

# Perceived Factors Influencing Examination Malpractices in BECE among Pupils in Asante Akim North District

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**Abstract:-** The purpose of this study was to examine the perceived factors influencing examination malpractices in BECE among pupils in Asante Akim North district, specifically considered school ranking and non-completion of syllabus contents as factors. A descriptive survey design was used for the study. The study was carried out among JHS teachers. The target population was 200 teachers from 25 JHSs. However, 132 teachers were sampled using proportionate stratified sampling. The instrument used for the study was questionnaire with  $r$ -index = .90. Data were analyzed with means and standard deviations. The findings of the study revealed that, majority of teachers in the district perceived that school ranking and non-completion of syllabus contents influence pupils' involvement in examination malpractices in BECE. However, teachers are vexed about what the study describes as dire phenomenon thus examination malpractices vis-à-vis disagreeing with the statement that, "pupils cheat in examinations because they have not being taught the content(s) being assessed". It was recommended that, school ranking should be halted and reviewed to avert its dreadful limitation like examination malpractices. Schools, teachers and pupils should be oriented to embrace attainment of learning objectives since education structure is based on the maxim: *Non Scholae, Sed Vitae*. Finally, teachers and pupils should adhere to principles and practices of "Assessment for Learning: AfL" and "Assessment as Learning: AaL" to strengthen teaching and learning and make pupils fully prepared for BECE.

**Keywords:-** BECE, Examination Malpractice, School Ranking, Syllabus Contents, Cheating.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The quality education given to our young one prepare them well to fit into the society since educational goals and structures are driven by the needs, aims, and aspirations of its society (Anane & Asamoah-Gyimah, 2014). They emphasize the need to ensure and attain learning objectives in the course of educating students since learning outcomes are fully attained after realizing the construct validity of one's educational success which is marked by grades. Examination is therefore one of the procedure to measure one's educational success which is marked by grades. In context, examination is the assessment of the examinee's

performance or behaviour with the use of series of questions, problems, tasks or situations in order to ascertain the amount or level or nature of knowledge, skills, attitudes or other behaviours that the individual has acquired, the extent to which he/she is able to utilize them or their quality and effectiveness (Azuru, 2009). He asserted that, it could be oral or written and that, examination serves a number of purposes including grading, certification, selection, placement etc. Hence any action that destabilizes examination poses a great menace to compromise the validity and reliability of its results.

However, one of the current hitches affecting the education system is examination malpractice. It is a worldwide occurrence reported in Japan, Pakistan, Great Britain, Kenya, South Africa and Nigeria. Globally, poor and declining academic performance of students in schools owing to examination malpractices has become so alarming that the achievement of the set goals of teaching in school for sustainable development is endangered (Bello & Oke, 2011). Evers & Walberg (2003) asserted that examination malpractice is one of the common social ills threatening the educational sector at all levels and the fact that it is found among the primary school pupils is even more worrisome. Azuru (2009), examination malpractice is any illegal act by the examinee before, during or after examination with the intention of making the examinee to have undue advantage or an unjust grade. Similarly, the WAEC (2003) defines examination malpractice as any irregular behaviour exhibited by candidates or anybody charged with the responsibility of conducting examination in or outside the examination hall, before, during or after such examination.

In Ghana, the situation on examination malpractice is obvious, Chief Examiner's Report (2019) cited that, following the conclusion of investigations into cases of examination malpractice detected during the conduct of the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE): 173 candidates had their subject results cancelled for bringing foreign material into the examination hall; 19 candidates had their entire results cancelled for bringing mobile phones into the examination hall; and 2,497 subject results was withheld pending the conclusion of investigations into alleged examination malpractice. In 2009, the outbreak of examination malpractices in the country was described by the third president of the fourth republic of Ghana, the late Prof. J. E. A. Mills, as an upsetting development in the

landscape of Ghana and fascinated civil society, the church and parents to aid in instilling desirable decent and wholesome attitudes in students (Ghana News Agency, 2009). In conclusion, it is therefore imperative for stakeholders in education to make a conscious effort towards curbing the horrible situation since its consequences are serious. Hang'andu (2005) as cited in Phiri & Nakamba (2015) suggested that, the consequences are not only dire for the education system but also for students, teachers, parents, and nation as a whole.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### ➤ *The concepts of examination malpractices*

Examination has two main distinct concepts: to achieve the purpose for which it is designed and to be a reliable consistent means of measurement (Wilayat 2009). When however, examination malpractice occurs, then the validity and resulting outcome is questionable. Examination malpractice is commonly defined as a deliberate wrong doing contrary to official examination rules designed to place a candidate at an unfair advantage or disadvantage (Wilayat 2009:2). Fasasi (2006) also added that, examination malpractice may be understood as “a misconduct or improper practice, before, during or after any examination by examinees or others with a view to obtaining good results by fraudulent means”. From these two definitions, it can be concluded that examination malpractice is an unethical act because it encourages mediocrity in that students who succeed through such unorthodox methods may be rated equal to those who struggle on their own to excel. Examination malpractice has been defined and described variously by many authorities in the field of education. Jega (2006) asserted that, examination malpractice as any form of misbehaviour that leads to the alteration of or a tampering with the prescribed ways of conducting examination in any given system. Similarly, Joshua (2008) agrees that examination malpractice is any unauthorized or unapproved action, inaction, activity, behaviour or practice that is associated with the preparation, conduct and process of examination and other forms of assessment and carried out by any person involved in preparing for, giving, taking and processing that examination at any level.

### ➤ *School ranking and examination malpractices*

According to Anderman & Midgley (2000) ranking individual pupils and schools creates fierce competition which sometimes leads to departure from teaching to preparation for passing examinations and cheating. According to Nyamwange, Ondima & Onderi (2013) pointed out that, the issue of examination malpractices is a continuous recurrence issue in the educational discourse. This menace has led to most of the stakeholders to be at a loss as to the right way to precede that will generate useful results on the matter. It has been observed that 9 out of every 10 pupils indulge in one form of examination malpractices or another. Aullo (2004) states that the situation becomes more worrisome when we notice parents, guardians and teachers who should be custodians of moral code of conduct abetting and aiding their pupils in

this terrible and shameful practice to ensure that they shine in final examination results. Kinuthia (2009) states that ranking of schools and pupils in national examinations encourage positive competition. However, the extent to which this affects society and schools in particular has been evidenced by the anxiety of the stakeholders during release of BECE, when the names of best schools have graced the print and electronic media.

### ➤ *Non-completion of syllabus content and examination malpractices in schools*

Society where emphasis is placed on individual success, parents see nothing wrong in assisting their children to perpetuate the act of cheating as long as they succeed in the examination (Noona, Walker & Kutsyuruba, 2008). Examination malpractices are therefore induced by grading pressure at least as much as that of individual character failure (Newberger, 2003). Berliner (2008) affirmed that the pressure to score well on a single test is so intense that it leads to nefarious practices such as cheating on the test. This is because most of them are forced to repeat or expelled from the school due to their unimpressive performance in internal tests. Time of syllabus coverage like, very early, fairly early, late and very late might influence exam malpractices. For instance schools with adequate facilities such as text books and other instructional materials stand a better chance of completing the syllabus very early or fairly early than others. This means enough revision for exams makes them stand a better chance of having better results than poorly equipped ones (Kombo, 1988).

### ➤ *Problem statement*

The occurrence of examination malpractices at any level of educational section poses the paramount threat to the validity and reliability of any examination and therefore to the authenticity and recognition of certificates issued (Abuga, 2014). According to Nyamwange, Ondima & Onderi (2013) examination malpractices, popularly known as cheating is a vice that has bedeviled the education system in nations for many years. In Ghana, the media has been highlighting impersonation and leakage of examination questions as being a recurring act generally associated with the West African Examination Council (WAEC), which is the examining body for basic, senior high and technical school education in the country. The evidence points to involvement between students, parents and school authorities being perpetrators of malpractices. Many students have their results either cancelled or withheld until investigations are carried out by the examining body as cited in Chief Examiners' Report (2019). On the part of the students, the fear of failure or scoring poor grades drives them to engage in examination cheating (Phiri & Nakamba, 2015). More so, through my personal experience I have witness many negative effects of examination malpractice. A boy with grade 12 in the 2012 BECE opted out from PRESEC-Bompata in a sister district confessing he never merit the grade he obtained. Is against this backdrop that I conducted this study explore the perceived factors influencing examination malpractices.

➤ *Purpose and research questions*

The purpose of the study was to examine the perceived factors influencing examination malpractices in BECE among pupils in Asante Akim North district. Specifically, the study was guided by the following research questions:

1. To what extent does School ranking influence pupils' involvement in examination malpractices in BECE?
2. What is the influence of non-completion of syllabus contents on pupils' involvement in examination malpractices in BECE?

➤ *Significance of the study*

Policy makers would be aware of these various attitudes of the stakeholders so that they can come out with effective and efficient policies and strategies to curb the menace of examination malpractices. The findings in this study would shed light on how attitude influences stakeholders' intentions to cheat and cheating behaviour in an examination which is obviously dire. Third, the findings in the study would help examination bodies such as WAEC to know the capacity of teachers to involve during invigilation.

The results may also be useful to teachers in making them aware of the level of preparation they have to subject students to in order for them to avoid cheating in examinations. The implementation of this finding would not only expose the extent to which students are involved in examination malpractice but would also suggest some remedies or lasting solutions to this academic dishonesty. This study may be expected to help school administrators, teachers and guidance counselors to curb or control cheating behaviour in schools.

### III. METHODS

➤ *Design*

The design used for the study was descriptive survey. The descriptive survey design was preferred because it describes and interprets what exists at present as a normal situation (Creswell, 2007).

➤ *Target population and sampling*

Target population for the study was 200 teachers estimated from 25 JHSs in the district from Owerriman and Agogo circuits. However, for the purpose of convenience and also to ensure a more detailed study of the elements involved, I used a sample size of 132 teachers from the

target population of 200 using Krejcie & Morgan (1970)'s sample size determination table. The study sample was selected from the population using proportionate stratified sampling.

➤ *Instrumentation*

A self-developed questionnaire was constructed from expert judge perspective. The questionnaire was made up of two sections soliciting demographic data and data in line with the two themes. It was also made up of close ended items on a four-point Likert type of scale ranging from strongly agree-4, agree-3, disagree-2, and strongly disagree-1. A pre-test was done to further refine the items using 10 teachers other than the respondents but of similar characteristics. An appropriate reliability index of .90 was obtained after cronbach alpha was computed.

➤ *Data collection procedure*

I did the administration of questionnaire together with four trained research assistants. Formal permission was secured from appropriate authorities prior to the data collection exercise. Respondents were also given the assurance of confidentiality and anonymity as well as the right to opt out of the study if they so wished. 160 questionnaires were administered since 21% attrition was considered.

➤ *Data processing and analysis procedure*

The data to answer the research questions were analyzed using descriptive statistics, specifically, means (M) and standard deviations (SD). At the end of the data collection, 132 questionnaires as required coded and keyed on SPSS version 26.0, for analysis and discussion. In the analysis,  $M \geq 2.50$  indicate majority of respondents agree to statement while  $M < 2.50$  indicate majority of respondents disagree to statement.

### IV. RESULTS

➤ *Research question 1: To what extent does School ranking influence pupils' involvement in examination malpractices in BECE?*

This question sought to examine the school ranking influence on pupils' involvement in examination malpractices in BECE. After the same coding of positively worded items, the data was analyzed. Summary of the analysis are shown in Table 1.

SN	Statement	Mean	Std. Dev.
1	Most pupils who cheat often pass their examinations	3.42	.618
2	Cheating is good in competitive examinations because passing places the school in prestigious positions	2.23	1.111
3	Cheat in examinations helps pupils to emerge winners after release of results	3.48	.715
4	The Ghana system of education seems to encourage cheating in examinations because of the ranking system and recognition given to top schools	3.65	.478
5	Only those who cheat have high grades in examinations and they top in schools and in the country	3.30	.605
<b>Mean of Means/Standard Deviation of Standard Deviation s</b>		<b>3.22</b>	<b>.705</b>

Table 1:- School ranking influence pupils' involvement in examination malpractices in BECE

Results from Table 1 shows that respondents perceived that school ranking influence pupils' involvement in examination malpractices in BECE with evidence (M of Ms = 3.22, SD of SDs = .705 which is an indication of homogeneous responses. On the scale respondents agreed (M = 3.65, SD = .478) to the statement "The Ghana system of education seems to encourage cheating in examinations because of the ranking system and recognition given to top schools". This is followed by their agreement (M = 3.48, SD = .715) of the statement "Cheating in examinations helps pupils to emerge winners after release of results". Again, respondents also agreed (M= 3.42, SD= .618) to the statement "Most pupils who cheat often pass their

examinations". The respondents can therefore be said to perceive that school ranking influence pupils' involvement in examination malpractices in BECE.

➤ *Research question 2: What is the influence of non-completion of syllabus contents on pupils' involvement in examination malpractices in BECE?*

This question sought to examine the influence of non-completion of syllabus contents on pupils' involvement in examination malpractices in BECE. After the same coding of positively worded items, the data was analyzed. Summary of the analysis are shown in Table 2.

SN	Statement	Mean	Std. Dev.
1	Pupils are interested in cheating in examinations because they do not have sufficient time to prepare for the examination	3.48	.516
2	Pupils are interested in cheating, provided they have not completed the course content	3.35	.741
3	There is no enough time to cover the syllabus and, if pupils don't cheat, they will fail	3.08	.913
4	Pupils cheat in examinations because they have not being taught on what is assessed	1.79	.742
5	Cheating is the only way out if a lot of work done over a long period of time is to be examined once in a short time	2.70	.979
<b>Mean of Means/Standard Deviation of Standard Deviation s</b>		<b>2.88</b>	<b>.778</b>

Table 2:- Non-completion of syllabus contents on pupils' involvement in examination malpractices in BECE

Results from Table 2 shows that respondents perceived that non-completion of syllabus contents influence pupils' involvement in examination malpractices in BECE with evidence (M of Ms = 2.88, SD of SDs = .788 which is an indication of homogeneous responses. On the scale respondents agreed (M = 3.48, SD = .516) to the statement "Pupils are interested in cheating in examinations because they do not have sufficient time to prepare for the examination". This is followed by their agreement (M = 3.35, SD = .741) of the statement "Pupils are interested in cheating, provided they have not completed the course content". Again, respondents also agreed (M= 3.08, SD= .913) to the statement "There is no enough time to cover the syllabus and, if pupils don't cheat, they will fail". The respondents can therefore be said to perceive that non-completion of syllabus contents influence pupils' involvement in examination malpractices in BECE. However, majority of respondents disagreed (M = 1.79, SD = .742) to the statement "Pupils cheat in examinations because they have not being taught on what is assessed". It can obviously be inferred from Table 2 that, pupils cheat in examinations is not based on the fact that they have not being taught the content(s) being assessed.

## V. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Data analyzed in Table 1 answer research question 1 which sought to examine the school ranking influence on pupils' involvement in examination malpractices in BECE. From Table 1, it was revealed that, majority of respondents perceived that school ranking influence pupils' involvement in examination malpractices in BECE. In the analysis, it was obvious that teachers perceive Ghana system of education to be encouraging cheating in examinations because of the ranking system and recognition given to top schools. It was also believed that, cheating in examinations helps pupils to emerge winners after release of results as well as majority perceiving that, most pupils who cheat often pass their examinations. The findings confirm the finding of

Anderman & Midgley (2000) who asserted that ranking individual pupils and schools creates fierce competition which sometimes leads to departure from teaching to preparation for passing examinations and cheating. Similarly, Kinuthia (2009) stated that ranking of schools and pupils in national examinations encourage positive competition. However, Table 1 presents a conflicting view against the perceived findings with majority of respondents disagreeing to the statement "Cheating is good in competitive examinations because passing places the school in prestigious positions". This presumption is supported by Nyamwange, Ondima & Onderi (2013) who pointed out that examination malpractices, popularly known as cheating is a vice that has bedeviled the education system in nations for many years. This clearly indicates that, teachers are vexed about what the study describes as dire phenomenon.

Data in Table 2 also answer research question 2 which sought to examine the influence of non-completion of syllabus contents on pupils' involvement in examination malpractices in BECE. From Table 2, it was discovered that, majority of respondents perceived that non-completion of syllabus contents influence pupils' involvement in examination malpractices in BECE. In the analysis, it was revealed that pupils are interested in cheating in examinations because they do not have sufficient time to prepare for the examination. Also it was noted that pupils are interested in cheating only when they have not completed the course content. Again, it was supposed that there is no enough time to cover the syllabus hence it becomes the prerogative of pupils to cheat in order to avoid failing. The findings are in agreement with Newberger (2003) who said that, examination malpractices are therefore induced by grading pressure at least as much as that of individual character failure. Similarly, Berliner (2008) who affirmed that, the pressure to score well on a single test is so intense that it leads to nefarious practices such as cheating on the test. However, majority of

respondents disagreed that pupils cheat in examinations because they have not being taught the content(s) being assessed. The findings from Table 2 also contradict the finding of Phiri & Nakamba (2015) who suggested that students engage in examination cheating because of fear of failure or scoring poor grades. This look success since pupil is not worried about adverse effects on their emotional state and their learning objective but just to please others.

## VI. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, it can be concluded that school ranking seemed to make pupils and schools to engage in examination malpractices in a bid to appear at top in the zone and other levels due to the publicity that comes along with it. Also, the study can conclude that pupils from schools where syllabus contents were not completely covered, cases of examination malpractices are prevalence. I therefore recommend base on the findings that, school ranking should be halted and reviewed to avert its dreadful limitation like examination malpractices. Schools, teachers and pupils should be oriented to embrace attainment of learning objectives since education structure is based on the maxim: *Non Scholae, Sed Vitae* meaning *Not for School but for Life*. Finally, teachers and pupils should adhere to principles and practices of “Assessment for Learning: AfL” and “Assessment as Learning: AaL” to strengthen teaching and learning and make pupils fully prepared for BECE.

## VII. LIMITATIONS

According to Best & Kahn (2006) define limitations as conditions beyond the control of the researcher that will place restrictions on the findings of the study and their implications. The researcher faced the problem of unwillingness on the part of the respondents to answer the questionnaire instruments given to them. Also, the sample was made up of respondents from one district with unique culture; findings from this study may not be generalizable to other districts and the country as a whole. In spite of these limitations, efforts were made to curtail their effect on the findings of the study.

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