



# Factors Influencing Examination Cheating Among Secondary School Students: A Case of Masaba South District of Kisii County, Kenya

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## ABSTRACT

Cases of examination cheating have been reported in Masaba South District and its environs over the years. This study purposed to establish the reasons why students cheat in secondary school examinations in Masaba South District of Kisii County. The study sought to determine whether competition, poor preparation, poor invigilation, inadequate facilities, ineffective teaching and anxiety had any influence on student cheating in secondary school examinations. The study too investigated the methods used by students to cheat in school examinations and how the vice could be curbed. The research adopted an explanatory approach of descriptive survey research design. The sample size consisted of 449 students, and head teachers from 6 purposively selected schools of Masaba South District. The Head teachers' and students' questionnaires were used to collect data in the study. The items in the questionnaires were tested for content validity and reliability by means of a pilot study in one of the schools that was not included in the sample. The data was analyzed using statistical package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The results of the study revealed that the major factors influencing examination cheating include: examination anxiety, lack of facilities, stiff competition, poor preparations, and inadequate invigilation of the examinations. The study recommended that there is need for thorough guidance and counselling and adequate preparation of students for examinations.

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## 1. Introduction

School examinations are a tool for measuring learners' mastery of content and instructors' effectiveness in delivering the content at different levels of schooling all over the world. According to Onger (2009) examinations are also used for placing students in various institutions and jobs and provide feedback in the teaching and learning processes and curriculum delivery in general. In Kenya, examinations are conducted from nursery schools, through primary schools, secondary schools, tertiary colleges and universities. Students are expected to be honest when taking examinations but research has shown that some students cheat in examinations (Mitukaa, 2001).

Cheating in examinations is a worldwide phenomenon. According to Anderman (2000) about 80% of high achieving high school students and 75% of college students admit having cheated, a percentage that has been rising over the past 50 years. Nearly 21% of students who say cheating is bad still engage in the behavior (kiogotho, 2009). Cheating in school examinations is on the increase among students in secondary schools and colleges in Kenya. According to Siringi (2009), over 60% of the students in colleges and universities in Kenya admitted having cheated in examinations. Cases of cheating in national examinations in Kisii County have been reported over the years. In the year 2001 for example 1.5% of students who sat for KCSE examination were reported to have cheated in the examinations (Khaemba, 2008). In the year 2008 KCSE examinations Masaba District had 0.56% cases of cheating second to Migori District which had 0.79% while most districts in Nyanza had no cases of cheating (Republic of Kenya, 2008). In spite of the tough measures meted out on examination cheats

which include cancellation of results and suspension from sitting for the examinations again, examination cheating seems to persist not only in the current study area but also in many parts of Kenya, and hence the essence of this study.

### 1.1 Statement of the Problem

Examination dishonestly, also popularly known as cheating is a vice that has bedeviled the Kenyan education system for many years. This malpractice not only occurs in primary, but also secondary school examinations. Tertiary colleges and universities are not spared either. Cases of examination cheating have been reported in many schools in Kenya in general and in a number of schools in Kisii County in particular. The Kenya National Examinations Council has also taken stern measures in dealing with the vice which includes cancellation of examination results and suspension of examination cheats from sitting for the examinations for a period of two years. The question that arises is why this practice is still rampant in spite of the tough measures taken to deal with examination cheats. Further, it was important in this study to establish the methods that are used in cheating and what can be done to eliminate this vice in order to restore the integrity of examinations in Kenya's education sector.

### 1.2 Research Questions

- What are the factors influencing school examination cheating among secondary school students in Masaba South District?
- Which methods are used to cheat in secondary school examinations in Masaba South District?
- What intervention measures have been instituted to deal with examination cheating among secondary school students in Masaba South District?

### 1.3 Purpose of the Study

This study aimed at assessing the various factors that contribute to examination cheating among secondary school students in Masaba South District of Kisii County. The study also looked at the different methods that are used to perpetuate this vice, with a view to coming up with recommendations on how this vice could be eliminated not only in the study locale but also in the entire education system.

### 1.4 Significance of the Study

School examinations play a crucial role not only in a county's education system but also in the overall development of any society. This is because the advancement of any society directly depends on the quality of its manpower which is produced from the education system. The quality of training of any society's manpower is measured by its school examinations. Thus the integrity of any county's examinations should be jealously safeguarded in order to accurately gauge the standard of training produced by its education system. A study intended to establish the causes of cheating in examinations with a view to recommending measures to rid society of this vice is therefore significant, hence the need for this study.

The results from this study may serve to shed light on the underlying causes of examination cheating. The methods used to cheat have also been determined and ways of avoiding examination cheating recommended. The results may also be useful to teachers in making them aware of the amount of preparation they have to subject students to in order for them to avoid cheating in examinations. Teacher counsellors may also utilize the results of the study to understand the part they should play in preparing students for examinations by counselling them on study skills and instilling a sense of confidence and self-esteem in them in order to reduce anxiety during exams. The Kenya National Examinations Council may also utilize the results of the study in ensuring that the loopholes in examination administration are sealed so as to minimize chances of examination cheating. The Ministry of Education should also utilize the results of the study in coming up with policies to improve the quality of teaching and early syllabus coverage to ensure that students are adequately prepared so as to reduce the temptations of cheating in exams. In the end the integrity of the examinations will be safeguarded and the products of the education system held in high esteem, who will in turn be charged with the responsibility of holding key positions and contribute to the development of society.

### 2.0 Methodology

Two likert type scale questionnaires were designed by the researcher to obtain data for the study. The questionnaires were used to collect data from a sample of 449 students and 6 head teachers. These questionnaires were: i) Secondary school Head teachers' Questionnaire (SSHTQ); and ii) Secondary school students' Questionnaires (SSSQ). The secondary school Head Teachers Questionnaire (SSHTQ) consisted of twelve items requesting information about the extent of cheating in the schools, causes of cheating, methods of cheating and intervention measures put in place to deal with the vice. The secondary school students' Questionnaires consisted of seven items divided into two sections: Section a) Collected demographic data of students, while section b) collected data on causes, methods and mitigation measures on students' cheating in examinations.

Both construct and face validity was established through discussions with experts. The reliability of 0.69 was established

for the instrument for head teachers (SSHTQ) using the Cronbach Alpha internal consistency reliability test. The Secondary School Students' Questionnaire (SSSQ) yielded an alpha coefficient reliability of 0.80. The study utilized descriptive and inferential statistics to analyze the data. Some of the data obtained was nominal and the chi-square test was used for analysis. The chi square test was performed at a significance level of 5%.

### 3.0 Results of the Study

Data obtained from the questionnaires were systematically analyzed and presented as follows:

#### Research Question 1

What are the factors influencing school examination cheating among secondary school students in Masaba Central District?

Table 1 indicates that poor preparation for examinations (32%) was the main cause of examination cheating. This result is similar to one by one by Jekayinta (2006) in Nigeria which found that when syllabus coverage is poor students are tempted to cheat. Studies in Pakistan by Saraj (2006) also established that inadequate preparation was a major cause of examination cheating among students in schools. From the study, it was found that secondary school students in Masaba District are not adequately prepared for examinations. Students were found to spend more time doing non-academic tasks like tilling land and domestic chores than studying. It was also established that many students do not take their studies seriously and quite a number of them absent themselves from school which means that the syllabuses would not be covered adequately. This state of affairs led to greater temptations to cheat in examinations.

The second cause of cheating was pressure to produce good grades (21.6%) because students have to pass before they can proceed to the next level of schooling. Similar studies by Jacobs (1999) in the USA found that middle level scholars cheat when there are high stakes in examinations. The study established that students face a lot of pressure to pass from parents, teachers, peers and society in general. This pressure forces a number of them to cheat so as to be seen to be working hard. Parents want their children to score high marks and join prestigious schools. Teachers want excellence in their subjects so as to get as many awards as possible during prize giving. Society expects a student to do well regardless of the methods they employ.

The third cause of cheating was found to be stiff competition for better grades (13.81%) which will enable one to be admitted to the next level of schooling. A study by Njeru (2008) in Thika District also found stiff competition to be the main cause of cheating. Studies by Ravi (2000) also supported stiff competition as a cause of examination cheating. It was established that in Masaba District, students compete to get high marks in order to join the next class because failure to score good marks will lead to repetition of classes. This in turn leads to cheating in examinations.

Poor invigilation of examinations (9.58%) was also found to be a leading factor in examination cheating. A study by Njeru (2008) in Thika District found that teachers do not invigilate examinations well but rather spend time marking papers, or reading newspapers or novels. This provides a fertile ground for students to cheat. The study established that there was poor invigilation of examinations in Masaba District schools as some teachers invigilate from outside examination rooms while others sleep in class during the examination period. This gives students the freedom to cheat in the examinations.

**Table 1: Factors Contributing to Cheating in Examinations**

Variables	Form Two				Form Three				Total	
	Males		Females		Males		Females		Freq.	%
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%		
Inadequate preparation	30	6.68	40	8.91	34	7.57	41	27.39	145	32.29
Performance pressure	25	5.57	20	4.46	25	5.57	25	5.57	95	21.16
Stiff Competition	14	3.12	10	2.23	20	4.46	18	2.03	62	13.81
Poor Invigilation	10	2.23	10	2.23	12	2.67	11	2.45	43	9.58
Lack of facilities	10	2.23	9	2.00	10	2.23	10	2.23	39	8.69
Anxiety	5	1.11	10	2.23	7	1.56	12	1.56	34	7.57
No response	7	1.56	8	1.78	9	2.00	7	2.00	31	6.90
Total	101	23.17	107	24.29	117	27.39	124	27.39	449	100

**Table 2: Methods used by Students to Cheat in School Examinations**

Variables Age levels	Forgery		Impersonation		Collusion		Smuggling		No response		Total	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
≤15	12	2.73	6	1.34	31	6.90	38	8.46	13	2.9	100	19.38
16	15	3.34	12	2.67	30	6.68	46	10.24	13	2.9	116	22.94
17	5	1.11	3	0.67	12	2.67	26	5.79	13	2.9	59	10.24
18	6	1.34	1	0.22	6	1.34	16	3.56	13	2.9	42	6.46
19	2	0.45	5	1.11	30	6.68	55	12.1	100	22.27	192	20.49
20+	6	1.34	2	0.45	12	2.67	14	3.12	12	2.67	47	7.57
TOTAL	46	10.24	29	0.46	93	20.71	145	32.29	136	30.29	449	100
Form 2	2	0.45	5	1.11	30	6.68	55	12.1	100	22.27	192	20.49
Form 3	1	0.22	10	2.23	49	10.91	60	13.26	137	30.51	257	26.73
TOTAL	3	0.67	15	3.34	79	17.59	115	26.61	227	2.78	449	100
Boys	27	6.01	18	4.01	32	7.13	79	17.6	65	14.48	221	49.22
Girls	19	4.23	11	2.45	61	13.59	71	15.8	66	14.7	228	50.78
TOTAL	46	10	29	6.46	93	20.71	150	33.41	131	29.18	449	100

**Table 3: Measures Instituted by Head Teachers to Deal with Examination Cheating**

Variable	Freq.	%
<u>Punishment</u>	5	83.3
Cancellation of Examination results		
Suspension of cheating students	2	33.3
<u>Educational Counselling</u>	2	33.3
Teaching examination taking skills		
Counselling	2	33.3
Imparting reading culture	2	33.3
Boosting students' self confidence	2	33.3
Campaign against cheating in examinations	2	33.3
Encouraging students to work hard	2	33.3

The fifth cause of examination cheating was found to be lack of facilities (8.69%). These findings concur with Kisilu's (2000) study which found that in schools where physical facilities were few, students cheated in examinations. The study attributed the lack of facilities to haphazard establishment of clan based schools in Masaba South District. Some schools were found to have neither library nor laboratory. This means that students do not have enough books and adequate exposure to science practicals, hence ill-preparedness for examinations and therefore increase in the tendency to cheat in examinations.

Anxiety, (7.5%) was also found to be a factor that contributes to examination cheating. This concurs with Kinai's (2010) findings which established that students have a phobia towards examinations in Masaba South District. They lack confidence when tackling examinations and some resort to cheating. Some of them suffer from inferiority complex and do not feel adequately prepared to handle examinations and therefore resort to cheating in the examinations.

### Research Question 2

Which methods are used to cheat in secondary school examinations in Masaba South District?

From this table, it is evident that smuggling foreign materials into examination rooms is the most commonly used method (33.4%) to cheat in examinations. The table also shows that form three students were found to cheat more (13.6%) by smuggling foreign materials to examination rooms than form two (12.1%). The 16 year old students cheated most by smuggling at 10.24% while least were the 19 year olds at 1.11%. It is also clear from the table that boys (17.6%) cheat more by smuggling items to examination rooms compared to girls (15.8%). These findings concur with Udomwitayakra's (2009) studies in Thailand which found that students carried scribbled notes into the examination room. In Masaba South District students prefer to carry foreign materials to examination rooms rather than copy from their neighbours whose work they doubted.

The second method of cheating in examinations was collusion (19%). Girls (13.5%) were found to cheat by collusion more than boys (7.13%). Form three students (10.91%) cheated more by collusion than form two (6.68%) students. These findings are similar to Jacob's (1998) in a poll of 3,123 high achieving 16-18 year olds which established that 67% copied from others' work. Studies by Ivor (2008) in Nigeria also found out that collusion was a common method of cheating in examinations just like secondary school students in Masaba South District, where it was established that collusion was a major method of cheating owing to congested rooms, poor invigilation and general unpreparedness. Cheating by collusion was more among girls than boys probably because girls have a lot of domestic chores to carry out at home and therefore less time to study.

The third method of cheating was forgery at 10.25%. It was found that boys (6.01%) forge documents more than girls (4.23%). It was also found that the 15 and 16 year olds cheat more by forging examination documents at 2.73% and 3.34% respectively. The study established that some students forge marks and report cards and make alterations on report cards and show them to their parents. Forging of examination documents is also a common phenomenon in Tanzania as established in a study by Kiogotho (2005). The last method of cheating was impersonation (6.46%). From table 2 it is evident that 16 year old (2.67%) students cheat more by impersonation than students

of other age groups. It was also established that boys (4.01%) cheat more by impersonation than girls 2.45%. This compares to studies conducted by Ivor (2007) in West Africa which found that impersonation in examinations was very rampant among high school students in that region.

### Research Question 3

What interventional measures have been instituted to deal with examination cheating among secondary students in Masaba South District?

The study sought to establish the methods put in place to curb cheating in secondary examinations and the findings are recorded in table 3. From table 3, it is clear that the methods instituted to deal with cheating can be divided into; a) punishment and; b) educational guidance. On punishment, cancellation of examinations was leading at 83.3%. Similar studies by Zachariah (2009) in the United Kingdom, China and Tanzania found out that the leading method of discouraging cheating in examinations was by cancelling examination results. The study established that when a student is caught cheating, teachers confiscate question papers and others give the student a 'Y' grade. This means that the student is not graded and cannot proceed to the next stage. Suspension of cheating students (33.3%) was another form of punishment used to discourage students from cheating in examinations. In Masaba South district a student is sent home for a week or two and on reporting must be accompanied by a parent or guardian. On reporting the parent is informed of the nature of cheating and some punishment is given which is normally caning and sitting for another examination. These measures are similar to those applied in India as established by a study conducted by Ujjwaladevi (2009).

Another measure under educational guidance that was found in curbing examination cheating was teaching examination taking skills (33.3%). In Masaba District students are taught how to read and revise thoroughly for examinations. Sometimes national examiners are invited to give examination tips to students. This helps to lower examination anxiety and instill a sense of confidence in them. The study also established that counselling (33.3%) was used as a measure to deal with examination cheating. A study by Tumuti (2004) also found counselling to be a useful method of curbing cheating. In Masaba South District students are counselled on how to avoid wasting time by indulging in activities that divert their attention from their studies. Instead, they are encouraged to concentrate on their studies in order to avoid the temptation of cheating in examinations.

A third method of curbing cheating under educational counselling is imparting a reading culture (33.3) among students. Griggs (2000) found that cheating can be reduced by creating a culture of reading and learning in the classroom. Students are trained to work on mathematical exercises daily in the mornings so as to develop their confidence in it. They are also given story books to read. Boosting of students confidence (33.3%) was another method employed to deal with exam cheating. In Masaba South District, teachers talk to students, encourage them and give them hope. They also reinforce their efforts whenever they make attempts in completing assignments in time. This enhances their self-confidence and can therefore avoid cheating in examinations.

The fifth method of curbing cheating under educational guidance is campaigning against cheating (33.3%). Studies by Mutie & Ndambuki (1999) found that campaign against cheating

can go a long way in curbing examination cheating. In Masaba South District, students are warned at assemblies on the consequences of cheating in examinations. Also at chapel services the preachers emphasize on the need for honesty as a moral principle.

The sixth method used to discourage cheating under educational guidance was encouraging students to work hard (33.35). Studies in Nigeria by Jekayinfa (2006) found that exam cheating can be reduced by encouraging students to work hard and by giving them positive remarks for their efforts. In Masaba South District, students who work hard and pass are rewarded with items such as books, pens, and clothes; and at other times they are given financial rewards. This will make them work hard and avoid cheating in examinations.

#### Summary of Results

The findings of this study indicated that a number of factors are responsible for examination cheating among secondary school students in Masaba South District. The findings also show that several methods are employed by students to cheat in examinations. It is also clear from the study that a number of measures have been put in place to curb the vice. The results of this study indicate that examination cheating is caused by a number of factors. These include poor preparations for examinations which include poor syllabus coverage, inadequate study skills and lack of sufficient examination taking techniques. It was also established that students in Masaba South District do not take their studies seriously and there are several cases of absenteeism, which means that the syllabus would not be covered adequately and hence ill-preparedness and an increase in the temptation to cheat in examinations.

Cheating was found to be caused by pressure from parents, teachers, peers and society in general to produce good grades in examination. Parents want their children to score high marks and join prestigious schools, teachers want performance in their subjects to be good, and society expects good performance from the students in school. This pressure results to a tendency to cheat in order to meet the expectations of the interested groups.

Poor invigilation of examinations by teachers and the generally congested examination rooms also lead to an increased tendency to cheating in examinations. Besides, it was found that many schools in Masaba South District lacked facilities for learning such as books and laboratories which led to a state of ill preparedness on the part of students and hence the tendency to cheat in examinations. It was also established that students have examination phobia and this coupled with the stigma associated with failure in examinations also contributed to examination cheating.

The study established that students in Masaba District employed a number of methods to cheat in school examinations. The first method involved smuggling foreign materials into examination rooms. These included textbooks, note books and notes written on small pieces of paper. The second method was collusion in which students copied from each other. Forgery was also a common method of cheating whereby students forged report forms and even changed marks on some subjects in report forms. Impersonation was also found to be common as a method of cheating among students. This involved cases of one student sitting examinations for another student. A number of measures were found to have been put in place to curb the vice. Behaviour modification is one of those measures where students are encouraged to strengthen their ego, build their self-esteem and boost their self confidence. They were also encouraged to obey

examination regulations because cheating in examination would lead to cancellation of examination results. Teachers were also encouraged to complete the syllabus in time and coach students on examination taking skills.

#### 4.0 Conclusions

Based on the findings of this study that have been discussed in the foregoing sections, the following conclusions have been drawn.

- ❖ School examination cheating is a reality in secondary schools in Masaba South District.
- ❖ More girls than boys cheat in examinations
- ❖ Examination cheating is higher among the younger students of 15 and 16 than among older students of above the age of 16.
- ❖ Students, teachers, school administrations and society in general all contribute in varying degrees to examination cheating.
- ❖ A variety of methods are used by students to cheat in examinations and they are becoming more and more innovative in the use of different methods to cheat.
- ❖ A number of intervention measures have been put in place to curb cheating but the vice is still rampant among secondary school students.

#### 5.0 Recommendations

For school examination cheating to be considerably reduced or wiped out all together, it requires concerted efforts from all stakeholders in the education sector. It is in the light of this that the researcher makes the following recommendations.

- ❖ Teachers should prepare students thoroughly before examinations and learners should prepare themselves well before examinations
- ❖ The society should not put a lot of pressure on students to perform beyond their abilities.
- ❖ Required facilities for learning should be provided adequately in the schools to prepare students for examinations.
- ❖ Teachers should give students educational guidance in examination taking skills so as to boost their self confidence.
- ❖ Examination invigilation should be done professionally to ensure that foreign materials are not smuggled into examination rooms. Besides teachers should be keen in examination rooms to minimize cases of students copying from each other.
- ❖ Teachers should encourage co-operation among students so as to minimize competition which encourages cheating.

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