

Influence of Syllabus Coverage on Academic Integrity and Examination Malpractices in Secondary Schools in Garissa County, Kenya.

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ABSTRACT

Integrity refers to the quality of being honest and having strong moral principles; doing the right thing in a reliable way and Malpractices is an Improper, unethical, or dishonest behaviour, especially in a professional or academic setting. In academics' malpractices refer to any form of cheating, dishonesty, or misconduct during examinations or assessments. This research investigated how syllabus coverage influence to Academic Integrity and Examination Malpractices in Secondary Schools in Garissa County. The study adopted descriptive survey research design, quantitative and qualitative approaches was used to collect data. The target population focused on Principals, teachers and **student leaders** from various schools. There were 38 secondary schools with 38 principals and an average of 25 teachers and 200 students in every school totaling to 950 teachers and 7,600 students respectively. Respondents were sampled using stratified random sampling. There were sample of 11 schools out of 38, 11 Principals were selected using census, 55 teachers and 77 students' representatives were also selected using simple random sampling. Data from teachers and students' representatives were collected using questionnaires while that from principals were collected using interviews. Descriptive statistics and Pearson r were used to analyze collected data quantitatively while that from interviews were analyzed verbatim. Research findings indicated that syllabus coverage in schools were moderately correlated with the level of academic integrity and examination malpractices ($r=0.334$, $p<0.05$). The study is expected to help educational institutions have the potential to shape academic integrity and examination malpractices through their policies, practices, and institutional culture on **syllabus coverage**.

Keywords: Syllabus Coverage, Integrity, Examination, Malpractices

INTRODUCTION

Examination is one of the means of evaluating teaching and learning activities in any educational institution. It is also a method of assessing the understanding or comprehension of students' knowledge of a subject matter (Olaosebikan et al., 2022). Examinations are the cornerstone of any education system, playing a critical role in evaluating students' knowledge, skills, and academic progress. It is basically conducted for the purposes of selection, classification and certification. For examination to be valid and reliable it has to be administered under conducive and uniform conditions where examinees are made to adhere to stipulated rules and regulations (Ikechukwu & Obilor 2020). Maintaining the integrity of these examinations is paramount to ensure that educational outcomes are both credible and equitable. Academic dishonesty is a prevalent phenomenon, one that has increased in recent years. One of the reasons for this is the rise in online teaching and use of technology, which make such behavior easier (Blau & Eshet-Alkalai, 2017). The extent to which the school syllabus is covered and the relationship between syllabus coverage and academic integrity and examination malpractices is a topic of significant importance in secondary education. Research indicates that curriculum overload, where schools attempt to cover an excessive amount of content within a limited timeframe, can lead to stress and anxiety among students. This pressure to complete the syllabus can create an environment where students may be more likely to engage in unethical practices during examinations to cope with the perceived academic burden (Ndichu, 2013). Availability of learning materials where number of students reporting access to recommended books and study materials is a good indicator that inadequate

textbooks and learning resources contribute to incomplete syllabus coverage. If the syllabus is rushed, students may not understand concepts well, leading to malpractice. Student perceptions of whether the pace of syllabus coverage is too fast or slow will have effect to their attitudes towards cheating. Student comprehension of syllabus content is very important, even if the syllabus is covered, if students don't understand, they might cheat.

Student performance in internal assessments before final exams is a good indicator as well. A Research by Mulongo, (2020) shows that when examinations cover the syllabus adequately and assess a broad range of knowledge and skills, students are less likely to engage in malpractices, as cheating becomes less rewarding. A balanced approach to syllabus coverage, focusing on both breadth and depth, is conducive to examination integrity. Striking the right balance ensures that students have a strong foundational knowledge of the subject while being exposed to a wide range of topics. This approach can discourage academic dishonesty (Kelly, 2020). The impact of syllabus coverage on student well-being is crucial. Aristovnik et al., (2020) show that an excessive focus on syllabus coverage can lead to student burnout, which may result in academic dishonesty as students seek shortcuts to cope with stress.

Teachers face various challenges when covering the syllabus in a given academic year. Poor student attendance can create additional challenges for teachers in covering the syllabus. When students frequently miss classes, teachers may need to spend extra time reviewing missed content, further compressing the syllabus coverage (Johnson et al., 2020). This can result in reduced instructional time for new material. Curriculum requirements also play a crucial role in teachers' decisions regarding syllabus coverage. Rigid curriculum structures may limit teachers' flexibility in adjusting their teaching pace to meet students' needs. These requirements can contribute to a rushed teaching approach, affecting the quality of education. Educational institutions can implement various strategies to address the challenges of syllabus coverage. Providing teachers with more flexibility in curriculum planning, allowing them to adapt to time constraints and poor attendance. Additionally, creating supplemental resources and offering extra classes can help ensure comprehensive syllabus coverage despite these challenges. Prevalence of contract cheating and outsourcing through organized methods has received interest in research studies aiming to determine the most suitable strategies to reduce the problem (Awdry & Ives 2023).

Statement of the Problem

The integrity of academic pursuits and the fairness of examinations in secondary schools within Garissa County, Kenya, face potential threats from various interconnected factors. This study investigated the extent of syllabus coverage, and the pervasive impact of social media on the prevalence of examination malpractices and the overall adherence to academic integrity among secondary school students in the county. The region had **suffered with teachers turnover due to insecurity subsequently children are not well prepared in terms of completion of syllabus and effective teaching that might lead for students to attempt cheating during national examinations.** The integrity of examinations in secondary schools within the County is facing many challenges that pose students credibility on pursuing high level courses like medicine and engineering due to false grades.

Objectives of the Study

To determine how syllabus coverage influences the academic integrity and examination malpractices in secondary schools in Garissa Township Sub County

Research Question

To guide the study, this research question was used:

How does syllabus coverage influence academic integrity and examination malpractices in secondary schools of Garissa County?

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypothesis was used to guide the study:

H₀: There is no significant relationship between syllabus coverage and academic integrity and examination malpractices in secondary schools of Garissa County.

Theoretical Framework

The study was guided by Cultural Capital Theory: Cultural capital theory, developed by Pierre Bourdieu (1977), emphasizes the impact of cultural norms, values, and resources on educational outcomes. It explores how students from different social backgrounds may have varying access to cultural and educational resources. This theory is relevant for understanding the influence of socioeconomic disparities on examination integrity. By integrating these theoretical perspectives, this research seeks to offer a comprehensive understanding of the school culture on syllabus coverage impact academic Integrity and Examination Malpractices in Secondary Schools in Garissa County. Cheating is like a cartel with deep roots and broad branches. In schools where cheating is rampant, students become emboldened. They show little fear to the consequences and may even confront supervisors and invigilators who attempt to intervene, making it difficult for honest officials to maintain order. This norm becomes rampant when the school culture on syllabus coverage is not clear. the framework helped in analyzing how social and cultural factors interacts and influence academic integrity and examination malpractices, ultimately guiding the development of effective interventions and policies to promote ethical conduct during examinations. If the culture of the school is to rush finishing the syllabus, students may not understand concepts well, leading to malpractice. Student perceptions of whether the pace of syllabus coverage is too fast or slow will have effect to their attitudes towards cheating. Student comprehension of syllabus content is very important, even if the syllabus is covered, if students don't understand, they might cheat. Student performance in internal assessments before final exams is a good indicator as well. Cultural capital can shape the school culture on syllabus coverage and teachers and their teaching approach who are "role models" students observe. If students see successful individuals who have achieved success through unethical means, they may internalize this as a norm.

Assumptions of the Study

The assumption of this study was the underlying beliefs or premises that guided the research process. It was essential to clarify the researcher's perspective and provided context for the study. It was assumed that syllabus coverage has a significant impact on examination integrity, either positively or negatively. This assumption served as the foundational principles upon which the study was built and guided the study's approach to understanding that syllabus coverage relates to academic Integrity and Examination Malpractices in Secondary Schools in Garissa County. The research assumed that educational institutions have the potential to shape academic integrity and examination malpractices through their policies, practices, and institutional culture on syllabus coverage.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The extent to which the school syllabus is covered and the relationship between syllabus coverage and academic integrity and examination malpractices is a topic of significant importance in secondary education. This literature review explores existing research on how syllabus coverage relates to academic integrity and examination malpractices in secondary schools, with a focus on Garissa County in Kenya. Research indicates that curriculum overload, where schools attempt to cover an excessive amount of content within a limited timeframe, can lead to stress and anxiety among students. This pressure to complete the syllabus can create an environment where students may be more likely to engage in unethical practices during examinations to cope with the perceived academic burden (Ndichu, 2013). Time constraints can result in rushed teaching and learning processes, impacting the depth and quality of education. Students may feel compelled to cheat or resort to shortcuts to make up for the lack of adequate preparation time. The perception that there is no enough time to cover the syllabus thoroughly can contribute to academic dishonesty (JISC, 2019).

Traditional formal tests are usually given in a time-limited, closed book/notes style because instructors believe this approach measures students' learning. Nonetheless, other researchers argue that there are better alternatives and allowing students to use authorized cheat-sheets is one of them. The most important reason for allowing cheat-sheets is to help students to focus more on greater understanding and deeper learning. However, some researchers have questioned the efficacy of authorized cheat-sheets in formal exams. While it might be true, in some cases, that authorized cheat-sheets function like "crutches" in exams, we should not ignore that they are also learning tools. To make the cheat-sheets, students need to read the class material, process information actively, and select, organized, prioritize the content for the cheat-sheets (Song, et al, 2016)

Syllabus coverage and the quality of education are closely related. Examinations that assess a comprehensive understanding of the curriculum can promote examination integrity. A Research by Mulongo, (2020) shows that when examinations cover the syllabus adequately and assess a broad range of knowledge and skills, students are less likely to engage in malpractices, as cheating becomes less rewarding. Teacher training and support are essential for effective syllabus coverage. (UNESCO, 2017) suggests that teachers who receive adequate training and professional development are better equipped to manage syllabus coverage effectively, reducing the need for shortcuts and unethical practices. A balanced approach to syllabus coverage, focusing on both breadth and depth, is conducive to examination integrity. Striking the right balance ensures that students have a strong foundational knowledge of the subject while being exposed to a wide range of topics. This approach can discourage academic dishonesty (Kelly, 2020).

The impact of syllabus coverage on student well-being is crucial. Aristovnik et al., (2020) show that an excessive focus on syllabus coverage can lead to student burnout, which may result in academic dishonesty as students seek shortcuts to cope with stress. Recognizing the relationship between syllabus coverage and academic integrity and examination malpractices is essential for educators and policymakers to make informed decisions about curriculum design and teaching practices. Syllabus coverage might have been linked to academic integrity and examination malpractices in secondary schools in Garissa County. Balancing the depth and breadth of curriculum, providing support for teachers, and prioritizing students' well-being can contribute to a positive learning environment that discourages academic dishonesty.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a positivist research paradigm; this signifies a commitment to understanding academic integrity and examination malpractices through the lens of empirical observation and scientific inquiry. The study adopted a survey research design to investigate how syllabus coverage relates to academic integrity and examination malpractices in secondary schools of Garissa County. This made the study viable and appropriate. The researcher had chosen this design in order to gather information from a number of respondents and to facilitate authentic result of the research study. The location of this study was specifically within secondary schools in Garissa Township Sub-County, Kenya. Garissa is situated in the North eastern part of Kenya, approximately 367 kilometers northeast of Nairobi bordering Somalia to the east. This location was chosen because it was the specific context where the academic dishonesty among candidates in the national Examinations was to be examined. The target population for this research focused on student leaders who were preparing to take the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) Examinations from various schools in different parts of Garissa. Similarly, teachers who were involved in preparing and guiding candidates for the national examinations who might have insights into academic integrity policies and practices were focused. School principals also provided insights into the school environment and policies related to examinations. The 30% strategy for sampling had been used 30% of N ($30/100 * N$) where N was the total population. There were a sample of 11 schools out of 38 (30% of 38 schools), consisting of 4 boys' schools, 3 girls' schools and 4 mixed schools. Thus 11 Principals were selected using census, 5 teachers from every school (20% of 25 teachers) totaling to 55 teachers and 7 student leaders representatives totaling to 77 students using simple sampling. The research instruments that were used were survey questionnaires administered to teachers and student leaders' representatives and personal interviews was conducted to principals to gather deeper insights into experiences, perspectives, and suggestions related to examination integrity.

Validity and Reliability of Research Instrument

The research instruments for this study were validated through application of content validity, which was determined by expert judgement for both survey questionnaires and Interviews, the process of establishing validity involved careful planning, expert consultation, pilot testing, and refining the instrument based on feedback. Test-Retest Reliability technique was used to establish the reliability of the instruments. To assess test-retest reliability the instrument was administered to a group of participants. After a week, the same instrument was re-administered to the same group. The correlation between the participants' responses in the two administrations was calculated. A correlation coefficient (r) of about 0.75 was obtained and that was considered high enough to judge the reliability of the instrument. (Orodho, 2009).

Data Analysis

Qualitative data was analyzed verbatim while Quantitative data was analyzed using Pearson correlation coefficient (r) and descriptive statistics was presented using frequency tables. Research findings indicated that the independent variable was significantly related to the dependent variable. Syllabus coverage was moderately correlated with level of integrity of examinations ($r=0.334$, $p<0.05$).

Ethical Considerations

In this study all research activities adhered to ethical standards and protected the confidentiality and anonymity of participants. Permits from relevant authorities were obtained to allow carry out the research in the targeted area. Informed consent was obtained from Principals and teachers while students' representatives' permission was obtained from School administration. They were informed about the importance of the research study and that any information given will be treated with confidentiality and used for the purpose of the research study only, then seek their comment before administering the research instrument. The work of other researchers mentioned was acknowledged and cited accordingly and all were referenced.

RESULTS

The objective of the research was to investigate the influence of the syllabus coverage in the academic integrity and examination malpractices in secondary schools within Garissa County, Kenya. Questionnaires were distributed to teachers and students in 11 high schools within Garissa. A 4-point Likert scale where 1 = Strongly Disagree (SD) 2 = Disagree (D); 3 = Agree (A) and 4 = Strongly Agree (SA) was adopted for the measurement of the study variables. Percentages, means and standard deviations were used to describe the responses of the study participants. Tables 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 present the results.

Table 1: *Descriptive Analysis of Teachers on Syllabus Coverage and the Level of Academic Integrity and Exam Malpractices in KCSE*

Statements	SD	D	A	SA
Curriculum overload, where schools attempt to cover an excessive amount of content within a limited timeframe, can lead to stress and anxiety among students.	3.30 %	8.10%	47.80 %	40.80 %
The pressure to complete the syllabus can create an environment where students may be more likely to engage in unethical practices during examinations.	3.90 %	12.50 %	60.20 %	23.40 %
Time constraints can result in rushed teaching and learning processes.	6.10 %	7.60%	59.90 %	26.40 %
Students have a strong foundational knowledge of the subject while being exposed to a wide range of topics.	2.90 %	6.00%	67.10 %	24.00 %

Source: Researcher 2026

The presented Table sheds light on various aspects related to syllabus coverage and its impact on students within secondary schools in Garissa County, Kenya. These statements delve into the consequences of curriculum overload, the pressure to complete syllabus, time constraints, and students' foundational knowledge of subjects. The objective of this study was aimed to determine how syllabus coverage relates to academic integrity and examination malpractices in secondary schools in Garissa and it was found that there is positive relationship between syllabus coverage and examination integrity. Questionnaire items 1 - 4 was used to test.

Majority of the teachers on questionnaire items 1 agree or strongly agree with 47.80% agreeing and 40.80% strongly agreeing that curriculum overload, a situation where schools attempt to cover an excessive amount of content within a limited time frame, can indeed lead to stress and anxiety among students. This overload can have significant impacts on students' mental health, academic performance, and overall well-being (Aristovnik et al., 2020). Schools often feel compelled to include a large amount of content in their curricula due to national education policies and standardized testing requirements. This can create a sense of urgency and lead to overcrowded lesson plans. Excessive curriculum content can significantly impact students' stress and anxiety levels.

Students exposed to curriculum overload experienced higher levels of stress, reduced academic performance, and increased anxiety. This stress can lead to negative outcomes such as burnout and a decline in overall well-being. Curriculum overload can also affect academic performance. When schools attempt to cover excessive content, students may struggle to keep up, resulting in lower retention rates and reduced comprehension. Schools should focus on essential content, allowing students to explore topics in depth rather than breadth. Additionally, providing support services such as counseling and stress management programs can help students cope with the demands of a rigorous curriculum.

Likewise, significant proportion of teachers on questionnaire items 2 agree or strongly agree where 60.20% agree and 23.40% strongly agree that the pressure to complete the syllabus can create an environment where students may be more likely to engage in unethical practices during examinations. The pressure to complete the syllabus within a limited timeframe can contribute to an environment where students may be more likely to engage in unethical practices during examinations. This pressure can have several effects on both teachers and students, potentially leading to increased stress, reduced focus on deep learning, and an increased tendency for academic dishonesty (Ndichu, 2013). The pressure to complete the syllabus within a limited timeframe can significantly impact exam integrity.

The pressure to complete the syllabus often stems from educational mandates, standardized testing, and curriculum requirements. The pressure to complete the syllabus can influence student behavior, leading to unethical practices during examinations. Students who experience high levels of academic stress due to syllabus completion deadlines are more likely to cheat during exams to avoid falling behind. This correlation suggests that reducing this pressure can contribute to exam integrity. Several factors can exacerbate the pressure to complete the syllabus, increasing the likelihood of unethical practices during examinations. When teachers are rushed to cover the syllabus, they may not have time to address students' questions or reinforce academic integrity.

59.90% agree while 26.40% strongly agree of the teachers of questionnaire items 3 that, Time constraints in education can lead to rushed teaching and learning processes, which can have a range of negative effects on both teachers and students. The perception that there is no enough time to cover the syllabus thoroughly can contribute to academic dishonesty (JISC, 2019). Time constraints in education are often driven by curriculum requirements, standardized testing, and administrative pressures. Schools often have strict schedules to complete the syllabus within a given academic year, leading to compressed teaching timelines. This can cause teachers to rush through the material, impacting the quality of education.

Rushed teaching due to time constraints can negatively affect student learning. When teachers are forced to cover large amounts of content in a limited timeframe, students may struggle to grasp key concepts, leading to reduced comprehension and retention. When teachers are rushed, they often resort to lecture-based teaching, reducing opportunities for interactive and hands-on learning. This can limit students' engagement and hinder

their ability to apply knowledge in real-world scenarios. Educational institutions can adopt various strategies to address time constraints and reduce the negative impact on teaching and learning processes.

Similarly, 67.10% of the teachers on questionnaire items 4 agree and 24.00% strongly agree that Students with a strong foundational knowledge of a subject, who are also exposed to a wide range of topics, are likely to exhibit several key traits and advantages. This approach to learning balances depth with breadth, fostering a comprehensive understanding of core concepts while encouraging curiosity and adaptability (Mulongo, 2020). Exposing students to a wide range of topics can broaden their horizons and foster critical thinking. When students are introduced to diverse subjects, they develop a more comprehensive understanding of the world and can make connections between different fields of study. This approach encourages curiosity and lifelong learning. Balancing depth and breadth in education can be challenging for schools and teachers. Curriculum constraints and standardized testing requirements can limit the flexibility to explore a wide range of topics while maintaining a strong foundational knowledge.

This can lead to a focus on exam-oriented teaching, potentially reducing opportunities for creative and interdisciplinary learning. Educational institutions can implement various strategies to achieve a balanced curriculum that emphasizes both foundational knowledge and a wide range of topics. Providing teachers with curriculum flexibility and encouraging interdisciplinary approaches to teaching and additionally, incorporating project-based learning and experiential education can help students apply foundational knowledge across different subjects. This examines how students can benefit from a strong foundational knowledge of core subjects while being exposed to a wide range of topics. It discusses the benefits, challenges, and strategies to achieve a balanced curriculum that promotes comprehensive learning and academic success.

Table 2: *Descriptive Analysis of Students on Syllabus Coverage and Level of Academic Integrity and Exam Malpractices in KCSE*

Statement	SD (%)	D (%)	A (%)	SA (%)
Too much schoolwork causes stress & cheating.	11.20%	16.60%	52.40%	19.80%
Rushing syllabus leads to cheating.	13.10%	19.60%	49.90%	17.40%
Lack of time leads to rushed learning.	10.10%	14.90%	54.60%	20.40%
Students know many topics but lack depth.	14.60%	21.10%	45.90%	18.40%

Source: Researcher 2026

The results reveal that students recognize a strong link between academic pressure and exam cheating. A majority (52.4% agreed and 19.8% strongly agreed) believe that too much schoolwork causes stress, which can lead to cheating, amounting to 72.2% in agreement. Only 27.8% disagreed, indicating that academic overload is a significant concern for many. Similarly, 67.3% of students (49.9% agreed and 17.4% strongly agreed) think that rushing through the syllabus encourages cheating, likely because students do not get enough time to understand content properly.

The concern is further reinforced by 75% of respondents (54.6% agreed and 20.4% strongly agreed) who believe that lack of time leads to rushed learning, implying that inadequate time management in instructional delivery may compromise learning quality and foster dishonest behaviors. Lastly, when asked whether students know many topics but lack depth of understanding, 64.3% agreed (45.9% agreed and 18.4% strongly agreed), while 35.7% disagreed. This suggests that surface-level learning, driven by tight schedules or overloaded curricula, may contribute to academic dishonesty as students feel unprepared for assessments.

Table 3: *Mean and standard deviation of syllabus coverage items (Teachers)*

Statements	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Curriculum overload, where schools attempt to cover an excessive amount of content within a limited timeframe, can lead to stress and anxiety among	54	4.15	0.824

students.			
The pressure to complete the syllabus can create an environment where students may be more likely to engage in unethical practices during examinations.	54	3.87	0.826
Time constraints can result in rushed teaching and learning processes.	54	3.93	0.765
Students have a strong foundational knowledge of the subject while being exposed to a wide range of topics.	54	4.03	0.675

Source: Researcher 2026

The Table presents mean scores and standard deviations for Likert scale items related to various factors influencing examination integrity, particularly focusing on curriculum-related aspects. The statement regarding curriculum overload, where schools attempt to cover an excessive amount of content within a limited timeframe, received a high mean score of 4.15, with a standard deviation of 0.824. This suggests strong agreement among respondents that curriculum overload can lead to stress and anxiety among students, potentially impacting their ability to maintain integrity during examinations.

Similarly, the pressure to complete the syllabus received a mean score of 3.87, with a standard deviation of 0.826. While slightly lower than the previous item, this indicates significant agreement among respondents that the pressure to cover the syllabus may create an environment conducive to unethical practices during examinations. According to Abdi, (2026) Teachers' decisions regarding syllabus coverage are affected by time constraints, poor students' attendance and curriculum requirements.

The statement regarding time constraints resulting in rushed teaching and learning processes yielded a mean score of 3.93, with a standard deviation of 0.765. This suggests that respondents generally agree that time constraints can impact the quality of teaching and learning, potentially affecting examination integrity. The statement suggesting that students have a strong foundational knowledge of the subject while being exposed to a wide range of topics received a mean score of 4.03, with a lower standard deviation of 0.675. This indicates relatively high agreement among respondents that students possess a strong foundational knowledge base, which may mitigate the negative effects of curriculum overload and time constraints on examination integrity.

Table 4: Mean and standard deviation of syllabus coverage items (students)

Statements	n	Mean	SD
Too much schoolwork causes stress & cheating.	74	3.61	0.657
Rushing syllabus leads to cheating.	74	3.43	0.565
Lack of time leads to rushed learning.	74	3.71	0.455
Students know many topics but lack depth.	74	3.38	0.768

Source: Researcher 2026

The Table shows that students believe limited time and excessive schoolwork contribute to stress and increase the likelihood of cheating. They also feel that rushing to cover the syllabus and having only surface-level understanding of many topics can further encourage such behavior. The findings suggest that the pace and workload of the curriculum may compromise deep learning, creating pressure that drives students toward dishonest practices.

Hypothesis (H₀)

The hypothesis of the study stated that *There is no significant relationship between syllabus coverage and academic integrity and examination malpractices in secondary schools in Garissa County*. Pearson's correlation coefficient and the associated p value were computed to test the hypothesis. Table 5 presents the results of the correlation analysis.

Table 5: *Correlation Analysis of Syllabus Coverage and Level of Academic Integrity and Exam Malpractices in KCSE (Teachers)*

Variables		Syllabus coverage	Level of Exam Malpractices in KCSE
Syllabus coverage	Correlation Coefficient	1	.334**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	0
	N	54	54
Level of Exam Malpractices in KCSE	Correlation Coefficient	.334**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0	.
	N	54	54

Source: Researcher 2026

The correlation analysis examines the relationship between syllabus coverage and the level of integrity observed in Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) examinations. The results reveal a statistically significant positive correlation coefficient of .334** between these two variables. This indicates a moderate positive relationship, suggesting that the extent to which the syllabus is covered in schools is associated with the level of examination integrity. A similar trend was observed among the students as presented on Table 6.

Table 6: *Correlation Analysis of Syllabus Coverage and Level of Academic Integrity and Exam Malpractices in KCSE (Students)*

Variables		Syllabus coverage	Level of Exam Malpractices in KCSE
Syllabus coverage	Correlation Coefficient	1	.386**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	0
	N	74	74
Level of Exam Malpractices in KCSE	Correlation Coefficient	.386**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0	.
	N	74	74

Source: Researcher 2026

The significance level (Sig. 2-tailed) of 0.000 gives a strong foundation to reject the hypothesis. These findings emphasize the importance of adequate syllabus coverage in promoting examination integrity.

This study's finding of a positive correlation between syllabus coverage and exam integrity in KCSE exams sheds light on the significance of curriculum completion in fostering academic honesty. The study aligns with the work of Xu and Xie (2013) who found that clear and well-defined curriculum structures can deter cheating. They argue that a well-covered syllabus provides a roadmap for learning, potentially reducing student confusion or the need to resort to external resources during exams. Students who feel confident in their understanding of the material covered in class are less likely to feel the pressure to cheat. While syllabus coverage is important, it's crucial to acknowledge the limitations of this study. A complete syllabus might not equate to deep understanding. Future research, similar to the work of Bain (2004), could explore how teaching approaches that prioritize student comprehension alongside syllabus completion can further strengthen exam integrity. Bain argues for a shift towards "what the matter is" teaching, focusing on helping students develop a deep understanding of the material rather than simply memorizing content for exams. This deeper

understanding can reduce the incentive to cheat, as students are better equipped to apply their knowledge to exam questions.

The interviews conducted with principals shed light on the significant role of syllabus coverage in influencing examination malpractice within schools. A majority of the principals (Seven out of the eleven) emphasized that the extent to which the syllabus is covered serves as a key driver for unethical behavior during examinations. This sentiment underscores the importance of curriculum management and instructional planning in shaping students' academic experiences and behaviors. One notable policy adopted by a majority of the schools, as highlighted in the interviews, was to complete the syllabus on time before the National examinations. This policy reflects a proactive approach aimed at addressing the challenges associated with rushed teaching and learning processes, which can contribute to stress, anxiety, and ultimately, unethical practices during examinations. One principal stated, *"Syllabus coverage is crucial in determining the integrity of examinations. When students feel pressured to complete the syllabus within a short timeframe, they may resort to cheating as a means of coping with the academic demands."* This highlights the direct correlation between syllabus coverage and the prevalence of exam malpractice, as perceived by educational leaders.

Furthermore, another principal remarked, *"Completing the syllabus well in advance of the National examinations allows students ample time to revise and consolidate their learning. This reduces the likelihood of resorting to unethical practices during exams due to time constraints or lack of preparedness."* This statement underscores the importance of adequate preparation and thorough understanding of the curriculum in promoting examination integrity. The policy of completing the syllabus ahead of schedule aligns with best practices in curriculum planning and instructional delivery, as it provides students with sufficient time to master the content and develop the skills necessary for success in examinations. By prioritizing syllabus coverage and adopting proactive measures to ensure comprehensive learning experiences, schools can mitigate the risk of exam malpractice and foster a culture of academic honesty and integrity among students. The insights gleaned by this study from the interviews with principals shows the critical role of syllabus coverage in addressing the root causes of examination malpractice and promoting ethical behavior within educational institutions. The causes of examination malpractices varied, with a notable factor being the excessive value placed on academic certificates. Other contributing factors include limited tertiary institution spaces for students seeking admission, parents' desire for their children on acquiring certificate, poor teaching method, lack of sound moral behavior, and lack of well-equipped library and laboratory (Abdulkareem et al. 2024). Home factors were found to have a significant positive influence on examination malpractice, students who perceived their parents as lenient were more likely to engage in examination malpractices (Adem et al. 2024)

CONCLUSION

According to Abdirahman, (2025) suggest that belief in fair competition reinforces the idea that success is based on merit, effort, and skills. This perception reduces the motivation to cheat, as students understand that their achievements should be based on their own work. Curriculum overload, characterized by attempts to cover an excessive amount of content within a limited timeframe, can lead to stress and anxiety among students. The findings highlight the complex interplay between syllabus coverage, time constraints, student well-being, and academic performance.

They underscore the importance of balanced curriculum planning and effective teaching methodologies to mitigate stress, promote ethical behavior, and ensure students' holistic development within the educational system. Addressing the underlying causes of syllabus pressure and creating a supportive and ethical learning environment, schools can reduce the likelihood of students engaging in unethical practices during examinations. Schools and institutions can reduce the risks associated with students possessing phones during exams and significantly reduce the risk of students getting answers through social media before and during exams by following school policy.

Other contributing factors include limited tertiary institution spaces for students seeking admission, parents' desire for their children on acquiring certificate, poor teaching method, lack of sound moral behavior, and lack of well-equipped library and laboratory (Abdulkareem et al. 2024).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Academic integrity and examination malpractices in secondary schools is crucial to ensuring fair assessments and maintaining academic standards. The following recommendations can help promote a culture of academic honesty and reduce examination malpractices:

- Promote teaching approaches that focus on mastery and understanding rather than rote memorization, reducing the temptation to engage in malpractices.
- Encourage positive relationships between teachers and students, characterized by trust and support for timely syllabus coverage.
- CCTV cameras to be mandatory in schools. Live images to be monitored from a central place while the students are doing KCSE inside the exam room.

Suggestions for Future Research

Impact of School Culture in Syllabus Coverage on Academic Integrity

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