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## The Perception and Reasons of Examination Malpractice among Students

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### **Abstract:**

*Examinations are good for assessment, selection and placement but it gets nutty students and officials to not play their role in turning out credible results. This study therefore, seeks the intuition behind people, especially, students for indulging in various forms of examination malpractices. The study was based on the deficit model of examination anxiety whilst two research questions were posed to guide the study. All second year undergraduate students of the University of Cape Coast were the target population. The study revealed that some of the perceptions students held about examination malpractices included “No matter how hard you read, if you don’t cheat you will fail” (83.96%) and “If I don’t cheat, those who do will have advantage over me” (95.28%). On reasons why students engage in examination malpractice, majority of them (91.51%) gave the reason “to maintain the trust and investment my parents have made in me” to be the causative agent for engaging in malpractice. Withdrawal, rustications and imprisonment of culprits were some of the recommendations put forward by policy makers.*

**Keywords:** Examination malpractice, anxiety, students, examinations, and university of cape coast

### **1. Introduction**

Examination is a procedure of assessing the amount of education/learning an individual has achieved over a period. Examinations are authentic means utilized to ascertain the degree to which learning targets have been inbred by students so that they can be offered some assistance in their further studies. The procedure takes place in many forms; through test, observation, interviews in laboratory/workshop practicals among others. Oluwatelure (2008) sees it as one important activity of the academic community which falls within the scope of the concept of curriculum.

There are set rules, code of conduct or ethics of the institution, government or the examination bodies that are expected to guide every examination. These notwithstanding, people find fair and foul means to pass examinations. These foul means are known as examination malpractices.

Kibler (1993) defines examination mal-practices as forms of cheating and plagiarism that involve students giving or receiving unauthorized assistance in an academic exercise or receiving credit for work that is not their own. Oluyeba and Daramola (1992) on their part made it known that examination malpractice include any irregular behaviour exhibited by a candidate or anybody charged with the conduct of examination before, during or after the examination which contravenes the rules and regulations governing the conduct of such examination. They added that such examination malpractice will include examination leakage, impersonation, cheating, collusion, swapping of scripts, smuggling of answer scripts in examination halls, result/certificate forgery, verbal/physical assault on examination administrators.

A critical study into the Ghanaian educational system reveals that the system is much focused on examinations. If a student fails an end of semester examination but can develop software application that makes life easy for us all, the university will dismiss him or her because he or she failed in exams. This means that students must pass exams by all available means. Students are committing things to memory just for the sake of exams. Paraphrasing lecture notes during exams to some extent are not acceptable to some lecturers they want it verbatim and just after the exams, everything goes off from the students’ memory. In the words of Dr Martin Luther King Jr ‘we have a high blood pressure of the theory but an anemia of practice’. In other words, their cognitive domain far out distances their psychomotor domain.

UCC “facebook” became known as a monster to students of the University of Cape Coast in the 2011/2012 academic year. Some students were expelled from the University for Poor Academic Performance; these students had their details, including their pictures posted on all notice boards.

The assorted violations in the management of examinations which constitute examination malpractice emanate from the fact that examination results and certificates have become the trump card for progression and success in life in terms of employment opportunities and scholarships. The over reliance of the paper evidential qualification has plunged students, parents, teachers and examination administrators into developing fraudulent means of meeting this criteria of employers. It is therefore not out of the blue to hear that the West African Examination Council has cancelled the results of students or caused the arrest of examiners and invigilators; or tertiary institutions withdrawing students for engaging in various forms of examination malpractices.

This study therefore seeks the intuition behind people, especially, students for indulging in various forms of examination malpractices.

### 1.1. Research Questions

- i. What is the general perception of students towards examination malpractices?
- ii. What are the leading reasons behind students engaging in Examination malpractices?

## 2. Theoretical Perspective

This study is based on the deficit model of examination anxiety which accounts for low academic performance of highly anxious students in terms of insufficient knowledge of the course material due to poor study habits and the met cognitive awareness of this lack of knowledge of subject matter during examinations. Thus, the thrust of the deficit theory is that poor academic performance is traceable to inadequate mastery of course material rather than interference in recalling material that has been thoroughly learned.

## 3. Methodology

The objective of the study was to find out the intuition behind people, especially, students who indulge in various forms of examination malpractices. The study therefore involved all second year undergraduate students of the University of Cape Coast.

A descriptive survey approach was used for the study. The population was the resident second year students of UCC, totaling one thousand eight hundred and seventy three. Following the Krecjie and Morgan (1970) table for determining sampling size, a sample of three hundred and eighteen (318) was derived.

A questionnaire was used to collect the data. Respondents had to give their opinions in relation to reasons why they will cheat in exams. The questionnaire was in three parts. The first part solicited information on respondents' demography while the second part dealt with research question one. The last part also dealt with the second research question. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics: frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations.

## 4. Results and Discussions

The results and discussions of the study are presented in terms of the research questions.

### 4.1. Question One

What is the perception of students towards examination malpractices?

Item	Sample	Agree		Disagree	
		f	%	F	%
I am only interested in cheating if it is a difficult examination	318	103	32.39	215	67.61
If I am opportune to see the question paper before the examination	318	154	48.43	164	51.57
If I am told to buy the examination question paper before the examination I will surely be interested	318	204	64.15	114	35.85
I cheat in examination due to lack of confidence in myself	318	179	56.29	139	43.71
I don't have enough time to read for examination hence the interest in cheating	318	56	17.61	262	82.39
Cheating in examination makes me feel guilty	318	243	76.42	75	23.58
I will not feel guilty to cheat in the examination if the teacher fails to teach well	318	186	58.49	132	41.51
Cheating is not necessary if one has read well before the examination	318	293	92.14	25	7.86
No matter how hard you read, if you don't cheat you will fail	318	267	83.96	51	16.04
Some teachers encourage cheating during the examination	318	34	10.69	284	89.31
I cheat because my friends cheat in examination	318	159	50	159	50
Cheating is encouraging since many people who cheat often escape punishment	318	142	44.65	176	55.35
Cheating pays in competitive examination in order to please parents and friends	318	206	64.78	112	35.22
Only people that cheat have high scores in internal and external examinations	318	221	69.50	97	30.50
You cannot pass examination these days in Ghana without a little cheating	318	134	42.14	184	57.86
Cheating is very common in any examination these day	318	273	85.85	45	14.15
It is difficult to stop cheating in examinations in our schools	318	149	46.86	169	53.14
Cheating is alright for difficult examinations with large failure rate	318	238	74.84	80	25.16
If I don't cheat, those who do will have advantage over me	318	303	95.28	15	4.72
Cheating is the only way out if much work done over a long period of time will be examined once	318	222	69.81	96	30.19
Cheating is helpful for people who are very nervous about examination	318	210	66.04	108	33.96

Table 1: Students' perception of examination malpractice

The study revealed that majority of the respondents (83.96%) indicated that “No matter how hard you read, if you don’t cheat you will fail”. 95.28% of the respondents also held the perception that “If I don’t cheat, those who do will have advantage over me.” Another good number of them 85.85% were of the opinion that “Cheating is very common in any examination these days.” Again “Cheating is alright for difficult examinations with large failure rate” was the perception held by many of the respondents (78.84%).

#### 4.2. Question Two

What are the leading reasons behind students’ engagement in Examination malpractices?

Reason	Sample	F	%
To maintain the trust and investment my parents have made in me	318	291	91.51
To become competitive in the uncompromising job markets	318	283	88.99
To avoid UCC “facebook”	318	205	64.47
Because I don’t know how I will handle failure	318	163	51.26

Table 2: Reasons why students cheat in Examinations

The students were asked to give three key reasons why they will cheat in examinations in the university. A whopping 91.51% gave the reason “to maintain the trust and investment my parents have made in me” to be the causative agent for engaging in malpractice. Another 88.99% did not mince words by indicating that they cheat so as to become competitive in the almost non-existent job markets. 64.47% of the respondents also indicated that they cheat to avoid been added to the “UCC facebook” while 51.26% indicated that they cheat because they do not know how they will handle failure.

Mui-Kim (2009) on ‘educational malpractice: legal cases and educators’ views’ made it known that cases in the U.S. and the U.K. have shown that courts are willing to extend the tort of negligence to find school authorities liable for intellectual harm due to identifiable mistakes. He, however, added that students engage in examination malpractice by and large for survival.

Azuka and Oyaziwo (2006) found that parents, teachers and school principals were guilty of encouraging cheating in examinations in Benin State in Nigeria. They stressed that majority of the students had a wrong notion about examination ethics; believing that examination ethics entail among others sitting next to someone in order to copy from his/her paper in the examination hall. To this end, it is inferred that students held the perception that cheating in examinations is not bad since they are even aided by the parents and teachers.

Ossai (2011) on examination anxiety as a predictor of students’ attitude towards examination malpractices found that students engaged in various forms of examination malpractices as a result of high examination anxiety. These students become anxious for a myriad of reasons. Key among them is thinking of the many adversaries of life to the neglect of the studies were more predisposed towards cheating in examinations. They therefore find a way to compensate the investments their parents have made by presenting them with excellent results through malpractices.

On reasons why students cheat, majority of the respondents 291 (91.51%) indicated that they cheat in order to maintain the trust and investments their parents have made in them. Oluwatelure, (2004) on psychological strategies for combating examination malpractices found that some students cheat to ensure that the resources their parents have committed to their education do not go down the drains.

Another reason given by the respondents for cheating in examinations was to become competitive in the uncompromising job markets. 283 respondents representing 88.99% indicated this for their top most reason. Unemployment figures in Africa and Ghana in particular is frightening. A World Bank Report in 2013 indicated that the unemployment rate in Ghana is 67%. Again, there has been a ban on public sector recruitment since 2011. Institutions can only employ to replace those going on retirement. This means that there are very few job opportunities for people to compete for. Students in order to put themselves in better stead for these few jobs will not hesitate to cheat in examination if that is what it takes to get employment

Two Hundred and five (205) (64.47%) respondents also indicated that they cheat because they wanted to avoid UCC “facebook.” In other words, they wanted to avoid having their names, pictures and other details posted on the University’s notice boards for poor-academic performance.

Others, 163 (51.26%) indicated that they did not know how they will handle failure hence, they will cheat in examinations to avoid failure. Of all the reasons given, this was what the researchers found most worrying. This so because if students will cheat just because they do not know how to deal with fear of failure, then our institutions are not functioning as they should. The universities have guidance, counselling and placement centers. As if that is not enough, students have hall and academic counsellors and if more than 50% of the respondents still do not know how to deal with fear, then that is quite worrying and the earlier these issues are dealt with, the better.

#### 5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Established from the findings of this study, it is concluded that examination malpractice is still with us as most respondents affirmed they had cheated before and when given another opportunity, they will cheat again. The aftermaths of this canker are not far-fetched; they are Machiavellian, gruesome and sinister and often times repelling. It is in the light of this that the following recommendations have been professed by the researchers.

Stiffer punishments should be prescribed for students as well as invigilators who assist students cheat in examinations. Withdrawal and rustications should not be the only stiffer forms of punishment but however, policy makers should be looking at making legislations that could prosecute offenders or people who cheat in examinations.

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