

ASSESSMENT OF PREVALENCE OF EXAMINATION MALPRACTICES AMONG UNIVERSITIES STUDENTS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF MALE AND FEMALE STUDENTS IN UNIVERSITIES IN MOUNT KENYA REGION

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Article Info	Abstract
<p>Received :06 January 2020 Accepted :21 March 2020 Published :29 April 2020</p> <hr/> <p>Keywords: examination malpractices, ethical theory, prevalence, pragmatic, vice.</p>	<p>Stakeholders in education continue to express concerns regarding the proliferation of students' engagement in examination irregularities in universities in the world and Kenya in particular. Despite the stringent measures put in place to curb the vice, university students continue to engage in examination irregularities. The objectives of the study were; to assess the status of the prevalence of examination malpractices among university students in the Mt Kenya region, and to compare the prevalence of examination malpractices between male and female students in universities in the Mount Kenya region. The Ethical Theory guided the study. A descriptive research design was adopted. Kathuri and Pals' sampling table was used to sample 380 student participants. Data were collected using questionnaires. Cronbach Alpha Coefficient was calculated to establish the reliability of the instrument, which yielded $r=0.79$ thus higher than the 0.7 thresholds of acceptance. Experts from the department of education validated research instrument. Data analysis was descriptive and inferential statistics. Results showed that carrying unauthorized materials (50.4%), copying of answers (49.6%) and giraffing (50%) were the most prevalent forms of examination malpractices and students did not get leakages as indicated by 84.5% of respondents. The t-test yielded a p-value of 0.720 against the theoretical $p = 0.05$. The null hypothesis was accepted (at $\alpha =0.05$). The engagement of male and female students in examination malpractice was relatively the same in universities under study. The study concluded that both gender engaged in examination malpractices. The study recommended that pragmatic measures were needed to control curb the menace.</p>

INTRODUCTION

The levels of students' engagement in examination irregularities in Kenya and particularly in the Mount Kenya region are not established. In Kenya, cases of the prevalence of examination malpractices have been reported in universities. In a recent study, there were 74 instances of examination malpractices reported in a single university (Ruto et al. 2011). In the same study, it was revealed that 64% of the cases involved male students, perhaps because there are more male than female students admitted to universities annually. Siringi (2009) observed that 60% of university students in Kenya affirmed that there were prevalence examination malpractices in their universities. Universities normally offer two categories of examinations which comprise the regular and the continuous assessment tests (CATS). Apart from the two main examinations, there are others that are administered to students which are the special, supplementary and the retakes. Njue, Muthaa, and Muriungi (2014) reiterated that examination malpractice has been noted as a global concern that needs urgent attention in Kenyan universities and at global levels.

Khan et al. (2012) report that all systems of education administer examinations as a measure of academic performance. Furthermore, performances at examinations are taken into account in the process of promoting students from one academic level to another. Not only are examinations crucial to the promotion of learners, but also through examinations results, learners can understand their unique academic strengths and areas where they require improvement. Andrew (2010) argues that the importance associated with examinations prompt students to engage in examination malpractices. Jagero (2013) reiterates that examinations serve to certify and provide evidence that the graduate possesses the requisite competencies required for the performance of specified behaviors in the workplace. From the ongoing discourse, it, therefore, remains a novel idea for educationists and policymakers to be concerned about making examinations to mirror the actual academic performance of learners. Given this, the issue of the assessment trends of examination malpractices is of utmost importance.

In an attempt to eliminate the vice, the government of Kenya has demanded educational institutions including universities to strengthen their assessment procedures and practices to maintain quality educational standards. In contemporary times in Kenya, there is a paradigm shift from knowledge-based examination-oriented education to a competency-based education that emphasizes what a learner can perform. When it is fully operationalized, competency-based education could be a strategy that can greatly mitigate the rising cases of examination malpractice in learning institutions in Kenya and the world at large. This strategy puts a lot of premise on the acquisition of competencies as opposed to the passing of examinations for purposes of promotion or placement. Students' engagement in examination malpractices poses the danger of institutions of higher education churning out graduates who may injure society in case they do not possess the

requisite knowledge, skills, and attitudes that society requires. Arising from the contextualized problem from the literature presented, the study sought to compare the prevalence of examination malpractices among the male and female students in universities in the Mount Kenya region.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

There have been grave concerns regarding the quality of students graduating from universities in the world and Kenya in particular. Volumes of information regarding widespread participation of students in one form of examination irregularity or the other have been reported widely in Kenya. Despite the existence of regulations and procedures to govern the process of administration of examinations, university students continue to cheat during examinations. The situation poses a threat to humanity and leads to the deterioration of the morals of graduates and their overall intellectual growth. There are great need and urgency to ensure that the trend is reversed to restore quality and confidence in university education. The students' Continued engagement in examination malpractices portends grave danger to society since high-level manpower churned out from universities have the potential to injure society if they are deficient in the requisite knowledge, skills, and attitudes. There existed a compelling need for an empirical study on the levels of prevalence of students in examination malpractices in universities in Kenya and particularly in the Mount Kenya region. To clearly understand the problem, there was a need to establish whether differences existed between the male and female students in the engagement in examination malpractices. The justification for gender comparisons concerning students' involvement in examination irregularities would help in clearly understanding the psychoanalytic motivations behind why students engage in the vice. In unraveling the problem, appropriate strategies and mechanisms aimed at controlling the problem can be developed.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study was guided by the following objectives, which were to;

- i. Assess the status of the prevalence of examination malpractices among university students in the Mt Kenya region.
- ii. Compare the prevalence of examination malpractices between the male and female students in universities in the Mount Kenya region.

HYPOTHESIS

The study tested the following null hypothesis;

H₀:

There is no significant difference between the prevalence of examination malpractices between the male and female students in universities in the Mount Kenya region.

METHODS

The study adopted a descriptive research design. Kothari (2011) describes descriptive research as that research that involves the formulation of research objectives, the establishment of data collection methods, selection of samples from a large population, collection of data, processing, and analysis of data and reporting findings. This method was appropriate because a large volume of data was collected and a large number of respondents took part in the research process. Five (5) universities were purposively picked from the 71 accredited universities in Kenya. The target population comprised of all the undergraduate students studying in the five newly established public and two private universities indicated as; Karatina University (Nyeri County), University of Embu (Meru County), Chuka University (Tharaka-Nithi County), Mount Kenya and Kenya Methodist University (Meru County). The five universities sampled comprised of 3 public and 2 private for comparison purposes. The 380 students were divided proportionately among the 5 purposively selected universities, as follows; Chuka University 179 students (47%), Karatina University 87 students (23%), University of Embu 61 students (16%), Kenya Methodist University 30 students (8%) and Mount Kenya University 23 students (6%) due to their variation in population sizes. Fourth-year students were purposively selected cognizant of the fact that they had been to universities for long and would provide feedback effectively, unlike first, second and third-year students who did not have long experiences at their universities. The researcher distributed questionnaires to students in 4 faculties proportional to their students' populations. Purposive sampling technique was used to select 1 examination officer and 1 academic registrar from each earmarked university and totaled to 10 respondents, thus a total of 390 respondents participated in the study. Table 1 illustrates the target population and the sample size of the study.

Table 1: Target population and sample size.

Institution	Total number of students (n)	Sample size	Percentage
Chuka University	16603	179	47
Karatina University	9105	87	23
University of Embu	6603	61	16
Kenya Methodist University	4107	30	8
Mount Kenya University	3605	23	6
Total	40023	380	100

Table 1 shows that students who were sampled from the five universities were 179, 87, 61, 30 and 23 respectively, making a total of 380. Students from private universities were 86% of the total, while those from public universities were 14%. Besides, 5 examination officers and 5 academic registrars comprised the sample size. The total sample size was 390 respondents comprising of 380 students, 5 university examination officers, and 5 university academic registrars.

The researcher obtained an introductory letter from Postgraduate School, Karatina University. The letter assisted the researcher to acquire a research permit from the National Commission for Science Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI) appendix VI. The permit was used together with the letter of introduction from the university to get consent to the County Directors of Education and County Commissioners of respective counties. The researcher used consent from the said county officers to collect data from students, university examination officers, and academic registrars. Data was collected using the Students' Questionnaire (SQ) which was administered to sampled students. Questionnaires were suitable for collecting information from literate respondents who can be easily reached and are willing to cooperate. The questionnaire had ten items that were rated using a Likert scale with 5 points as follows; 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=undecided, 4=agree, and 5=strongly agree. The researcher conducted a pilot study on 38 students randomly selected from one university which was not earmarked for the study and a reliability coefficient of the research instrument was 0.772 which was greater than the 0.7 recommended by Frankel & Wallen 2003. Collected data were analyzed by use of Descriptive Statistics and t-tests for differences with aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21.0

LITERATURE REVIEW

Historically, the time when cheating in examinations started among learners in educational institutions is not documented. However, because examinations play an extremely important role in selecting individuals for further education, placement, jobs, and promotions, the situation might have led people to seek unfair advantage over others in one form of dishonesty or the other in academics. Examination cheating is indeed a form of academic dishonesty. Globally, there have been cases of escalating examination malpractices by university students. Kibler (1993) reports that cheating in examinations was noted in civil service test in china. At Kabarak University, Kenya, to protect the integrity of the university and degrees offered, examination malpractices are considered a serious offense and those found guilty of such offenses are punished by discontinuation (KU, 2016). Jaramogi Oginga Odinga, University of Science and Technology (JOUST) outlines the forms of examination malpractices and provides consequences for engagement in those by students. This scenario is a sample of regulations and policies which govern the administration of examinations in both public and private universities in Kenya. The

fundamental concern hence remains; why examination malpractices persist in universities in Kenya, yet guidelines are given to students.

According to Omari (2012), the main purpose of examinations in universities is to enhance intelligibility, efficiency, and effectiveness in decision making about various people. For example, job placement, training programs and placement of learners for further education are largely determined by their levels of academic performance. The selection of persons for various decisions making can be done based on their performance at examinations. This background information, therefore, provided the rationale that informed the researcher to engage in the study.

Franklyn-Stokes and Armstead (1966) state that an examination cheats were highly associated with male students as opposed to female counterparts, in which participation was rated lower. Consistent with their view, Njeri (2016) reiterates that 70% of those who were engaged in examination malpractices were male students, whereas the female was 30% of those who participated. The findings indicate that male students have a higher tendency to engage in examination malpractices. This could be explained by the fact in most instances, male children are more aggressive in most activities, hence the possibilities that the same levels of aggressiveness are applied in examination malpractices in universities. However, it is inferred that both genders are usually examination candidates and they equally desire to perform well in their academic endeavors. Since both genders have similar desires to pass their examinations, then it is possible and logical to deduce that both genders are likely to engage in examination malpractices.

In another study, there were 74 instances of examination malpractices reported in a single university (Ruto et al. 2011). In the same study, it was revealed that 64% of the cases involved male students, perhaps because there were more male than female students admitted to universities annually. Lack of preparation for examinations was cited as the main reason why university students engage in examination malpractices. In this regard, it is logical to infer that if lack of preparation leads to examination malpractices, then both gender could experience a scarcity of time to prepare for examinations, therefore, both are likely to have similar urges to be involved in examination malpractices. Maheka (2015) reported that female students had a higher tendency to engage in examination malpractices than their male counterparts. For instance, the study revealed that 50% of the respondents indicated that more females engage in examination malpractices whereas 21% indicated that males are involved more than females while 29% showed that both genders were equally engaged in examination malpractices. However, the overall inference revealed that there was a significant association between gender and examination malpractice; since the p-value was 0.686 compared to the theoretical value of the t-test worked out to find out the difference between male and female involvement in examination malpractices. This implies that the probability of male and female engagement in examination malpractice was largely similar; hence both male and female students have relatively equal tendencies of involvement in examination malpractices in universities.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the study and the discussion are presented following the stated objectives and the hypothesis that guided the study.

A) Objective 1: status of the prevalence of examination malpractices among university students.

The first objective sought to assess the status of the prevalence of examination malpractices among university students in universities in the Mount Kenya Region. Respondents were provided with 10 items on a 5 point Likert scale ranging from 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=undecided, 4=agree, and 5=strongly agree. The responses were coded and computed into percentages which were used to indicate the levels of prevalence of the students regarding specific statements that described forms of irregularities that students engaged in at universities. The results are represented such that they strongly agree and disagree scales were combined and named agree while the strongly disagree and disagree levels formed the disagree percentages. The results of data analysis are presented in table 2.

Table 2: Students' responses to the prevalence of examination malpractices

Statement	SD		D		U		A		SA		\bar{X}	σ
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%		
1. Students carry unauthorized materials	82	24.5	63	18.8	21	6.3	114	34.0	55	16.4	2.99	1.47
2. Students copy information	75	22.4	68	20.3	28	8.4	118	35.2	48	13.7	2.98	1.42
3. Students giraffe on others	65	19.4	68	20.3	38	11.3	115	34.3	49	14.6	3.04	1.38
4. Students hack examination systems	204	60.8	70	20.9	30	9.0	19	5.7	12	3.6	1.70	1.08
5. Students write notes on bodies	109	32.5	79	23.6	53	15.8	69	20.6	25	7.5	2.47	1.33
6. Students get leakage of examinations	213	63.6	70	20.9	25	7.5	18	5.4	9	2.7	1.63	1.02
7. Students write examinations beyond time	120	35.8	107	31.9	36	10.7	61	18.2	11	3.3	2.21	1.20
8. Students make uncalled visits to toilets	160	47.8	103	30.9	31	9.3	34	10.1	7	2.1	1.88	1.07
9. Students are awarded an undeserved grade	122	36.4	55	16.4	62	18.5	62	18.5	34	10.1	2.50	1.40

10. Both male and female students engage in cheating	86	25.7	53	15.8	39	11.6	123	36.7	34	10.1	2.90	1.34
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The findings of the study contained in Table 2 revealed that 50.4% of respondents agreed that students carried unauthorized materials to examination rooms whereas 43.3% of respondents did not affirm. The undecided students were 8.3%. On 'students referring or attempting to copy information, 48.9% of respondents agreed that university students copied during examinations. The vice of giraffing had 48% where students agreed that students giraffed on others during the examination, while 39.7% disagreed, while 11.3% of respondents were undecided. Hacking had 81.8% of respondents disagreed it existence, 9% were undecided while 9.3% agreed that students hacked examination systems. Students writing notes on their bodies, thigh, hands, and palms had 56.1% disagreeing while 15.8% were undecided and 28.1% agreed.

The study revealed that 93% of respondents agreed that students write notes on body parts, 86% exchanged examination papers, 79% were assisted by invigilators, 77% copied information from others while 70% smuggled examination papers into examination rooms respectively. The study found out that students do not write examinations beyond stipulated time as indicated by 67.7%; 21.5% said they write beyond while 10.7% were undecided on this statement. A total of 78.5% indicated that students do not make uncalled for visits to the toilets, 12.2% of them agreed that uncalled for visits to toilets were made while 9.3% of respondents were undecided. On leakage, 8.1% of participants agreed while 7.5% of them were undecided. This implied that universities have put in place effective mechanisms and reliable structures that prevent leakages of examinations to students. The statement on students being awarded undeserved grades by lecturers received 52.8% disagreed, 18.5% were undecided while 28.6% of participants agreed. On gender involvement in examination malpractices, 46.8% of participants indicated that both male and female students engaged in examination malpractices, 41.5% indicated that both male and female students differ in their engagement in examination cheating and 11.6% of the participants were undecided.

The results of data analysis were discussed in light of the available literature pertinent to the study. The vice of students carrying unauthorized materials to examination rooms was consistent with the Clabaugh & Rozycki (2009) who found similar results in their research where they established that 81% of students used smuggled papers to cheat in examinations. Further, findings indicated that students write notes on thighs, and it was usually not easy to identify such culprits. This was in agreement with the study by Ele (2016) which revealed that students copied and substituted as original, other peoples' ideas and thoughts as theirs. This implies that university examinations need to be invigilated more keenly to avoid the behavior of students copying work from others.

Matara and Namango (2016) found that 67% of respondents agreed that university students giraffe on others during examinations, hence suggested that sitting arrangement should be checked to manage that form of examination malpractices. This matter needs urgent attention if there is to be proper management of university examinations. This study was consistent with Omemu (2015) which indicated that 65% of students do not hack university examination systems. This implied that examination systems were safe from hacking and students' access. This means that this form of examination malpractice does not take place to a large extent. However, the results deviated from the findings of Oyieko (2017) who reported that students hacked examination systems. Similar findings were reported by Maduabarn (2009). Probably, the deviation could be due to the enforcement of university examination regulations in recent times. This implies that university leaderships need to keep reinforcing rules that guide examination processes and have proper structures in place to enhance the management of examination malpractices.

Further analysis indicated by 84.5% of respondents revealed that students do not get leakages of examinations as supported by Chaminuka and Ndudzo (2014) whose research informed that 90% of respondents affirmed that examinations do not leak to university students. This means that examinations are safely kept and not accessible to students before examination time. These findings were consistent with the research findings of Akaranga and Onyonga (2013) who observed that only 28% of respondents agreed that students get leakage of examinations from their lecturers; hence an inference that students do not get leakage of examinations can hold and be generalized. Time management was reported to have been well adhered to by both students and invigilators during university examinations. The findings are in line with those of Njue (2013) whose research indicated that examination malpractices could manage by students and invigilators ensuring time management is adhered to during examinations. This finding deviates from that of Achio (2005) whose research revealed that university students hide examination materials in toilets and strive to access them during examinations by seeking permission to go to toilets. The findings were partially consistent with the research conducted by Ele (2016) who revealed some university lecturers award marks to students in the face of mass failure where they refer to such scores as bonus marks. This implies that several lecturers have awarded undeserved grades, a practice that can lead to the production of weakly trained graduates who may not deliver in their job markets.

This finding deviates from the research findings of Campel (2013), Bandura (2013), Duze and Nash (2011) and Ruto (2011) whose studies revealed that male students have a higher tendency of involving in exam malpractices than their female counterparts. For example, Ruto (2011) revealed that of the 74 cases who participated in the study, 63.5% were males while 36.5% were females. Probably, in recent times, the female gender has been empowered and improved in many aspects, hence the possibility that they can do what men do, including the courage to involve in examination malpractice. This means on average, both genders participate in examination malpractices hence a need for the fair administration of corrective measures to both genders.

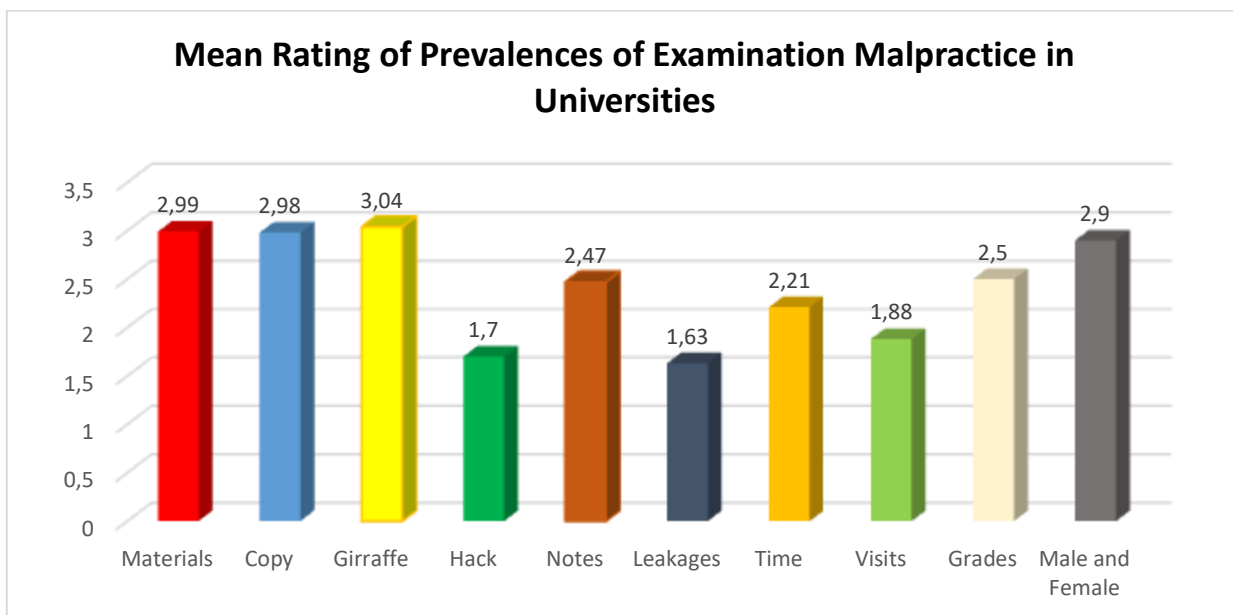


Figure 1: Forms of the prevalence of examination malpractices in universities

Figure 1 provides a summary of students' responses on levels of different forms of the prevalence of examination malpractices in universities. The highest form prevalence of examination malpractice was students girraffing on others at $\bar{X} = 3.04$, while in the examination rooms, which would be attributed to the ineffectiveness of invigilators or the spacing of students in the rooms. At $\bar{X}=2.99$, students indicated that students carry unauthorized materials into examination rooms, which shows that probably, invigilators do not frisk students effectively as they enter examination rooms. Respondents informed that students copy information from others during examinations at $\bar{X}=2.98$. Another high form of the prevalence of examination malpractice was that among male and female students. Respondents showed that there was a prevalence of examination malpractices among both genders at $\bar{X}=2.9$. Leakage of examinations to students was found to be the least form of the prevalence of examination malpractices at $\bar{X}=1.63$, followed by students hacking examination systems at $\bar{X}=1.7$ and student visits to toilets at $\bar{X} = 1.88$. Based on objective 1 of the study, which sought to assess the status of the prevalence of examination malpractices among university students in the Mt Kenya region, it was found that examination malpractices prevailed in universities. The situation provides a compelling need for the university authorities to devise methods of curtailing the vice. There is a need to strengthen the capacity of lecturers to enable them to set quality examination questions that test on higher-order reasoning rather than the rote or recall questions that are easy to copy. When quality tests are set coupled with the deepening of lecturer vigilance during

examination invigilation, cases of students' engagement in examination irregularities can be easily controlled.

B) Objective 2: Compare the male and female students' engagement in examination malpractices.

The second objective compared the prevalence of examination malpractices between male and female students in universities in the Mount Kenya region. Table 3 shows group statistics computed to show the mean difference in the prevalence of examination malpractices when male and female responses were compared. The total number of male participants was 203 and the females were 132. The mean for male students was 14.7488 while that of females was 14.6818 with SD=1.70930 and 1.59827 respectively.

Table 3: Group Statistics

	Gender of students	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Prevalence of Examination malpractices	Male	203	14.7488	1.70930	.11997
	Female	132	14.6818	1.59827	.13911

The hypothesis for the study was that **H₀:1** there is no significant difference in the prevalence of examination malpractices between male and female students in universities in the Mount Kenya region. To test this hypothesis, an independent sample t-test was computed. To establish whether there existed a statistically significant difference in the prevalence of examination malpractices between male and female students in the Mount Kenya region. Table 4 presents the results of the computed independent sample t-test on students' adherence to the regulatory framework by gender during university examination

Table 4: Independent Sample t-test on the prevalence of examination malpractices (Independent Samples Test)

		Leven's Test t-test for Equality of Means									
		for Equality of Variances									
		F	Sig	T	df	Sig-(2-tailed)	Mean difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		
								Lower		Upper	
Prevalence of Examination Malpractices	Equal variances assumed	.333	.564	.359	.333	.720	.06695	.18364	-.29959	.43349	
	Equal variances not assumed			.364	293.157	.716	.06695	.18370	.28458	.42848	

Analyzed data presented in Table 4 indicates that the computed t-test yielded a p -value of 0.720 against the theoretical p -value of 0.05. Therefore we accept H_0 (at $\alpha = .05$). The study concluded that the prevalence of examination malpractices between male and female students in the Mount Kenya region was largely the same. Hence the study supported the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference in the prevalence of examination malpractices between male and female students in the Mount Kenya region. The inference made from the results of the study is that overall, examination malpractices prevail among both male and female students in universities. Hence, equal attention is needed for both categories of gender. This implies that both genders tend to engage in examination malpractices. Universities should remedial actions for both male and female students. The prevalence of examination malpractices between male and female was largely the same

CONCLUSIONS

From the findings of the study, it was concluded that both male and female students similarly engage in examination malpractices. Students in universities engage in diverse and creative forms of examination irregularities such as possession of unauthorized materials, giraffing, copying information, writings on their bodies, hacking examination systems, leakage, extending examination time while lecturers awarded undeserved grades. Students' engagement in these examination vices was widespread in both the private and public universities in the Mount Kenya region.

The study recommended pragmatic measures necessary in controlling students from engaging in examination malpractices. The enhanced vigilance during the administration of examinations includes the need to strengthen the practice of frisking students as they entered examination rooms to flag out those who may be hiding unauthorized materials. To enhance the surveillance of students, there was a need to increase the number of invigilators per every examination room. There was a need for universities to install CCTV cameras in the examination rooms to enhance the monitoring of students. The study provides a compelling need to strengthen the capacity of lecturers in setting quality examination questions that test on higher-order reasoning as opposed to rote and recall items which may be easy to copy, complemented with the enhanced vigilance during invigilation.

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