



The Concern of the SHS Teacher and Examination Malpractice: Combating the Excessive Examination Malpractices in Ghana

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Abstract

Examination malpractice poses a significant challenge to the integrity of Senior High School (SHS) education in Ghana. This narrative review delves into the complex interplay of factors contributing to malpractices and explores the perspectives of SHS teachers. Current strategies, while implemented with the intent to mitigate malpractices, reveal gaps and limitations that call for improvement. Factors such as high-stakes examinations, inadequate resources, and the absence of a robust ethical foundation contribute to the prevalence of malpractices. SHS teachers play a crucial role, perceiving the pressures faced by students and recognizing the ethical dilemmas inherent in examination malpractice. Current strategies encompass monitoring mechanisms, ethical education, and technology adoption; however, resource constraints, inadequate training, and limited collaboration with communities present challenges. Addressing these gaps necessitates a holistic approach, including comprehensive ethical education, regular teacher training, community engagement, and technological solutions for monitoring. The proposed recommendations emphasize preventive education, collaborative community efforts, enhanced

teacher training, and the utilization of technology. Establishing incentives for ethical behavior and continuous evaluation through research contribute to a resilient and adaptive approach in mitigating examination malpractice. In conclusion, a collaborative, adaptable, and evidence-based strategy is essential for fostering a transparent and fair SHS education system in Ghana. Cultivating a culture of integrity, where all stakeholders commit to ethical standards, is imperative for a sustainable and credible educational environment.

Subject Areas

Educational Reform

Keywords

Examination Malpractice, Ghana SHS Education, Academic Integrity, Ethical Education, Monitoring Mechanisms, Narrative Review

1. Introduction

Examination malpractice refers to various dishonest or unethical behaviors that compromise the integrity of examinations and assessment processes within schools. It encompasses a range of activities that include but are not limited to cheating, impersonation, leakage of exam materials, use of unauthorised aids, collusion, and misconduct of invigilators [1] [2]. Examination malpractice within the context of Senior High School (SHS) education in Ghana has emerged as a pressing concern, threatening the credibility of academic assessments [2]. Examination malpractice poses a significant challenge to the educational landscape, impacting the integrity of assessments and, consequently, the quality of education [3]. Addressing examination malpractice is crucial for maintaining the integrity of the education system. Rigorous monitoring and supervision during exams can significantly reduce malpractices [2]. Additionally, fostering a positive learning environment and emphasizing the importance of ethical behavior can contribute to a cultural shift away from malpractices [4]. However, it's essential to consider various perspectives on this issue. Some argue that systemic factors, such as pressure to perform well and inadequate resources, contribute to malpractices [5] [6]. Exploring these factors and implementing holistic solutions, can provide a comprehensive approach to combating examination malpractice.

The prevalence of malpractices raises questions about the ethical conduct of both students and educators, impacting the overall quality of education [7]. Despite efforts to curb malpractices, the problem persists, necessitating a closer examination of its root causes and potential solutions. This review seeks to identify the specific factors or causes, and the effects of examination malpractice, aiming to shed light on the complexities of the issue and contribute to the development of effective strategies to combat this phenomenon.

2. Methodology

This methodology outlines the processes the researchers used to conduct the narrative review on examination malpractice, particularly focusing on factors (causes) and effects of examination malpractices, educators' roles in controlling examination malpractices, and strategies or recommendation to combat examination malpractice.

2.1. Research Design

This narrative review adopts a qualitative research design, specifically employing a narrative synthesis methodology. The aim is to comprehensively summarize and synthesize existing literature related to examination malpractice, focusing on the identification of key themes, causes, and control strategies.

2.2. Literature Search Strategy

A comprehensive search was conducted across academic databases such as PubMed, Google Scholar, JSTOR, and institutional repositories including educational journals and reports specific to (Ghana's) educational system. Key search terms included "examination malpractice", "academic dishonesty", "SHS teachers", "Ghana education" and variations of these terms. Boolean operators (AND, OR) were utilized to refine search results.

2.3. Inclusion Criteria

Peer-reviewed articles, reports, policy documents, and scholarly works published from 2010 and 2023, written in English, focusing on examination malpractice within SHS education (in Ghana), and specifically addressing effects and teachers' perspectives were included.

2.4. Data Extraction and Synthesis

Initial Screening: Retrieved articles were initially screened based on titles and abstracts to assess relevance to the review's focus.

Full-Text Review: Relevant articles underwent a full-text review to extract data pertinent to factors contributing to examination malpractices, effects of examination malpractices, educators' roles in controlling examination malpractices, and strategies or recommendation to combat examination malpractice.

Data Synthesis: A thematic analysis approach was employed to categorize and synthesize extracted information into themes related to factors contributing to examination malpractices, effects of examination malpractices, educators' roles in controlling examination malpractices, and strategies or recommendation to combat examination malpractice.

2.5. Quality Assessment

Quality Appraisal: Articles underwent a quality assessment using established criteria such as methodological rigor, relevance, and credibility of sources.

Inclusion Decision: Articles meeting the quality criteria were included in the final synthesis, ensuring the reliability and credibility of the information synthesized.

2.6. Limitations

Scope Limitation: The review focused primarily on literature available in English and might not include all relevant perspectives or unpublished reports.

Temporal Scope: The review's temporal scope was limited to articles published from 2010 and 2023, potentially excluding older but relevant studies.

3. Factors Contributing to Examination Malpractice

Several factors contribute to examination malpractice in the context of Senior High School (SHS) education in Ghana. It's essential to consider a multifaceted perspective, acknowledging both systemic and individual elements. Here are some key factors:

High-Stakes Examinations: The emphasis on high-stakes examinations creates intense pressure on students, fostering a climate where the temptation to engage in malpractices may arise [8]. When the outcomes of exams determine access to prestigious educational institutions or lucrative opportunities, competition intensifies, incentivizing some individuals to cheat to gain an edge. The emphasis on exam scores as the primary measure of success may encourage a "score-centric" approach, where students prioritize achieving high marks over genuine learning. Addressing the influence of high-stakes exams on examination malpractice requires a balanced approach. This involves reconsidering the weight of exam results in pivotal decisions, fostering a broader understanding of success beyond exam scores, and implementing measures to reduce the pressure associated with these exams.

Inadequate Preparation and Resources: Insufficient preparation and limited access to educational resources may lead students to resort to unethical means to perform well in exams [5]. Disparities in resource allocation among educational institutions can create imbalances, with some schools having better access to resources than others. This imbalance can fuel feelings of unfairness and prompt students to resort to unethical means. Again, inadequate time for revision or preparation due to curriculum demands or disruptions in the academic calendar can push students toward shortcuts, including engaging in malpractice. Schools with inadequate infrastructure, overcrowded classrooms, or insufficient facilities may hinder effective learning. Students in such environments might resort to malpractice due to a lack of proper educational support.

Teacher-Student Relationship: Unhealthy relationships between teachers and students can contribute to malpractices. Favoritism or coercion may influence students to engage in cheating [9]. A positive teacher-student relationship built on trust can encourage students to seek guidance and support rather than resorting to malpractice when facing challenges or feeling unprepared. Teachers

who emphasize ethical behavior and uphold academic integrity serve as role models, influencing students to prioritize honesty and ethical conduct in their academic pursuits. A strained or competitive relationship might contribute to increased pressure on students to excel, potentially leading them to resort to malpractice to meet perceived expectations. A lack of trust or support from teachers can create a sense of isolation among students, diminishing their motivation to succeed through honest means. When students feel disconnected from or disengaged with teachers, they might perceive less accountability, leading to a higher propensity to engage in unethical behaviour [10] [11].

In certain cases, a teacher involved in a romantic relationship with a student might provide unfair assistance or favoritism during examinations, compromising the integrity of the assessment process. Romantic relationships between teachers and students can create conflicts of interest. Teachers may feel inclined to assist their romantic partner, consciously or subconsciously, leading to compromised ethical conduct during exams. Other students might perceive a bias towards the student involved in the romantic relationship, leading to resentment and potentially fostering an environment where malpractice might be perceived as more acceptable.

Lack of Ethical Awareness: A deficiency in promoting ethical values and academic integrity within the educational system may contribute to a culture where malpractices are tolerated [12]. In some cases, a lack of ethical awareness can stem from a culture where malpractice is normalized or seen as a common practice. This normalization diminishes the perceived severity of the behavior. Cultural beliefs or societal attitudes that prioritize success over ethical conduct can contribute to a lack of awareness or importance placed on maintaining ethical standards.

Overemphasis on Results: When the sole focus is on exam results rather than holistic learning, students may prioritize grades over genuine understanding, leading to dishonest practices [13].

Technological Advances: The availability of advanced technology facilitates new forms of cheating, such as using electronic devices during exams or accessing unauthorized online resources [14]. Technology provides easy access to a vast amount of information. Students might use electronic devices to access unauthorized materials during exams, facilitating cheating. Mobile phones and messaging apps enable real-time communication. Students may use these tools to share answers, ask for assistance, or collaborate with peers during exams.

Inadequate Monitoring and Supervision: Weak examination supervision and monitoring mechanisms can create opportunities for students to engage in malpractices without fear of detection [15].

4. Effects of Examination Malpractices

Examination malpractices in Ghana can have multifaceted effects across various aspects of the education system and society. Here is an outline of these effects.

4.1. Educational System

Quality Erosion: Malpractices compromise the integrity of assessment, leading to skewed academic performance metrics and undermining the quality of education [16]. Over time, a pervasive culture of malpractice can damage the reputation of the education system as a whole, both domestically and internationally. This can discourage investment in education and affect its overall standing. Addressing quality erosion caused by examination malpractice requires concerted efforts from educational institutions, policymakers, educators, and students themselves. Encouraging ethical behavior, implementing stringent measures to prevent malpractices, and promoting a culture of academic integrity are crucial steps toward preserving the quality of education.

Meritocracy Erosion: Unfair advantages gained through malpractices hinder the selection of deserving candidates based on merit, impacting admissions to higher education institutions [17]. Meritocracy erosion occurs when the fair and equitable selection or recognition of individuals based on their abilities, achievements, and merit is compromised or distorted due to external factors like examination malpractice. Students who engage in malpractices gain an unfair advantage over their peers who choose to uphold academic integrity. This skews the playing field by rewarding dishonesty instead of genuine merit.

Certification Credibility: Certificates and qualifications lose credibility due to doubts about the legitimacy of students' knowledge and abilities [6]. Institutions issuing certificates may suffer damage to their reputation if their qualifications become associated with malpractice. This tarnishes the credibility of certificates they provide.

4.2. Students

Ethical Dilemmas: Engaging in malpractices can instill unethical behavior, impacting students' moral and ethical development [18].

Psychological Impact: Stress and guilt from cheating or fear of being caught can affect students' mental well-being and academic confidence [15].

Skill Deficiency: Dependence on cheating rather than genuine learning leads to a deficiency in critical thinking and problem-solving skills [19].

4.3. Society/Country

Workforce Competency: Ill-prepared graduates may lack the necessary skills and competencies, impacting workforce productivity and quality. Individuals who rely on cheating during their education might lack the necessary skills and knowledge required for their roles in the workforce [20]. This deficiency can hinder their performance and productivity. Employees lacking genuine skills acquired through ethical learning might produce subpar work quality, affecting the overall output and efficiency of organizations.

Social Trust Erosion: Distrust in academic qualifications affects societal trust in institutions and diminishes confidence in the education system [21]. The pub-

lic's perception of the education system can be negatively affected, leading to skepticism about the fairness, transparency, and integrity of academic processes. Society might lose confidence in the value and credibility of certificates and qualifications earned in an environment where malpractice is widespread.

Economic Ramifications: A workforce with questionable qualifications may impede economic growth and development by hindering innovation and productivity. Malpractice can hinder innovation and technological advancements within sectors as a workforce lacking authentic skills may struggle to drive innovation and progress [22]. Individuals with certificates earned through malpractice might face difficulties securing employment or advancing in their careers due to doubts regarding their qualifications.

4.4. Legal and Ethical Aspects

Legal Implications: Examination malpractices can result in legal consequences, affecting the futures of those involved. The students involved may be subject to legal action, including fines or even imprisonment, depending on the severity of the malpractices and the applicable laws [23]. Legal consequences can extend beyond the immediate academic setting. Students with a record of examination malpractice may face challenges in pursuing higher education or securing employment opportunities, as many institutions and employers take academic integrity seriously.

Ethical Dilemmas: It raises ethical concerns about fairness, honesty, and integrity within the education system and society as a whole. Students might face the conflict between the desire to excel academically and the ethical imperative to achieve success through honest means [24]. Again, students might face the conflict between the desire to excel academically and the ethical imperative to achieve success through honest means. In some cases, students might face dilemmas related to reporting malpractices they witness, balancing the ethical obligation to maintain confidentiality among peers with the responsibility to uphold academic honesty.

5. Educators' Roles in Preventing and Addressing Examination Malpractices

Promoting Ethical Values: Educators should recognize the importance of instilling ethical values in students, emphasizing the significance of honesty, integrity, and fair play in academic pursuits [20].

Creating a Positive Learning Environment: Teachers should aim to foster a positive and supportive learning environment that reduces the likelihood of students resorting to malpractices due to stress or pressure [21].

Emphasizing Holistic Learning: Educators should perceive their role as not solely focused on exam outcomes but also on cultivating a deeper understanding of the subject matter, discouraging shortcuts through malpractices [25].

Providing Adequate Support: Teachers should understand the impact of re-

source limitations on student performance and strive to provide adequate support, both academically and emotionally, to reduce the incentive for malpractices [26].

Implementing Effective Assessment Strategies: Educators should aim to design assessments that truly evaluate students' comprehension, minimizing the opportunities and motivations for engaging in dishonest practices [27].

Vigilance in Monitoring: Teachers should recognize the need to be vigilant during examinations, implementing robust monitoring systems to detect and prevent malpractices effectively [28].

Acting as Role Models: Teachers should see themselves as role models, demonstrating ethical behavior and integrity, which can influence students positively and discourage dishonest practices [29].

By understanding and actively fulfilling these roles, educators will contribute significantly to the prevention and mitigation of examination malpractices, fostering a culture of academic honesty and integrity.

6. Gaps and Limitations in Current Strategies Addressing Examination Malpractice

Several gaps and limitations exist in current strategies addressing examination malpractice in Senior High School (SHS) education in Ghana. Recognizing these shortcomings is crucial for proposing effective improvements (Table 1) through the inspirations from [1] [2].

7. Recommendation

To effectively mitigate examination malpractice in Senior High School (SHS) education in Ghana, there must be a collaboration involving the Ministry of Education, curriculum developers, administration, teachers, students, and parents. The following recommendations are therefore proposed by the researchers:

Comprehensive Ethical Education Programs: Implementation of comprehensive ethical education programs that are integrated into the curriculum, focusing on instilling values of honesty, integrity, and academic responsibility from the early stages of education.

Regular Teacher Training and Capacity Building: Conducting regular and standardized training sessions for SHS science teachers to enhance their awareness, skills, and strategies in preventing, detecting, and addressing examination malpractice.

Collaborative Community Engagement: Strengthen collaboration with parents, communities, and local stakeholders to create a shared commitment to combating malpractices. This can involve awareness campaigns, community forums, and involvement in school activities. *Utilization of Technology for Monitoring:* Ghana must invest in technology solutions for examination monitoring, including the use of surveillance cameras, electronic devices, and plagiarism detection software to enhance the efficiency and accuracy of malpractice identification.

Enhanced Examination Policies: There must be regularly review and update examination policies, addressing loopholes and incorporating measures to deter

Table 1. Gaps and limitations in addressing examination malpractice.

Concern	Gap	Proposed improvement
Limited Preventive Education	Current strategies may not sufficiently emphasize preventive education, neglecting opportunities to proactively address the root causes of malpractices.	Integrate comprehensive ethical education programs into the curriculum to foster a culture of integrity and discourage dishonest behavior.
Resource Constraints	Schools face resource limitations, hindering the implementation of advanced technological solutions for monitoring and surveillance.	Allocate resources strategically, considering the unique needs of each educational institution, and explore cost-effective technology solutions.
Inadequate Teacher Training	Teachers may not receive adequate training on identifying and addressing examination malpractice, leading to inconsistencies in their ability to tackle the issue.	Conduct regular and standardized training sessions for teachers, ensuring they are well-equipped with the necessary skills to handle malpractices effectively.
Limited Collaboration with Communities	Collaborative efforts with parents and communities may be limited, reducing the impact of awareness campaigns and collective action against malpractices.	Strengthen partnerships with communities through outreach programs, involving parents in anti-malpractice initiatives and creating a shared responsibility.
Insufficient Use of Forensic Analysis	Forensic analysis techniques may not be widely adopted, resulting in challenges in swift and accurate identification of malpractices.	Promote the use of forensic analysis tools, providing training for educators and examiners on their effective implementation.
Incomplete Revision of Examination Policies	Incomplete or outdated examination policies may create loopholes that can be exploited for malpractices.	Regularly review and update examination policies, addressing emerging challenges and ensuring clarity in communication to both teachers and students.

malpractices. Ensuring that these policies are clearly communicated to both teachers and students.

Promotion of Holistic Learning: Emphasize on a shift in the educational culture towards holistic learning, where the focus is on understanding and applying knowledge rather than solely on exam results. This can reduce the pressure on students to resort to malpractices.

Student Counseling and Support Services: Provision of counseling and support services to students to address the psychological and academic pressures that may lead to engagement in malpractices. This will foster an environment where students feel comfortable seeking help.

Incentives for Ethical Behavior: Introducing incentives and recognition programs for students who consistently demonstrate ethical behavior, promoting a positive culture of integrity within the academic community.

Establishment of an Oversight Committee: There must be the formation of an oversight committee comprising educators, parents, and representatives from the education sector to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of anti-malpractice measures and recommend improvements.

Implementing these recommendations collectively and iteratively can contribute to a more resilient and adaptive approach in mitigating examination malpractice in SHS science education in Ghana.

8. Conclusion

In conclusion, addressing examination malpractice in Senior High School (SHS) education in Ghana requires a multifaceted and collaborative approach. The existing challenges, including high-stakes examinations, inadequate resources, and the lack of a strong ethical foundation, underscore the need for proactive measures. This review has explored the factors contributing to malpractices, the viewpoints of SHS science teachers, current strategies, and identified gaps. Recognizing the limitations in the current approach, recommendations have been proposed to mitigate malpractices effectively. By implementing comprehensive ethical education programs, enhancing teacher training, fostering community engagement, leveraging technology for monitoring, and promoting a holistic learning environment, the educational system can take significant strides toward reducing the prevalence of examination malpractice. Continuous evaluation, research, and adaptation of strategies are vital for the sustained success of mitigation efforts. It is essential to cultivate a culture of integrity, where educators, students, and communities collectively commit to upholding ethical standards in education. In summary, a collaborative, adaptable, and evidence-based approach is crucial to fostering a fair and transparent SHS education system in Ghana, free from the detrimental impact of examination malpractice.

Authors' Contribution

K. A and A. O. D conceptualized the research; I. B. N., and A. J. H., supervised and reviewed the draft manuscript; K. A., and A. O. D., drafted the original manuscript; H. K., E. K. D., W. H., A. S., I. B. S., and E. A. E., supported the original writing and reviewed the manuscript; K. A., and E. A., proofread the manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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