

Examination malpractice in Ghanaian Schools: Evidence from 2018 to 2021.

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Abstract

This study investigated Examination Malpractices in Ghana ranging from 2018 to 2021. WAEC cancels the results of candidates who sit for BECE and WASSCE and even hand-prohibited some from WAEC-administered examinations over the years. But cheating continues and, in most cases, increases year by year. In an attempt to unravel the nature of malpractices, the causes, and people who engage in fraud in the conduct of examinations in Ghana, content analysis was used as the design. Secondary data from WAEC and the abstracts, introductions, findings, conclusions, and recommendations of authoritative articles were purposefully selected for the study.

The findings revealed that examination malpractices take several forms in Ghana, including impersonation, syndicate cheating in schools, smuggling of mobile phones into examination halls by candidates, and restriction of access to school compounds for surveillance. It also highlighted concealing materials in washrooms, pockets, private parts, and pen corks; giraffes; illegally assisting candidates, and colluding with invigilators to replace the original answer script with a pre-prepared answer script.

The study also found the pressure to meet high parental demands for excellent results, bad study habits, a desire to avoid failure, anxiety, and panic, a lack of academic competence, incompetent teachers, an inability to cover the syllabus, bad teaching methods, inadequate seating arrangements, and congested examination halls as the causes of examination malpractices in Ghana.

The study recommended that WAEC collaborate with the Ghana Education Service to make the cheating policy available to students at all levels of education, including the punishment for cheaters if they are caught. It is also noted that to avoid improper seating arrangements, WAEC should adopt snake-like seating with a standard spacing of 1.50 cm.

Keywords: Student, examination malpractices, West African Examination Council, qualitative document analysis, Ghana.

Introduction

Education by and large intends to develop the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains of learners (Asare-Danso, 2018). On the personal development subject, Anane and Asamoah-Gyimah (2014) stated that education priorities and processes are guided by societal needs, goals, and desires to prepare young people to fit into society. The pair emphasizes the significance of setting and achieving learning objectives while training students since learning outcomes are fully realized once students are aware of the construct validity of their academic performance as evidenced by grades. Examining is hence one of the processes used to determine one's educational achievement, which is assessed by grades.

The History of Education in Ghana.

The history of education in Ghana has been associated with the coming and the activities of European Merchants on the Gold Coast now Ghana. The Portuguese who arrived first established schools intending to

encourage the teaching of reading, writing, and the Catholic religion to the people in Elmina where they settled. Though there are no grounds to establish the success of the Portuguese, it is established that the English, Danish and Dutch organizations operated schools on the Gold Coast where the instruction was mainly reading, writing, and religious education (StateUniversity.com). However, not every child had the opportunity to attend the Castle schools except for the mulattoes or children of Ghanaian women who were married to European traders, children of prominent chiefs, and affluent merchants (McWilliam, 1962). The Christian missionaries needed a staff of educated local assistants to establish independent native churches and as a result contributed immensely to the commencement of formal education in Ghana (Vivian, 2016). To the Missionaries, education was necessary to be able to interpret the Bible into local languages to enable the Africans to have skills in Bible reading (Graham, 1971).

According to Abroampa (2007), the bedrock of education in Ghana throughout the colonial era has been a trilogy: religion, learning, and moral training. Nonetheless, the integration of religious education in the school curriculum was not exclusively on education but as well as historical and moral grounds.

It was as a result of the objectives of the Christian Missionaries that the Basel Missionary established the first teacher training college in Ghana, Presbyterian Training College in 1848 at Akropong-Akwapim. The Wesleyan and the Roman Catholic Missionaries followed suit to set up Wesley College in Kumasi, Holy Child Training College in Takoradi, and others. Since the focus was ecclesiastical and evangelical, apart from the special areas, the Bible was the foundation upon which religious, moral, and character training was dispensed (Abroampa, 2007).

Ghana's education and teacher training have faced several secularizations but there was no formal curriculum for religious, moral, or character development. The missionaries' colleges formulated their structures for education exclusively on the Bible. Subsequently, cultural studies were introduced as a subject area to study in basic schools. Asare-Danso (2018) noted that Traditional African Education was a casual type of education that took place in the home where parents and adults in the community acted as teachers. Therefore, it was a collective mandate for everyone to teach and bring up children in a community. However, due to the emergence of religious pluralism and social dynamism, it became necessary to broaden the scope of education and religious and moral education. In support of the face rising consensus in society, the school has been mandated to address the issue of moral education with a united effort and a holistic approach to fight moral degeneration eating up the social fabric of Ghana (C.R.D.D, 1999).

In this vein, the Ghana Education Service in cooperation with the Curriculum Research and Development Division introduced Religious and Moral Education (RME) into the educational system throughout junior secondary schools and senior secondary schools in 1999 to replace Cultural Studies. The focus of Religious and Moral Education as a subject is on the moral values of the main religious bodies in Ghana comprising, African Traditional Religion, Christianity, and Islamic religion (Asiedu, 2009). It also has components of social and moral contents such as individual and collective rights and responsibilities, bribery and corruption, teenage pregnancy, drug abuse, etc which are shackles to the progress of the country. More importantly, the Code and Professional Conducts for teachers under Ghana Education Service has largely entrusted into the hands of teachers the education of children in Ghana and places teachers, whatever their role, in a special perspective of obligations, which requires an exceptionally high standard of behavior and conduct (Ghana Education Service, 2008).

Basic Education in Ghana

According to the Anamuah-Mensah Report (2002), the term "basic education" refers to the "minimum period of schooling needed to ensure that children acquire basic literacy, numeracy, and problem-solving skills, as well as skills for creativity and healthy living." In the same vein, Alexander (2009) asserts that the primary objective of basic education is to provide students with a unique opportunity to learn basic life

skills such as reading, writing, spelling, interpersonal communication, tolerance, respect, time management, and self-discipline. However, this can only be achieved if the quality is at the forefront.

Educators have not agreed on a generally accepted definition of quality education as there are no established methods for assessing educational progress to determine whether it is of high or low quality (Bawa, 2011). Nonetheless, UNESCO (2017) perceived quality education as issues such as adequate skill development, gender equality, availability of school infrastructure, adequate teaching equipment, materials and resources, scholarships, and teaching staff. This promotes access to quality education as a human right and advocates a rights-based approach in all educational activities (Pigozzi, 2004) and access to education that is not of high quality is a waste of time and money (Bawa, 2011).

The government of Ghana has recently revised the school curriculum to include the Senior High School in the basic education system, which formerly consisted of kindergarten (2 years), primary school (6 years), and junior high school (3 years). Pupils do not write national examinations after primary school and therefore do not receive any certificates, but are automatically promoted to junior high school. Junior high school graduates, on the other hand, take national examinations (Basic Education Certificate Examination, BECE) and are awarded certificates upon completion of year three. In short, pupils attend basic school for 11 years. The Constitution (1992) of Ghana guarantees the right to basic education in article 25 (1), which stipulates that “Basic education shall be free, compulsory and available to all.”

The government of Ghana has made frantic efforts over the years to introduce significant policies such as Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE), provision of infrastructure, promotion of gender equality, Capitation Grants, school feeding for primary schools, and providing free school uniforms for children from low-income homes in response to global development frameworks such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Dakar Principles for Education for All (EFA).

Despite government efforts to improve access and quality through spending on education for all, the basic education system still faces unpleasant quality and equity challenges that prohibit thousands of children from going to school and learning (UNICEF, 2015). For example, poor children’s learning attainment; insufficient supply of trained and competent teachers; inadequate water and sanitation facilities; excessive class sizes; and a lack of teaching and learning resources exist in the basic schools, particularly schools in rural communities. These obstacles over the years have been reflected in the students’ abysmal performance in the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) and some including their teachers indulging in examination malpractices. However, there is some evidence that illustrates differences in student performance in the basic education certificate examination, which has been linked to the effectiveness of private individuals and institutions with better resources and encouraging their staff to do their best (Yeboah, 2014).

Deplorable Nature of Basic Schools

According to the 1992 constitution, “*the Government shall [...] draw up the program for implementation over the next ten years for the provision of Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education,*” the FCUBE was launched in October 1995 and was to be implemented over ten years (1996-2005). The policy was initiated to overcome some of the inadequacies of the past educational reform programs and to expand access to quality basic education in Ghana (Osifunke, 2018). The policy recommends the government provide free tuition, textbooks, teaching and learning materials, and subsidies for the cost of exercise books through the FCUBE program. It also covers the costs of Basic Education Certificate Education (BECE) for both public and private candidates. However, parents are required to enroll their school-age children, feed them, and supply them with school uniforms, school bags, stationery, and transportation if needed (Daily Graphic, Friday, November 17, 2000, 19; culled from; Akyeampong, 2009). The compulsory component showed the commitment to pressure parents to enroll their children throughout the entire period of basic education. At

the inception, parents were threatened with fines for non-compliance, but without an enforcement plan, which amounted to an empty threat (MOE / GES 2001).

However, the overall implementation of the policy and other recent interventions have not been encouraging as a result of the tenacity of rural-urban inequities, especially the infrastructure and other essential teaching and learning resources as well as personnel as compared to urban Ghana. Some classrooms, especially in rural communities, deserve to be referred to as death traps that alienate both students and teachers from school. Because most of these structures are dangerous, some parents opt to keep their children at home or send them to work on farms instead of sending them to school. Where there are buildings, children sit on the floor with broken furniture and lie on the floor to write notes, while others sit in classrooms with potholes, making teaching and learning uncomfortable.

The rural-urban inequality gap is widening because the government's social interventions, including those on education, are often implemented across the board with little regard for the unique context of rural communities and do not target the local needs, knowledge, and content that are critical for long-term outcomes (Anlimachie 2016). Long distances continue to be a barrier to equitable access to education in rural communities, as the majority of Ghana's primary schools lack junior high schools. Whereas most junior high school communities are located further away from primary schools, making them inaccessible to students due to a poor transportation network (Amoako, 2010).

According to African Education Watch (2022), prioritizing some aspects of the education sector while ignoring others is counterproductive to meeting Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG-4) by 2030. The CEO of the civil society group emphasized that despite having nearly six million students enrolled in public basic schools (from primary through junior high school) in the country than in other forms of education, the sector receives a small portion of the GETFund disbursement. With almost 5,000 schools operating under trees, sheds, and dilapidated structures and 4,000 primary schools lacking JHS, the basic school level has the worst infrastructure deficit. This results in a high drop-out rate of up to 28 percent in underserved regions of the northern half of the country.

Concept of examination malpractice

Wilayat (2009) describes examination to consist of two distinct concepts: first, achieving the intended goal, and second, being a consistent and trustworthy means of measurement. Therefore, an anomaly or examination malpractice, renders the legitimacy and outcome questionable. The West African Examination Council (WAEC) is responsible for overseeing the pre-tertiary final-year examination in Ghana.

Examination malpractice, according to Azuru (2009), is unethical behavior committed by a test taker before, during, or after the test, typically to gain an unfair advantage or obtain an unjust grade. The WAEC (2003) defines examination malpractice as any unusual behavior displayed by candidates or anyone in charge of administering exams, within or outside the exam room, before, during, or after the exam. Recent examinations in Ghana have been plagued by question leaks and have become a seasonal topic of debate and undermine the credibility of the examination system. Nwana (2000) expanded on the WAEC definition by describing examination malpractice as a "massive and unprecedented abuse of rules and regulations on internal and external examinations, beginning with the setting of such examinations, through the taking of such examinations, their marking, and grading, to the release of the results and the issuance of certificates." Kyeremeh, Graham, Fabea, and Dabone (2015) discovered that examination misconduct is still prevalent, with the majority of respondents admitting to having cheated in the past and saying they would cheat again if given the chance. Moreover, the repercussions of this ailment are not implausible; they are Machiavellian, gory, diabolical, and unpleasant.

Several studies have revealed that examination malpractice is pervasive in societies and that its

consequences can be seen in the quality of human resources produced by their educational system; however, it's frightening to realize that Ghana has not had trouble-free examinations in recent years. The fraud, which takes many forms and ranges from massive leaks, and invigilators writing on chalkboards for students to neck-stretching in exam halls, has frequently resulted in some schools having some or all of their papers canceled. To substantiate the impacts of examination malpractice on education, Jimoh (2009) disclosed in a study that countries known for examination malpractice have comatose education systems in terms of international cooperation in education.

Some of the factors that lead to examination malpractices include non-completion of syllabi, candidates' inadequate examination preparation, candidates' desperation to pass exams at all costs, the school's performance standings, and laxity in prosecuting offenders (Adamu, 1998; Onyechere, 2008). It baffles me why the canker is a national phenomenon and an annual ritual yet nothing is being done about it. Those arrested in connection with the practice are frequently not heard from again after the exams are completed. What is unclear is whether they are subjected to the due process of the law, or whether the appropriate punishment is meted out to those found guilty. Examination malpractices have always existed in Ghana, according to the West African Examination Council's annual press releases. Table 1 summarises the malpractice trend in the country for some years, showing the number of students involved in examination malpractices.

Table 1: Examination of Malpractice Trend in Ghana

Examination Name	Year	Total Enrolment of Students	Total No of Those Involved in Examination Malpractices
WASSCE	2018	316,999	26,434 (Results withheld)
BECE	2018	509,827	217 (Results canceled) 2,061 (Results withheld)
WASSCE	2019	346,094	48855(Results withheld)
BECE	2019	517,331	192 (Results canceled) 2,500 (Results Withheld)
WASSCE	2020	375,763	2383 (Subject canceled) 480 (Results canceled) 384 (Results withheld)
BECE	2020	531,707	497 (Results canceled) 977 (Results withheld)
WASSCE	2021	446,352	1339 (Subject canceled) 174 (Results canceled) 3667 (Results withheld)

BECE	2021	572,167	184 (Results canceled) 257 (Results withheld
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Source: WAEC

According to Table 1, examination malpractice is more prevalent in the West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) than in the Basic Certificate Examination (BECE). The summation of the figures for both school exams is shown below.

Out of 82,682 candidates for the BECE and WASSCE, 28,712 were caught cheating in 2018. This figure increased to 51547 out of the 863,425 students who took both exams in 2019. However, the table demonstrates that the number of WASSCE candidates involved in the act (48855) was more than double that of the BECE. In 2020, the figure dropped dramatically to 4721 candidates out of 978,059 before rebounding slightly to 5,621 candidates out of 1018,519 in 2021.

Research Questions

1. What kind of exam fraud does the West African Examination Council encounter?
2. What are the causes of examination malpractices in Ghana?
3. Who is involved in examination malpractices in Ghana?

Research Design

A document analysis design was employed for the study and hence, extant data will be used for the analysis. Qualitative document analysis (QDA) is a research method that analyses the contents of written documents rigorously and systematically (Wach, Ward & Jacimovic 2013). Researchers regard it as a versatile tool for analyzing text data (Cavanagh, 1997). The huge volume of material already written on this issue influenced the selection of qualitative data. To do this, content analysis was employed to carefully select relevant material from the WAEC and other authors with authority that provided significant information on examination misconduct in Ghana for the analysis of this study. The data used, ranged from 2018 to 2021. The study aimed to examine examination malpractices between 2018 to 2021 in Ghana to answer the research questions.

Data Collection

The goal of this study was to explore examination malpractices in Ghana to determine their nature, their root causes, and the individuals who commit these malpractices during the numerous exams that the West African Examination Council administered between 2018 and 2021. Existing documents and archives from the West African Examination Council and authoritative articles were purposively selected via the internet and qualitatively analyzed to determine examination malpractices in Ghana. The emphasis was on the abstracts, introductions, findings, conclusions, and recommendations. This method was adopted and deemed suitable because of the sensitivity of examination malpractice and the amount of research conducted in the area in Ghana.

Data analysis.

The study considered only relevant data that could be used to answer the research questions, and data thinning was performed to extract the relevant data to examine the nature of examination malpractice and identify the caliber of people who engage in the act. The data was then organized into smaller units

following the study questions that had been prepared for coding after the researcher had found patterns and frequent sequences in the data. Reading over the material and carefully noting concept repetitions was how the coding was carried out. Using this approach, the researcher was able to collect and analyze data in line with the study's research questions. The findings were then summarised into a logical report, making inferences and drawing conclusions.

Developing Themes

The major themes that were identified during data interpretation include:

the nature of examination malpractice in Ghana

This study showed that examination malpractices take several forms in Ghana. In a WAEC press release (September 2, 2022) concerning the conduct of the West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) for school candidates in 2022 and emerging issues, the following issues were highlighted: impersonation, syndicate cheating in schools, smuggling of mobile phones into examination halls by candidates, restriction of access to school compounds for monitoring purposes as the major trends of examination malpractices. WAEC (2014, 2018, and 2019) further indicated that "script conspiracy" constitutes the most common type of examination malpractice in the WASSCE.

A study by Achio, Ameko, Kutsanedzie, Alhassan, & Ganaa (2012) examined the forms, contributing causes, and major participants in examination misconduct as well as the effects and countermeasures. The descriptive survey classified test misconduct into the following categories: writing on things and applicants' bodies; leaks; impersonation; cheating; plagiarism; falsified course work; using programmable calculators and other technological devices during the examination; concealing materials in washrooms, pockets, private parts, and pen corks to be used as reference materials; giraffe; illegally assisting candidates and colluding with members of staff to replace the original answered script with a pre-prepared answered script. The report indicated once more that between 2000 and 2011, various kinds of examination misconduct increased from 5 to 12, representing a 140% rise. Moreover, the study demonstrated that close to 37% of respondents have ever been involved in malpractice, and 94.5% agreed that examination malpractice is unethical.

Similarly, a study conducted by Folson & Awuah (2014) on combating examination malpractices in the Basic Education Certificate Examinations (BECE) in Ghana asserted that examination questions leak a couple of weeks through advertisements on Facebook, Twitter, and other social media to attract customers, mostly heads of schools and proprietors and that invigilators act as conduits between the cheating students and the smuggling of the solutions to the exam halls. The study's findings show that the leaking cartel comes in two types: first- and second-source. First-sourced cartels claim that WAEC officials are their primary source of questions, which they pass on to second-sourced cartels. It is also claimed that second-sourced cartels transmit them to other interested cartels, generally with the solution to the leaked questions. The first-sourced cartels are said to pay between GH 2,000 and GH 2,500 for each sheet and sell them to second-sourced cartels for between GH 1,000 and GH 1,500. Most second-source cartels often answer the questions and sell them directly to schools or third-source cartels for between GH700 and GH1, 000 per paper, enriching these cartels with large sums of money each year and constantly looking for ways to circumvent WAEC's modalities for preventing cheating in their examinations.

causes of examination malpractices

Many reasons for exam malpractice have been discovered via research. According to Tawiah, Alberta, Bossman, and Ata (2015), one of the reasons students are involved in examination fraud is the pressure to meet high parental demands for excellent results. Adamu, Cobbinah, and Alhassan (2021) attributed

examination malpractice to bad study habits, a desire to avoid failure, anxiety, and panic, and a lack of academic competence in their assessment of the factors causing Senior High students' involvement in examination malpractice in the Takoradi Metropolis of Ghana. The study also linked exam fraud to incompetent teachers, inability to cover the syllabus, bad teaching methods, inadequate seating arrangements, the congested aspect of the examination room, and teachers' lack of topic expertise.

Ampofo (2020) categorized the factors that promote examination malpractices in Ghana into teachers, students, parents, and the environment. Under the teachers' factors, the researcher found a lack of mastery skills in teaching, bad teaching techniques, inadequate teachers' textbooks, untrained teachers, and an inability to cover the required syllabus. The investigation also discovered students' lack of self-motivation, improper examination preparation, poor efficacy, poor study habits, and a lack of desire, low academic competence, and relationships with peers who tend to cheat and need to avoid failure. Moreover, the study found that improper parental training at home, deficient parental supervision, a lack of basic learning resources, parents purchasing exam materials for students, and parents giving exam officials money in exchange for assistance for their kids are all contributing factors to examination malpractice in Ghana. Furthermore, the study discovered that the crowded character of the examination rooms, as well as the location of examination centers in distant places with limited access for complete monitoring, are environmental factors influencing examination malpractices. Studies show that most examination facilities have traditional seating arrangements (snake-like), often rows of fixed seats with students facing the invigilator and with their backs to one another. This seating arrangement is common in colleges and effective in reducing student-student interaction. However, because examination rooms are usually crowded, students can easily copy from one another.

Arhin (2020) researched the perceived factors causing BECE exam malpractices among students in Asante Akim North District. Using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) sample size determination table, he selected 132 teachers from a target population of 200. The study discovered that students and schools engage in examination misconduct to appear at the top of their zones and other levels, owing to the attention that comes with it.

Individuals Implicated in Examination Malpractice

A significant number of studies have cited several people who engage in examination malpractices. According to a WAEC press release (September 16, 2022), teachers, students, and invigilators are the primary perpetrators of exam malpractice in Ghana. Achio et al. (2012) named the ensuing persons implicated in examination fraud: examination bodies; school proprietors; teachers and supervisors; parents and guardians; examination servicers; students and candidates; and examiners and examination managers. However, Adamu et al. (2015) contend that the majority of examination malpractices are committed by students for a variety of reasons, including poor study habits, a desire to avoid failure, anxiety, panic, and low academic ability.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Examination malpractice in Ghana comes in different forms including impersonation, syndicate cheating in schools, candidates sneaking mobile phones into exam rooms, collusion over scripts, writing on objects and students' bodies, leaks, illegal assistance given to students by invigilators, denying exam monitors access to school grounds, and plagiarism. This implies that everyone participating in examination administration must be skilled, vigilant, accountable, and empowered to assist remove the aforementioned examination malpractices. WAEC must pick invigilators who are trustworthy, capable of withstanding financial pressure, and knowledgeable, rather than teachers who are also complicit in the act.

The study also determined that the most common causes of malpractice in Ghana are the pressure to meet

high parental demands for excellent results, bad study habits, a desire to avoid failure, anxiety, and panic, a lack of academic competence, improper parental training at home, deficient parental supervision, a lack of basic learning resources, inadequate seating arrangements, the congested nature of the examination rooms, bad teaching techniques, and schools' desire to come on top of ranking tables. WAEC should collaborate with the Ghana Education Service to make the cheating policy available to students at all levels of education, including the punishment for cheaters if they are trapped. WAEC must also adopt the snake-like seating arrangement with 1.50 cm spacing as the standard arrangement for the country's standardized examinations.

The study identified individuals involved in examination malpractice in Ghana, including examination administrators, class teachers, students, and parents. The practice has become a cankerworm gnawing deeply into the fabric of the educational system in Ghana, with horrifying consequences such as a social and economic impact on people and jeopardizing the reputation of academic degrees in the country. The West African Examination Council should therefore be much concerned about the behavior of their employees and implement a policy that will subject invigilators to a thorough search before accessing examination halls to prevent them from smuggling mobile phones and foreign material into the examination halls.

The Ghana Education Service should promote an innovative, practical, and vocational education system rather than a theory-based. The education strategy must be devised to connect theory with practice to develop graduates with practical and vocational knowledge, and the existing ranking system used to evaluate schools must be abolished.

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