]. If students observe that those who cheat are not punished and are even rewarded with higher grades, they may be more inclined to follow suit.

Research on examination malpractice globally highlights a widespread issue that affects the integrity of educational systems. In Tanzania, the prevalence of malpractice is well-documented across various academic levels, with studies noting that it is particularly rampant in secondary schools (Agholor & Otsemobor, 2016). Studies by Suleman et al. [10] in Pakistan and Nyamoita & Otieno, [11] in Kenya show similar trends, where high-stakes exams create immense pressure, leading to unethical behaviors such as cheating, impersonation, and bribery. These studies reveal that examination malpractice is often facilitated by teachers, parents, and school administrators, all of whom play roles in perpetuating a culture of dishonesty.

The impact of examination malpractice on education quality is severe. Adeyemi, [6] demonstrated that cheating leads to the production of graduates who lack the skills and competencies necessary for the workforce. In the Tanzanian context, this has raised concerns among employers who question the reliability of

academic qualifications from local institutions. This issue is not unique to Tanzania, as similar concerns have been raised in countries like Zambia and Nigeria, where employers find it difficult to trust the qualifications of graduates due to widespread examination malpractice [12].

To combat examination malpractice, several countries have adopted a mix of technological and regulatory interventions. Mireku, Bervell, & Dzamesi, [13] advocate for the use of advanced technologies such as biometric identification systems and secure online testing platforms to minimize opportunities for cheating. Similarly, Adeniran, Bakare, & Akinpade, [14] emphasize the need for regulatory frameworks that enforce strict penalties for both students and teachers involved in malpractice. In Tanzania, however, these interventions have been slow to take root, largely due to financial and logistical constraints [4]. Nonetheless, the potential for technology to curb malpractice remains promising, particularly as more schools adopt digital learning environments.

3. METHODOLOGY

A mixed-method research approach was used, combining quantitative and qualitative data to explore the causes and effects of examination malpractice in Kinondoni Municipality. This cross-sectional study involved four secondary schools (two public and two private) and gathered data from 20 teachers, 80 students, 20 parents, 4 school heads, and 4 educational officers using questionnaires, interviews, and observation methods. Thematic analysis was used to organize qualitative data into recurring themes, while quantitative data was processed using statistical techniques. Direct quotations and narrative forms were employed to enrich the analysis and offer concrete recommendations for policy improvements. This approach facilitated a holistic understanding of the roles various stakeholders play in perpetuating malpractice and allowed for actionable insights to improve examination integrity at both local and national levels.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Agents of Examination Malpractice in Secondary Schools

The study revealed that examination malpractice has increasingly become a pervasive norm and cultural practice in secondary schools within

Kinondoni Municipality. This malpractice is widespread across various examinations and educational levels in Tanzania, and the study identifies key factors contributing to it. Specifically, several agents were found to play significant roles in facilitating malpractice, including students, teachers, parents, school administrators, invigilators, and custodians of examination materials. These different forms of malpractice undermine the quality of education, and the study suggests comprehensive strategies to address these issues.

The data presented in Table 1 show that students are perceived as the primary agents of examination malpractice, with 80% of respondents identifying them as the most frequent culprits. This finding is consistent with the work of Suleman et al. [10], who found that students often resort to cheating in the belief that it will improve their academic outcomes. Similarly, the study revealed that teachers also play a significant role, with 55% of respondents indicating that some teachers engage in unethical practices. Despite their professional responsibilities, some teachers reportedly assist students in cheating, which undermines the integrity of the educational system. This aligns with the views of Adeniran, Bakare, & Akinpade, [14], who argue that school administrators play a critical role in managing these issues, acting as intermediaries between the government and school stakeholders, including teachers.

The involvement of invigilators and supervisors is also notable, with 45% of respondents acknowledging their role in perpetuating examination malpractice. This finding mirrors research by Suleman et al. [10], who observed similar patterns in Pakistani high schools, where

exam officials undermined the integrity of exams by turning a blind eye to cheating or even actively participating in it. Furthermore, approximately 40% of respondents implicated parents in facilitating malpractice, often through bribery, while 30% pointed to school administrators as collaborators. Only 15% of respondents identified custodians of exam materials as participants in these unethical practices, but their role is nonetheless significant.

Interviews with teachers from Secondary School 'B' further highlighted that teachers responsible for tasks such as exam moderation, invigilation, and grading might also engage in malpractice. One head teacher from the same school reported witnessing teachers accepting bribes from the school's director to help students cheat during the Form IV National Examinations. These findings underscore the need for stricter supervision and accountability measures to prevent such unethical behavior from compromising exam integrity.

Interviews with students and teachers indicated that students frequently resort to cheating to gain unfair academic advantages or mitigate the consequences of poor performance. One teacher from Secondary School 'A' recounted catching a student attempting to smuggle notes into an examination, highlighting how ingrained such behavior has become. Similarly, a Form III student from the same school reported that some teachers unfairly graded their tuition students' exam papers, giving them higher marks than they deserved. This practice not only distorts academic fairness but also fuels discontent among students who feel their efforts are devalued by such favoritism.

Table 1. Agents of examination malpractice in secondary schools

Agent of examination malpractice	Frequency	Percentage
Student	16	80%
Teacher	11	55%
Parent	8	40%
School administrators and managers	6	30%
Examination invigilators and supervisors	9	45%
Custodians responsible for examination materials	3	15%

Source: Field Data 2024

The study also found that school administrators and managers contribute to the problem by prioritizing institutional prestige over academic integrity. For instance, the introduction of awards like "Best School" and "National Best Student" by NECTA, based on exam results, has incentivized some administrators to condone or participate in cheating to boost their school's performance. This is echoed in findings from Adeniran, et al [14], who emphasize the administrators' responsibility in ensuring the credibility of examinations. However, the pressure to secure high rankings has often led to administrators engaging in unethical practices to maintain competitive standings.

Parental involvement in examination malpractice is another serious concern, with some parents bribing school officials or examination supervisors to ensure their children pass exams. A parent at Secondary School 'Y' confirmed this during a meeting, noting that a group of parents attempted to collect money to help their children pass exams, further underscoring the systemic nature of malpractice. Research by Adeyemo, & Babatunde, [15] similarly points to the role of parents in undermining exam integrity, illustrating how some parents prioritize short-term academic success over long-term educational values.

Examination invigilators and supervisors were also found to be complicit in malpractice, driven by financial incentives. An education officer reported that certain invigilators accepted bribes from private school owners to manipulate exam results. This aligns with findings by Suleman et al. [10], who documented similar behavior in other regions. Custodians responsible for handling exam materials were also implicated in leaking exam content to students ahead of the examination, as observed by the head of Secondary School 'Y'. These actions severely compromise the fairness of examinations, giving some students an unfair advantage over others.

The findings, analyzed through the lens of Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory and Jean Piaget's Cognitive Theory, offer insight into the mechanisms that drive examination malpractice. According to Bandura, behavior is learned through observation and modeling, suggesting that students who witness peers or authority figures cheating are likely to imitate these behaviors. This aligns with reports from teachers at Secondary School 'A', who indicated that students perceived clear benefits from engaging in malpractice. Furthermore, Piaget's Cognitive

Theory posits that individuals' moral reasoning evolves through cognitive development stages, influencing how they perceive and justify unethical actions. For instance, teachers and administrators may rationalize their involvement in malpractice as a necessary response to institutional pressures, while parents may view bribery as a way to secure better futures for their children.

The study highlights the need for a comprehensive approach to addressing examination malpractice, recognizing the interconnected roles of students, teachers, parents, administrators, invigilators, and custodians. To break the cycle of unethical behavior, interventions must disrupt the observation and imitation processes by promoting positive role models and ethical standards. Policies should incorporate strict anti-malpractice measures with clear consequences for offenders, coupled with visible enforcement to deter potential violators. Furthermore, effective strategies must address the cognitive justifications that individuals use to engage in malpractice. By considering the cognitive development of all involved agents, from students to administrators, educational authorities can design interventions that promote ethical reasoning and discourage rationalizations that support malpractice. These insights align with Systems Theory, which emphasizes the need to address multiple interconnected factors within a system to effect meaningful change.

Stronger policies and regulatory frameworks are essential to combat examination malpractice effectively. Lessons can be drawn from international models, such as the UK's Education (Student Support) (Amendment) Regulations 2019 and Nigeria's Examination Malpractice Act (1999), which provide robust frameworks for addressing cheating and ensuring accountability [3]. Additionally, advanced surveillance technologies, such as those employed in Singapore and Japan, offer effective means of monitoring and preventing cheating. Regular training for teachers, invigilators, and exam personnel on ethical practices should also be prioritized, alongside community outreach programs that engage parents in promoting academic integrity. Finally, ensuring the secure handling and transportation of exam materials is crucial for safeguarding the integrity of the examination process. By adopting tamper-evident packaging and implementing oversight

mechanisms, Tanzania can mitigate the risks associated with leaks and theft.

4.2 Effect of Examination Malpractice on the Quality of Education in Secondary Schools

The study investigated how examination malpractice affects the quality of education in secondary schools within Kinondoni Municipality, revealing its far-reaching consequences on academic integrity, student competency, and broader societal outcomes. Table 2 presents the findings based on responses from 25 participants, showing that examination malpractice undermines education quality in several key areas.

The results indicate that 21 respondents (84%) believe that examination malpractice leads to the production of candidates with low academic value. This finding suggests that students who cheat during examinations avoid genuine academic engagement and fail to develop essential knowledge and skills. This aligns with Bandura's Social Learning Theory [5], which posits that behaviors, including dishonest ones, are learned through observation and imitation. In environments where cheating is prevalent, students are likely to observe others cheating and model this behavior, perceiving it as a shortcut to success. As Jibrin and Ibrahim, [3] noted in his study of Nigerian students, examination malpractice weakens academic rigor and produces graduates with insufficient competencies. Thus, the reliance on malpractice fosters laziness, inhibits the development of critical thinking skills, and contributes to poor national examination results. A teacher from Secondary School 'Y' recalled that in 2012, students relied on fake exam papers instead of thorough preparation, leading to mass failure and the suspension of the Form IV examination results across the country.

Moreover, 96% of respondents (24 out of 25) indicated that examination malpractice erodes the credibility of the curriculum and the overall education system. This finding is supported by Piaget's Cognitive Development Theory [7], which suggests that individuals develop moral reasoning over time. However, when exposed to environments where dishonesty is normalized, students may fail to reach higher stages of moral reasoning, rationalizing cheating as a means to cope with academic pressures. As Munachanga [12] explains, malpractice not only damages local trust in educational standards but also affects international perceptions. This issue is particularly relevant in countries like Tanzania, where graduates may face additional scrutiny abroad due to the compromised integrity of their qualifications. The head of School 'A' recounted how, in the 1990s, the Tanzanian government re-tested graduates from certain Asian universities due to concerns over fraudulent academic credentials, illustrating the long-term impact of systemic malpractice on national and international educational credibility.

In addition, 52% of respondents (13 out of 25) believe that examination malpractice narrows job opportunities for genuine graduates. Skinner's Reinforcement Theory [9] offers insights into this dynamic, suggesting that behavior is shaped by its consequences. In cases where cheating is not adequately punished, students may come to view it as a viable strategy, reinforced by the perceived success of those who cheat. As Bai [16] observed, individuals who graduate through dishonest means often lack the competencies necessary to perform well in professional roles. A parent from Kinondoni Municipality lamented that while their academically competent son remains unemployed, peers who cheated during exams have secured jobs undeservedly, highlighting the negative ripple effect malpractice has on job market fairness.

Table 2. Ways in which examination malpractice affect quality of education

Effects of examination malpractice on quality of education	Frequency	Percentage
Production of candidates with low academic value	21	84%
Loss of credibility in the curriculum and education system	24	96%
Lessening job opportunities (narrowing opportunity for real graduate to get a job)	13	52%
Poor future academic and professional careers	19	76%

Source: Field Data (2024)

Teachers also face significant pressure due to examination malpractice, which influences their behavior and the standards of the education system. As reported by 76% of respondents (19 out of 25), malpractice leads to lowered academic standards and unethical practices within the teaching profession. According to Bandura's Social Learning Theory, teachers, like students, may be influenced by the behaviors they observe in their colleagues and the broader educational environment. A teacher from School 'B' noted that parents and guardians often prioritize high exam scores over actual learning, pressuring teachers into inflating grades or turning a blind eye to cheating. This dynamic undermines the authenticity of academic assessments and compromises the integrity of the education system as a whole [10].

Furthermore, the study found that 76% of respondents believe that examination malpractice has a detrimental effect on students' future academic and professional careers. Piaget's Cognitive Theory again provides a relevant framework here, as it highlights how students who engage in malpractice fail to fully develop the higher-order reasoning and problem-solving skills required for long-term success [7]. Mireku, et al [13] observed similar outcomes, where those involved in malpractice struggled in professional roles due to poor foundational knowledge. Education officers interviewed during this study emphasized that students who cheat miss out on developing crucial cognitive and professional skills, leading to poor decision-making and performance in the workforce. One officer commented that unqualified individuals, who obtained their roles through malpractice, often lack the capacity for informed decision-making and contribute to misguided policies and reforms within the education sector.

These findings strongly reinforce Bandura's Social Learning Theory, particularly the idea that behaviors are learned through observation, imitation, and reinforcement. The widespread involvement of students, teachers, parents, and administrators in examination malpractice suggests that dishonest behaviors are being modeled and normalized within the educational environment. Consequently, interventions aimed at curbing malpractice must focus on altering the behaviors being observed and imitated. Encouraging ethical behavior among teachers and administrators, for example, could help reshape the cultural norms around examinations and reduce the prevalence of malpractice.

The study also underscores the need for a holistic approach to combating examination malpractice, one that involves multiple agents such as students, teachers, parents, and school administrators. Piaget's theory indicates that addressing the moral reasoning of these stakeholders is key to fostering an environment that prioritizes integrity over short-term success. This aligns with existing literature that emphasizes the need for comprehensive strategies to address systemic issues in education [17]. Focusing solely on students or teachers without addressing the broader systemic influences is unlikely to yield meaningful results.

The practical implications of these findings include the need for stronger policies and regulatory reforms. Schools should implement stricter penalties for those caught engaging in malpractice and develop comprehensive monitoring systems to ensure compliance. These policies would be aligned with Skinner's Reinforcement Theory, which suggests that behavior can be shaped and controlled through consistent and meaningful consequences [9]. By instituting severe penalties for both students and teachers who participate in or enable malpractice, schools can effectively deter unethical behavior [18-21].

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Examination malpractice presents a significant challenge to the quality of education in Kinondoni Municipality, Tanzania. The findings of this study reveal that malpractice undermines the academic integrity of the education system by producing graduates with low academic value, eroding the credibility of the curriculum, limiting job opportunities for genuine graduates, and negatively affecting students' future academic and professional careers. These effects are exacerbated by the involvement of multiple stakeholders, including students, teachers, parents, administrators, and custodians of examination materials, who, through their actions or inaction, contribute to a culture where unethical behavior is normalized.

The theoretical frameworks of Bandura's Social Learning Theory, Piaget's Cognitive Development Theory, and Skinner's Reinforcement Theory provide valuable insights into how examination malpractice is learned, rationalized, and perpetuated within the school

environment. Students, in particular, are influenced by the unethical behaviors they observe from peers, teachers, and other authority figures, while external pressures such as school performance metrics and job market competitiveness drive teachers and administrators to prioritize exam results over authentic learning.

To address this complex issue, the study recommends a sound approach that involves stricter policies, comprehensive monitoring systems, and meaningful penalties for all agents involved in examination malpractice. Schools must enforce severe consequences for both students and teachers caught engaging in malpractice, and regulatory frameworks should be strengthened to ensure accountability across all educational levels. Furthermore, regular training programs should be implemented to promote ethical practices among educators and examination personnel, while technology-driven solutions such as CCTV surveillance and secure handling of exam materials should be adopted to prevent future instances of malpractice.

It is equally important to engage parents and the wider community in understanding the long-term implications of examination malpractice on students' futures and the nation's development. Educational campaigns that foster a culture of integrity and discourage bribery are crucial in shifting societal attitudes towards more ethical behavior. Finally, robust security measures are necessary to safeguard the credibility of examination systems, ensuring that the quality and standards of education in Tanzania are preserved for the benefit of current and future generations.

DISCLAIMER (ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE)

Author(s) hereby declare that NO generative AI technologies such as Large Language Models (ChatGPT, COPILOT, etc.) and text-to-image generators have been used during the writing or editing of this manuscript.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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