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## **Examination Malpractices in Ghana:**

### **What Teachers Should Know**

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#### **Abstract**

The paper is about what teachers should know with respect to examination malpractices. It brings to light the various forms of examination malpractices that take place in educational institutions in Ghana. It also provides suggestions as to how this menace can be curbed. Information for writing the paper was obtained from personal observations and published literature. The paper concludes that examination malpractices can be minimized if rules are made for examiners concerning the proper conduct of examinations. The examiners should also be made aware of the need to behave properly during examinations.

Examination malpractices have become rampant in recent years and this does not augur well for the academic progress of a nation. It is not uncommon to hear that examination results of candidates have been cancelled because of this practice. In fact, in almost every release of examination results by the West African Examinations Council (WAEC), the principal examining institution for the West African sub-region, cases of examination malpractice have been cited with the resultant cancellation of the results of candidates. For example, in 1999 candidates numbering 181 were barred from writing any examination conducted by the Council in any of its member countries, namely, Ghana, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Liberia and the Gambia, for 3 years because of their involvement in examination malpractice with respect to the General Certificate of Education (GCE) Ordinary ('O') and Advanced ('A') level examinations (Dery, 1999). In the same year the number of candidates involved in examination malpractices in the Senior Secondary School Certificate Examination (SSSCE) was 317.

In the year 2000, the number of candidates whose results were cancelled as a result of examination malpractices was 172 (Amanor, 2000). The SSSCE results released in 2001 recorded 160 cases of examination malpractices (Donkor, 2002). In reality cheating by candidates has been a headache for WAEC, leading at times to delays in the release of examination results (Okine, 1999). Asamoah and Cook (2001) reported that the Head of the Ghana Office of WAEC decried “the increase in examination malpractices, stressing that drastic measures have to be taken to prevent the recurrence of the practice” (p.17).

The examining body for the 3-Year Post-Secondary Teacher Training Colleges, the Institute of Education of the University of Cape Coast, has also had its share of examination malpractices with the consequences of cancellation of results of candidates. For example, in 1997, the results of 9 candidates were cancelled for their involvement in examination malpractices in the Three-Year Post-Secondary Teacher Training College Final Part II examination (Institute of Education, 1997). In 1998, those involved in examination malpractices in the Final Part I examination were 14 in number (Institute of Education, 1998). Cheating in examinations occurs even at the University level. Such incidents have been reported in the local newspapers. One such case resulted in the expulsion of a student of the University of Ghana for his involvement in examination malpractice and the suspension of 3 others for a similar offence (Graphic Reporter, 1998).

Even in the primary schools, pupils do cheat. This was discovered in the course of testing pupils in English and Mathematics within the period 1999 to 2000 in a United States Agency for International Development (USAID) sponsored research in which the author was involved. It covered schools from every region of Ghana. The data collectors really had difficult times in trying to prevent the pupils from copying from each other. Doubtlessly, cheating in examinations must be seriously combated. It is in this direction that Awortwi-Mensah (1998) reported that the Public Relations Officer at WAEC “appealed to churches, parents and the members of the general public to help eradicate examination malpractices to ensure that students grow to become responsible adults in future” ( p. 13 ).

The causes of examination malpractices are many, and it is important that educationists are made aware of them so that this canker can be minimized if not quashed altogether. In this paper, the author

draws on experiences as an examination supervisor to provide information on the nature of examination malpractice and how it can be controlled. It is hoped that armed with this information invigilators and supervisors of examinations can execute their duties with an informed mind and also aspire towards malpractice-free examinations so that more confidence can be placed in examination results. Specifically, the paper focuses on (a) the nature of examinations; (b) nature of examination malpractice; (c) causes and examples of examination malpractices (d) some remedies to examination malpractices and how to deal with culprits of examination malpractices.

### Nature of Examinations

Examination is part of a large concept called assessment. Examinations have become an almost indispensable means of assessment in educational institutions since 2200 B. C. when formal testing started (Popham, 1981). For the purpose of this paper an examination is just a large scale test, or a combination of several tests and other assessment procedures. A test in the context of this paper is defined as a particular situation set up for the purpose of making an assessment (Wrigley, 1986). In the testing situation there is a testor and a testee and in the examination situation there is an examiner and an examinee. In the context of examination malpractices the testee and examinee will be considered as synonymous since in both cases situations are set up to collect data on a person for some decision to be taken.

Because an examination is considered as an assessment, its outcome is supposed to represent the true performance of the examinee so that the outcome can be useful, among other things, for:

1. Screening or selecting individuals for admission
2. Motivating learners to maximize their learning
3. Advising individuals on their vocational choices
4. Diagnosing learning difficulties and designing methods and materials ( Akplu, 1989).

The above uses of assessment necessitate the genuineness of examination scores, otherwise the wrong impression will be conveyed. This situation will lead to a wrong decision which might be taken, as it happens when a

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candidate cheats in an examination and thus obtains a score which does not represent his academic ability.

In Ghana, different types of examinations are organized for various purposes. For example, the West African Examination Council organizes many examinations among other things, to certify Junior and Senior Secondary School students. The Institute of Education of the University of Cape Coast also organizes examinations for the promotion and certification of teacher-trainees of the Three-Year Post-Secondary Teacher Training Colleges in Ghana. Examinations are also done at the University level in Ghana to award degrees, diplomas, and certificates. For all these purposes the real academic output of the candidate is very important, otherwise square pegs would be put into round holes.

### Nature of Examination Malpractices

Examinations are necessary practices in the teaching/learning situation because of the many functions they are supposed to perform. It has, however, been observed that "selection-oriented examinations such as the ones that dominate our educational system have generated intense competition forcing pupils and schools to adopt fraudulent practices in order to win the 'Rat Race' (Akplu, 1989, p.4). These fraudulent practices are what are popularly known as examination malpractices. By definition it is "any activity of a student or group of students whose purpose is to give any of them higher grades than they would be likely to receive on the basis of their own achievement" (Ebel and Frisbie, 1991, p.206).

Examination malpractice is a serious academic fraud that should be given serious attention by teacher education units and governments since it is a social vice and an indictment on the reputation of heads of educational institutions. According to Ebel and Frisbie (1991), although it is agreeable to students, teachers and educational administrators that cheating in examination is a serious problem "it seems to receive more attention in popular press than in technical books and articles on testing. Cheating in examinations is commonly viewed as a sign of declining ethical standards or as an inevitable consequence of increased emphasis on test scores and grade" (Ebel & Frisbie, 1991 p. 206).

Examination malpractice has become so rampant that it became necessary for the head of an examination institution to instruct Chief Examiners, Team Leaders and Assistant Examiners during a co-ordination and marking exercise to scrutinise very carefully all scripts to ensure that candidates have not committed any examination malpractice. They were to watch out for scripts which were not properly stuck together and to report any cases of collusion where the answers of two or more candidates were too similar to be a coincidence (Antwi, 1995).

The teacher has now turned into a detective. As a follow up, it is justifiable for the teacher education curriculum in Ghana to include courses on the detection of examination malpractices to equip teachers with the necessary skills to be detectives for this menace. Coupled with the strenuous effort of marking scripts is an added task of carefully scrutinizing all scripts because an examinee misbehaves or an examination supervisor/invigilator did not do his/her work properly. The part examiners and supervisors play to foster examination malpractice needs elaboration.

### Causes and Examples of Examination Malpractices

The causes of examination malpractices are many and, therefore, cannot be completely covered in this paper. However, a few of the known causes have been highlighted. These include laxity in proctoring, leakage of examination questions, the nature of the test, preparedness of examinees and noise making.

In the view of Mehrens and Lehmann (1991), if one considers the prevalence of cheating in examinations, it is obvious that the responsibility of proctoring is not considered seriously enough by many teachers. This situation, therefore, creates a conducive atmosphere for cheating. It is tantamount to the absence of invigilators and/or supervisors from the examination room. Poor invigilation may have many interpretations. Firstly, there is the "present-absentee" situation in which case the invigilator and/or supervisor will be physically present in the examination room but will be pre-occupied with other things such as reading a novel, conversing, marking scripts, among others. Such situations can give the students the chance to cheat because they know that they are not being observed. In the second situation, the invigilator/supervisor will be present and be actually observing the students but turn a blind eye to

whatever unconventional scenes that may be set in the examination hall. These invigilators/supervisors are described as being "blind." The third category are the supervisors/invigilators termed as "ghosts" who stand outside the examination hall for most part of the examination. There are also those faultfinders ready to pick a quarrel with a teacher who reprimands students for wrong doing in the course of the examination in order to win the favour of the students. The main job of these case-pickers in the examination situation is rather to aid and abet examination malpractices.. The fourth group are those who occasionally or for most part of the examination are absent from the vicinity of the examination to attend to other matters. They are also called ghosts. Lastly, are the helpers who go there with the intention to help certain examinees.

The above analysis spells out different categories of indecorous invigilators/supervisors, namely the blind, the present-absentee, the case-pickers, the helpers and the ghost. One can imagine the kind of activities that go on among the examinees in the examination hall with such kind of supervisors/invigilators. The teacher-teacher supervision inhibitory actions can also impinge negatively on the alertness of even the firmest of supervisors/invigilators. A supervisor/invigilator may adopt an apathetic attitude in order not to incur the displeasure of his colleagues or the students for his corrective actions in the examination room.

Laxity in proctoring can lead to examination malpractices such as receiving of unauthorised information by the examinees. For example, he/she can glance sidelong at another examinee's script for information. Sometimes an examinee intentionally places his/her script in the course of the examination in such a way that a fellow examinee can have a full view of whatever has been written on it and thus copy the information. The examinee can also obtain information using foreign materials for example books (not applicable to open-book evaluation), pieces of paper with or without information which have been smuggled into the examination hall under unorthodox conditions. A handkerchief can also be a source of unauthorised information. Those with prepared notes copy them directly and the blank ones are sent in for the purpose of copying questions. The copied questions are then sent outside the examination hall under the pretext of going to urinate, to obtain answers. They are then smuggled back into the examination hall to be used as sources of information.

One has to be watchful when examinees borrow because borrowing of items such as erasers, pencils, calculators and other stationery in the course of the examination are means by which information can be passed from one examinee to the other, verbally or documented.

One trick that can go on unnoticed is swapping of question papers with written information between examinees. Gestures must also be watched and interpreted as “friendly” or “dangerous”. Dangerous gestures are the ones used to communicate answers to other examinees. This happens especially with multiple-choice items. One finger lifted may represent the first question. The answer follows with the second gesture. If the first finger is lifted for the second gesture the answer is the first one. If two fingers are lifted the answer is the second one. Watchfulness should extend to the examinees leaving the examination hall with excuses. This is because examinees can arrange to meet outside under the pretext of visiting the washroom but rather go out and confer.

The second cause of examination malpractices, which is leakage of examination questions, happens as a result of laxity at the processing stage of the questions. The mode of disposal of unused question papers during processing can be a channel for questions to leak. Leakages can also occur when question papers are not kept properly before the administration of the test by the examiner.

Thirdly, the nature of the examination can also be a determinant as to whether cheating will take place or not. It is believed that “cheating is more likely to occur on a poorly planned test in which the test items do not cover what was taught, or focuses on straight memorization of trivia rather than upon reasoning skills” (Mehrens and Lehmann, 1991, p. 158). The increased use of objective test has been given as a leading cause to cheating (Ebel and Frisbie, 1991). The types of cheating inherent in objective tests are sidelong glance, gesticulation to communicate answers to others and exchange of papers. In the objective test it is very easy for an examinee to look on a fellow examinee’s paper and quickly spot the answers, unlike the essay type of answers which involves lengthy reading. It is also easy for the answers to be copied and circulated on paper among the examinees. Gestures can be used by supervisors and invigilators to provide answers to multiple choice items to examinees.



Content invalidity, the fourth cause of cheating in exams, happens when items do not compare favourably with what is stipulated in syllabuses. This situation can lead to desperation on the part of the examinee. Such desperate situations are enough of an impetus to cause even an angel to want to cheat. Another desperate situation that can lead to cheating is when examinees realize they are handicapped because they have not learned enough to be able to answer the questions, and they are directly faced with failure. It can be difficult for such people to be restrained from cheating unless they are under the most vigilant eye. The more hard pressed the examinee is for information, the more likely it is that he/she may resort to cheating.

WAEC supports this view when it states that one of the causes of the recent upsurge in examination malpractices is inadequate preparation by students (Tetteh, 1998). It may be this lack of preparedness on the part of the candidate that causes them to ask others to write the examination on their behalf. This is an examination malpractice termed impersonation. In fact, the examining body in Ghana that reports a lot on impersonation is WAEC. For example, a 24 year old former student was arrested in connection with impersonation. He was caught when he was found writing the English Language paper for a girl (Dzamboe, 1998). In another instance seventeen candidates were arrested for impersonation during the English Language paper of the GC E "O" level examination. Earlier on 4 were arrested for the same offence during the Modern Mathematics Paper of the GCE "O" level examination. According to WAEC officials, the impersonators have devised new methods by exchange of index numbers or exchange of examination papers (Tetteh, 1998). In yet two more instances a man was arrested whilst he was in the process of writing the GCE "A" Level Modern Mathematics Paper I examination for a friend (Awortwi-Mensah, 1998) and there was impersonation at the GCE "A" and "O" level examinations involving more than 200 candidates (Dery, 1999)

Last but not least, noise-making within or outside the examination hall can create the opportunity for students to cheat. Sources of noise in the examination hall can be when drawing examinees' attention to typographical errors, giving instructions, conversation between examiners and noise made by passers-by and outside events. Whenever there is such

a situation, some examinees can take advantage of the noise being made to make their own noise by communicating with each other.

Even if all the aforementioned tricks are not detected, the examination scripts and other things can give clues that can help to detect examination malpractices. The examiner may do well to look out for:

1. Scripts to which entire sheets are attached or new sheets have been inserted when many of the original sheets in the script are not used. The inserted script could be from another candidate or materials smuggled into the examination hall.
2. Scripts with many creases. These are characteristic of scripts which are smuggled out of the examination hall to answer questions and later smuggled back into the examination hall.
3. Answer scripts having different hand writings. This is suggestive of information from another candidate/source.
4. Answers too similar to be coincidental. In this case there will be common errors and the answers will be the same, word for word.
5. Foreign materials such as notes and torn out pages of books are left in the answer scripts (Antwi 1995).
6. Fidgety examinees. These candidates may be looking for opportunities to use foreign material or to communicate with another candidate.

It is really not impossible to nib these offences in the bud. With the help of dedicated and vigilant examination supervisors/invigilators something can be done about the negative intentions of the examinees before they degenerate into fraudulent acts.

### Some Remedies to Examination Malpractices

One thing is clear from what has been said so far, that if a person cheats then the outcome of the test is not a reflection of the candidate's output. This situation puts validity at stake, because the score will be representing something else instead of what it is supposed to represent. This is serious because validity is a requirement of test scores, if they are to be of any use.

To minimize the invalidation of test scores through examination malpractices certain measures have been suggested as follows:

1. At the processing stage, measures should be put in place to ensure that the questions do not leak. One way of doing this is to shred and burn all discarded question papers. No bags should be allowed into the processing rooms, and there should be a body-search of the people leaving and entering the processing room. The processing should be under tight security, and if possible the time lapse between the processing and actual administration of the examination should be as short as possible to provide less time available for leaked questions, if any, to circulate. Besides, storage of examination questions over a long period of time carries with it the temptation of examination malpractice. Account should be made of each copy of the test that is duplicated. Numbering of the copies can also help.
2. Examination questions should be valid to avoid the desperation which causes examinees to cheat as has been happening especially when questions set do not have much bearing on what the syllabus demands. The questions must be proofread before being used, to avoid distracting the attention of students during the test to correct errors, for example typographical ones, thereby creating a noisy environment which can favour cheating. Students should be directed to check on whether or not their test copies contain all pages and are properly collated before they begin to avoid interruptions during the examination or the temptation to seek help from other examinees, which can lead to collusion.
3. Rules must be established for both examinees and supervisors/invigilators to guide them with respect to their behaviour in the examination hall. For the students the rules can be posted to

notice boards and their attention drawn to it for perusal. That alone is not enough. There should be a formal session at which the rules and regulations can be read and the rationale behind them explained to the students so that they can better appreciate why they are not to do certain things. In the same way the invigilators/supervisors should also have sessions at which they will learn about their duties and the rationale behind the rules. The informed mind can better help them to enforce the rules after having had understanding of their implications.

4. For noise to be minimized, teachers who are friends should not be put together to supervise the same session for fear that they themselves may create noise in a form of conversation, thereby allowing students to do the same. Also a notice can be put outside to warn passers-by not to disturb when examination is in session.
5. Before students enter the examination room they should be searched to prevent them from carrying any foreign material into the examination room. The idea that they should be allowed to go in with whatever they have, and if they are found out they will be dealt with should be discarded. Students should be made to know that it is improper to carry foreign material on them for the purpose of taking advantage over others. Examinees leaving examination room and intending to return should go under escort or else should not be allowed to return to the examination room. Not more than one examinee intending to return to the examination room should be allowed to go out. If more than one person leave, there is the tendency for them to confer even inside the washroom.
6. For very effective proctoring, sections in the examination room can be apportioned to the invigilators, so that they can intensify their watchfulness on the examinees in the area given them. Also under no condition should there be no supervisor/invigilator in the examination room.
7. Examination rooms should function for that purpose alone, otherwise they can promote cheating if they also serve as study rooms for the students after the examination sessions. Information can be scribbled on tables and other materials can also be hidden there for their use during the examination if the room serves a dual purpose during the examination period.

8. Once in the examination room there should not be any form of communication between examiners. Even communication between examinees and invigilators/supervisors should be disallowed unless it becomes very necessary. Borrowing of items such as pencils and erasers can be avenues for exchanging information and thus should be discouraged. Borrowing through the mediation of a supervisor/invigilator should also be discouraged.
9. Examinees should not be allowed to leave during the last few minutes of the test period as this tends to distract and unsettle other students and to abet cheating (Ogunniyi, 1991).
10. If it is possible examinees should be seated on alternate seats to minimize cheating. An alternative is the preparation of two formats of the same test but having the test items arranged differently on each format and printed on differently coloured papers if possible. If the examination involves different classes taking tests concurrently, the seating can be arranged such that students sitting adjacent to each other are not members of the same class.
11. Index numbers should be written on all examination tables and the index number should be that of the candidate sitting for the examination at that time. Candidates should not be allowed to choose where and with whom they want to sit. The identity of each candidate must be established.
12. Scripts of all those who finish the examination early should be collected and kept by the examiner to prevent a situation whereby an examinee can take his script away or exchange his script with that of a more intelligent candidate who might have left earlier.
13. To safeguard against exchange of question papers with information written on them provision should be made for all question papers to bear the candidate's index number which has been written in ink. Also all scripts should bear the stamp of the institution.
14. Students should learn to be honest. They should prevent other students from copying their answers and also report cases of cheating to the invigilator.

### How to deal with the Culprits of Examination Malpractices.

Firstly, all cases of examination malpractice should be officially documented. A format as found in the Appendix can be used whereby provision is made for stating the nature of the offence. It is important that other examinees present in the examination room are made witnesses to the offence to forestall future denial by the culprit or to prevent a false preferment of an offence against a candidate by a supervisor/invigilator for personal reasons. The form should then be signed by the detector of the offence, the culprit, the supervisor and possibly an external supervisor if there should be one. The candidate's name as well as his correct index number should be on the form. The exhibit, if any, should be collected and attached to the report as evidence.

Secondly, for a fair judgement of the offence it should be presented before a special board, which will then decide the kind of punishment to be meted out to the culprit if found guilty of the offence.

Thirdly, the attention of the general student body should be drawn to the offence and the kind of punishment given to serve as a deterrent to them. It must, however, be noted that the fact that a student has cheated in an examination does not mean that he should be given a low score. Learning goal attainments are not reflected when an examinee cheats (except the goal attainment is honesty, which is rare). Therefore, if a student cheats on a test then his/her score is not valid for that test and therefore he/she should not be given any score, just like anybody who never took the examination at all.

Judgement of the attainment of the proper learning goals should be suspended and should only be done if the culprit no longer displays the dishonest behaviour to enable a true assessment of the attainment of the learning goals to be made.

According to Frisbie and Andrew (as cited in Ebel & Frisbie, 1991) "the typical student has many opportunities to cheat, and the willingness to do so has been observed as early as kindergarten ( p. 207). This observation justifies the moulding of a student's character with respect to cheating by conscientizing them. Examinees must know that examination malpractice is an academic dishonesty and is tantamount to stealing with its logical punishment of incarceration.

Since examinees come from different backgrounds and as such have formed their characters already with respect to what is morally sound it behoves educational institutions to consciously train students to come to the realization of the malicious nature of cheating so that the student will frown on it .

### Conclusion

Examination malpractice is real. It is a nuisance to examination bodies and it is an impediment in making a fair assessment on learners. It over-burdens invigilators /supervisors because of the extra caution they have to take. Knowing its negative effects, all those concerned with examinations should arm themselves with the knowledge given, hoping that it will be minimized if not eradicated altogether. The examination rules should help students to mould their behaviour on honesty. According to the behavioural model, the events which come after a behaviour are essential in determining whether the behaviour will be strengthened and maintained. Consequences which are found to be pleasant or desirable increase the likelihood that the behaviour will recur. They can, therefore, strengthen or reinforce behaviour. Consequences which are found to be unpleasant or undesirable decrease the likelihood that the behaviour will be repeated and therefore weaken it (Bull & Solity, 1987). In this light, it can be logically concluded that examiners' attitude to cheating will determine whether it will continue or not.

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