

Factors Related to Examination Irregularities in Secondary Schools in Meru-South District, Kenya

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Abstract

Curriculum in the Kenyan education system is academic oriented, with examinations playing a central role in career placement and progression to the next level. The researcher sought to determine factors related to examination irregularities in Continuous Assessment Tests and mocks examination among form 3 and 4 classes using descriptive survey. The study targeted the District Examination Officer, head teachers, teachers and students on examination policy, examination revision, the role of curriculum department in administration and invigilation of internal examinations. The study sampled schools using purposive sampling techniques using the criteria of boarding status and type of school (boys/ girls or mixed). A combination of stratified sampling, simple random sampling and systematic sampling techniques were also used. Data were collected using interview schedules for the District Examination Officer and headteachers, and questionnaires for form 3 and 4 subject teachers. Questionnaires were equally administered to form 3 and 4 students respectively. Results were presented in descriptive statistics, tables of frequency, percentages, charts, graphs, research and narratives. The study found out that examination irregularities in schools were propagated by the school environment, the home situation, schools' stakeholders and the Ministry of Education with its subsidiary bodies such as the Kenya Institute of Education, Kenya National Examination Council and District Education Officer's office. Examination irregularities impacted negatively on students, parents, schools and the Kenya National Examination Council. Consequently, more strategies were yet to be employed on the management and administration of examinations to arrest the loopholes. The research questions answered indicated significant relationship between the types of irregularities and reasons for involvement in internal and external examination irregularities. The study recommended that the curriculum department in schools should play an active role in coordinating examinations, motivating good performers and addressing challenges affecting poor performers.

Key words: *Irregularity, examination, assessment, curriculum, secondary school*

1. Background to the Study

One of the most widely debated subjects by the general public in Kenya today is examination. Wanyande (1988) contends that the debate picks up every year in the period before examinations are taken by school candidates and reaches its peak soon after the examination results have been made public by the Ministry of Education. The debate reflects an attempt to understand the factors that affect candidates' performance in examinations. Implied in the debate is also the issue of and concern

with what the examination results would mean for those students who perform poorly in such examinations. This is an issue which is of concern to both students and parents alike.

Examinations according to the Concise Oxford Dictionary, First Edition (2001) is defined as: "Testing of knowledge or ability of pupils or candidates by oral or written questions or exercise". Since the purpose of education is to give intellectual and moral training to students, it follows that there must be a way of assessing or

testing the extent to which this vital objective has been achieved. To this end, examinations are justified. Whether the examinations are oral, written or are practical exercises, they are probably the best means of testing the knowledge or ability of the students. Ideally, the method of testing one's knowledge and ability should not be made optional but must include the following:

- i. Oral examinations
- ii. Written questions
- iii. Practical exercises

This gives the examiners a better opportunity to assess or gauge a candidate's theoretical and practical knowledge. Wanyande (1988) contends that the other objectives for doing examinations are to aid institutions, organizations or any other interested parties in selecting suitable candidates for a given job and selecting suitable candidates for further studies, be they at primary school level or university level. Examinations encourage students to read extensively and in detail, differentiate between the serious students and lazy students, differentiate between those who read for the sake of acquisition of useful knowledge; and assess to what extent one's character or mental powers, have been developed.

1.1 History of Public Examination in Kenya

The evolution of public examinations in Kenya dates back to the colonial period which the responsibility for the administration of such examinations rested with the department of education. Towards the last years of colonial rule, the primary and lower secondary examinations were moved to the examinations section of the Ministry of Education. The upper secondary examinations during that period were set and administered under the auspices of the Cambridge in England. This arrangement was maintained until 1974 when these examinations were taken over by the East African Examinations Board. The East African Examinations Council

was a regional examining board comprising of Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. Tanzania withdrew from the regional board in 1971 and set up its own national examinations body. This move was necessitated by the desire and determination of the country's leadership to develop a close link between its examinations and the national development philosophy, needs, goals and particularly its changing educational needs. This linkage could not be meaningfully achieved while operating under the East African Examinations Council. The withdrawal of Tanzania left Kenya and Uganda to operate the regional examinations board. Thus by an act of parliament, Kenya established its own examining body, the Kenya National Examination Council (KNEC) (1980). According to the Act, the KNEC was to be responsible for the professional conduct and development of all school examinations below the university level.

1.2 Examinations and the Learning Process

Talking about the role of examinations, Kitui (1988) observed that the main role of national examinations in the education system or process is to evaluate the success (or lack of it) of instructional programmes in the achievement of the goals of education at a given level. But as much as the necessity to evaluate the instructional programmes in the achievement of the education goals is appreciated, it is becoming increasingly questioned whether the upsurge of examinations irregularities that have dominated the country for more than 3 decades are in tune with evaluation aims (Saitoti, 2004:1). A lot still remains to be done, for example, in the area of administration of internal examination which has a strong bearing on external examination. Therefore this article addresses issues that affect evaluation and which later on affect achievement of the goals of education.

2. Statement of the problem

Despite the rationale for attaining

objectivity in the administration of examinations in secondary schools examinations, many schools in Kenya still have their Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (K.C.S.E) results cancelled; and students, invigilators, supervisors and principals subjected to the consequences of the rules and regulations governing the conduct of the K.C.S.E (KNEC, 2004). The overall problem is that factors influencing external examination irregularities in secondary schools are not well understood; and as such, the problem of examination irregularities will persist with its adverse effects on these schools.

It was upon this background that the researcher aimed at investigating school-based factors contributing to Continuous Assessment Tests and mock examination irregularities in Meru-South District. The focus was establishing the opinions of the District Examination Officer, head teachers, teachers and students on examination policy, examination revision, role of curriculum department in administration and invigilation of internal examinations. Hence, establishing the types of internal examination irregularities, in secondary schools in Meru -South District and suggesting strategies of curbing them.

3. Research Questions

The study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the school-based causes of internal examination irregularities in secondary schools in Meru-South District, Kenya?
2. What are the opinions of the District Examination Officer, head teachers, teachers and students on examination policy, examination revision, role of curriculum department in administration and invigilation of internal examinations in the study district?
3. What types of internal examination irregularities are found in secondary schools in Meru-South District, Kenya?
4. What strategies should be adopted to

curb school-based examination irregularities in Meru-South District, Kenya?

4. Research Design and Methodology

The descriptive survey design was adopted. Data was collected using interview schedules for the District Examination Officer and head teachers. Questionnaires for form 3 and 4 subject teachers, and also for form 3 and 4 students. The instruments were pretested in two schools in Meru - South District. Results were presented in descriptive statistics, which included among others percentages to demonstrate the distribution of factors under study.

5. Results and Discussion

There was a total of 448 questionnaires; that is, 416 from students and 32 from subject teachers in secondary schools. Sixteen headteachers and the District Examination Officer were interviewed. Data has been presented and analyzed using descriptive statistics. The presentation and analysis of data is organized based on the research questions.

5.1 What Were the School-Based Causes of Internal Examination Irregularities in Secondary Schools in Meru South District, Kenya?

The study sought to establish whether there were cases of examination irregularities among respondents of the sample schools. A total of 64% answered to the negative and 36% affirmed that cases of examination irregularities did exist in their schools. Research findings revealed that 79.8% of teachers were fully involved in invigilating the examination exercise; while 20.2% of the respondents felt that teachers were not fully involved in invigilating the examination exercise. The study sought to assess whether examinations were set from: areas covered, areas not covered or both. Half (50%) of the respondents felt that examinations were derived from areas covered; whereas 39.4 % of the

respondents felt that examinations were set from both those areas covered as well as those not covered. However, 10.6% were for the opinion that examinations were set on areas not covered.

In determining whether students were motivated for passing examinations, it was noted that, 87.3% of the respondents answered in the affirmative; nevertheless 12.8% of the respondents indicated that students in their schools were not motivated for passing examinations. The study sought to find whether students who continuously failed were punished. The response indicated that 87.5% affirmed that students are punished for failing. However 12.5% of the respondents declined that students were punished for failing.

The research sought to establish whether students who apply for bursary award were more likely to be involved in examination irregularities than those from well-up families. Up to 90% negated to this; 10% of the respondents affirmed that students who apply for bursary award are more likely to be involved in examination irregularities than those from well-up families. This trend showed that there were other overwhelming factors contributing to examinations irregularities other than the social-economic background of the students.

The study sought to ascertain whether students from other schools cheat in their terminal or mock examinations. It was felt that 76.7% of students from other schools cheated in their terminal or mock examinations. This is a pointer that examination irregularities could have been as a result of peer pressure influence from other schools. Opinions were sought to whether students were counseled against involvement in examination cheating

during assembly days. Notably, 97.1% said they were counseled. Nevertheless, 2.9% of students felt that they were never counseled on the vices of involvement in examination irregularities.

5.2 What Were the Opinions of the District Examination Officer, Headteachers, Teachers and Students on Examination Policy, Examination Revision, and the Role of Curriculum Department in Administration and Invigilation of Internal Examinations in the Study District?

The headteachers ascertained that there existed a policy on the conduct of examinations in their schools. On time committed to revising for examinations before they start, 34.4% of teachers said no time was given; 34.4% said examination revision took place during prep times; 25% said that revision time took a whole week; while 6.3% gave no response. Time for revision, provided students with opportunity to prepare for examinations and may avoid examination irregularities.

A total of 56% of the headteachers said the task of co-ordinating the setting and typing of examinations in their schools was done by the Curriculum Department, 25% of the respondents said that the Heads of Department were involved while 16% attributed the task to the subject teachers. Up to 78.1% of the teachers attributed coordination of setting and typing of examinations to the curriculum department; 12.5% of the teachers said that the Heads of Department coordinated the setting and typing of examinations in their schools; while, 9.4% attributed the task, to subject teachers. On teachers' involvement in examination invigilation, 81% of headteachers said that the teachers were fully involved in invigilating examinations; 12% of the headteachers felt that teachers were partly involved; while 6% felt that teachers were not involved at all.

From the above information, it is clear that some schools did not have a policy on the

conduct and revision of examinations which could have led to students' involvement in cheating in examinations. Additionally, to some extent the curriculum department was not involved in time-tabling examinations and advocating for upholding of examinations ethics. And the administration of examinations was not harmonized in terms of setting and typing, whereby subject teachers did it at their own time which could have created a loop-hole for a leakage of the examinations.

5.3 What Types of Internal Examination Irregularities were found in Secondary Schools in Meru South District, Kenya?

The study found that the most common type of internal examination irregularity was students conversing among themselves during examination; this was supported by 40.9% of the respondents. This could have been due to congestion in classes as a result of some schools lacking adequate facilities like spacious classrooms and enough desks. Conversing among students during examination could have also been attributed to lack of strict invigilation by some subject teachers during the examination exercise.

The other most common type of examination irregularity was copying from: books, friends, and writings on walls, lockers, clipboards, log tables, handkerchiefs and body parts. This was identified by 36% of respondents. This could have been attributed to failure by the teacher to clear any relevant materials that might give some candidates unfair advantage. Also exchanging question papers and answer sheets was common as cited by 36% of the respondents. Some of respondents, that is, 3.8% rated impersonation, use of cell phones and picking of examination stencils by the students from the typing pools as most common.

An informal discussion with the headteachers during the interviews revealed that there were similarities in internal and external examination irregularities. This could have meant that some irregularities

are nurtured right in schools. Hence, it is necessary to have control measures.

5.4 What Strategies could have been adapted to Curb School-Based Examination Irregularities in Meru-South District, Kenya?

An interview with the District Examination Officer pointed on the need for teachers to exercise thorough invigilation, cover the syllabus on time and administer discipline to avoid examination irregularities. The headteachers pointed out different methods for controlling the misconduct. It was found that, 25% of the headteachers felt that timely coverage of the syllabus could have been the key strategy in curbing examination irregularities; 18.8% of the headteachers cited strict supervision of examinations and guidance and counseling respectively as important strategies. While 12.5% of the headteachers, thought students needed to be suspended to bring parents or guardians; and a similar percentage felt that there was need for change of venues for students during examinations. A 5.3% of the respondents believed that students who cheated in examinations their results needed to be canceled. Again, 16.3% thought adequate spacing during examinations should have been practiced.

Apart from heateachers' views on curbing examination irregularities, also teachers gave their opinions. A 21.9% of the teachers cited timely syllabus coverage as the main strategy of curbing examination irregularities. A similar proportion cited guidance and counseling of students while physical invigilation was equally rated by 21.9% of the respondents. Additionally, 9.4% cited the strategy of testing from the many topics covered, encouraging students to revise thoroughly and nullifying results. Lastly, 6.3% of the teachers mentioned the giving of many exercises and tests as a way forward to curbing examination cheating.

6. Conclusions

From the findings of the study the following conclusions were made:

- ❖ Majority of the students felt it was not a good thing to be involved in examination irregularities, though they still got involved in the same citing external influences.
- ❖ Half of the students said examinations were set from both areas they had covered and those they hadn't covered. This was attributed to heavy teaching load among teachers hence inadequate coverage of syllabus.
- ❖ The types of punishment given to examination failures ranged from students opening earlier than others, being left behind on closing day, repeating the class, bringing parents to school, sitting for supplementary examinations, doing manual work in school, receiving warning letters and being denied some privileges. The schools attempt to administer the above types of punishment could have encouraged students to device other competitive strategies of examination irregularities to avoid the punishment.
- ❖ Inadequacy of physical resources impacts negatively on sitting arrangement and management of students during examination administration.
- ❖ The teachers' attempt to be fully involved in invigilation did not stop students from conversing during examination time, copying from written materials and body parts or exchanging answer sheets.
- ❖ There were indications that the students, teachers, headteachers and the District Examination Officer expressed optimism that the battle against examination irregularities can be won. This is a positive step towards investing their time, potential and will-power towards eliminating both internal and external examination irregularities in schools.
- ❖ Notably, students who applied for bursary award were not likely to be involved in examination irregularities than those from the well up families. This was an indication that other factors other than the social-economic background of the students were at play in accelerating examination irregularities in schools.
- ❖ It was confirmed that other schools cheated in their terminal and mock examinations. The implication was that peer pressure played a key role in propagating examination irregularities in schools.
- ❖ Majority of students did not have positive attitudes towards examination cheating. They felt that those who cheat in examinations got unfair advantage over genuine performers. If the factors causing examination irregularities are not averted, other students are likely to get involved to avoid being taken advantage of by those who cheat in examinations.
- ❖ There was evidence that students were not satisfied with the way examinations were being administered. Students' ideas on how they would like examinations to be administered for their benefit may be necessary in curbing examination irregularities.
- ❖ Lack of regular circulars, journals and examination materials on internal examination irregularities sensitizing students against the vice was drawback in forming a culture of upholding examination ethics.
- ❖ There were indications that the types of irregularities found in external examinations were a reflection of internal examination irregularities. These included conversing during examination time, copying answers from written materials, objects and body parts, exchanging answer sheets and question papers bearing answers among others.
- ❖ Some schools associated the task of coordinating the setting and typing of examinations to the heads of department and subject teachers. If the

above task is not centralized in the curriculum department, there is bound to be lack of uniformity in conducting examinations, which could lead to leakages.

7. Recommendations

- ❖ The government should enhance the K.I.E. capacity to design and distribute reading materials, journals, magazines and tapes to schools, with information sensitizing them on the importance of examinations ethics both in internal and external examinations.
- ❖ The K.N.E.C should widen their scope from concentrating in external examination ethics and embark on designing circulars, presenting papers and holding field seminars targeting teachers with information on internal examination ethics in schools.
- ❖ Schools with all their stakeholders, the District Education Officer and the District Examination Officer should design an examination policy that educates and sensitizes students on strategies of good performance and upholding examination ethics. The examination policy should be reviewed more frequently
- ❖ Examination ethics should be incorporated in the school rules for students to internalize them and know the repercussions of breaking them.
- ❖ The type of punishment given to examination cheats should be correction-oriented and not demoralizing to the student.
- ❖ The government should increase its annual education budget allocation to accommodate construction of additional physical facilities such as spacious classrooms in schools. This subsidizing will ensure there is enough space and venues for students during examinations, thereby avoiding congestion that leads to irregularities.
- ❖ Headteachers should adopt a more participatory leadership style where students views are incorporated in the decision making process regarding examinations.
- ❖ More teachers should be employed and evenly distributed in all understaffed schools to provide for manageable teaching load thereby boosting efficiency in supervision and administration of examinations.
- ❖ The headteachers should ensure that the curriculum department prepares examination time-table and provide for adequate revision time.
- ❖ The headteacher should ensure that examinations typing and production is centralized; and done in time.

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