


EXAMINATION MALPRACTICE AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN HARPER, MARYLAND COUNTY, LIBERIA

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Abstract

This study investigated examination malpractice behaviour among secondary school students in Harper, Maryland County, Liberia. The study employed a cross-sectional survey design to collect data from 50 students and teachers at public and private schools using a questionnaire. Descriptive statistics and inferential methods, including correlation analysis and t-tests, were used to analyse the collected data. The study found that the most common forms of examination malpractice among the students are using impersonators to write exams for them at 'special centres' known for their involvement in examination malpractice, and invigilators giving them unreasonable extra time to write examinations. The reasons students cheat in examinations include fear of failure, inadequate preparation, lack of self-confidence, as well as a desire to fulfil their parents' and community's expectations. The study found that cheating motives differed between male and female students, but their cheating methods remained identical. Furthermore, the study found that Liberian students engaged in examination malpractice due to multiple factors, which included personal elements, institutional aspects, and social influences. The research established that implementing better examination oversight, specific academic support programs, and strong policies that promote academic honesty is necessary to curb malpractice. The research added new evidence to the scarce academic dishonesty studies in Liberia while offering valuable information for educational leaders on how to curb examination malpractice.

Keywords: Academic dishonesty, educational integrity, examination malpractice, Liberia, secondary education

Introduction

Educational systems often rely on examinations as the primary method for evaluating students' knowledge and abilities. Examinations serve as essential assessment tools for measuring student achievement and facilitating both academic and professional advancement. Research conducted by Makaula (2018) and Adow et al. (2015) indicates that students often engage in examination malpractice because examinations provide qualifications that function as proof of academic achievement. The widespread incidence of examination malpractice across developed and developing nations has created significant challenges to the credibility of examination systems (Ayoade & Agboola, 2022).

The global problem of examination cheating continues to undermine test credibility and threaten the integrity of educational systems (Akaranga & Ongong, 2013). Students

who engage in examination malpractice through deliberate actions before, during, or after tests gain unfair academic advantages (Ayoade & Agboola, 2022). Common forms of examination misconduct include question paper leakage, student impersonation, copying during tests, and post examination score manipulation (Amadi, 2018). In the digital age, students increasingly use mobile devices, social media platforms, and artificial intelligence tools to cheat (Kell et al., 2025). Malpractice in examinations has severe consequences because it disrupts merit based academic systems, discourages genuine study, and diminishes the value of national academic credentials (Davies et al., 2018).

Examination malpractice affects all levels of education in African countries. Studies by Makaula (2018) and Petters and Okon (2014) indicate that West African countries, such as Nigeria, Ghana, and Liberia, experience high levels of examination malpractice despite various policy interventions. The West African Examinations Council continues to report persistent cases of examination misconduct. In Liberia, cheating has become so frequent that it affects both national and regional assessment programmes. The 2022 WASSCE results from WAEC Liberia revealed that 13,454 out of 40,977 candidates had their results withheld due to suspected cheating through collaboration and the use of unauthorised materials. The 2020 WASSCE pass rate remained at 35.4 percent, which highlights a persistent learning crisis (WAEC Liberia, 2022).

Liberia's educational challenges stem from historical events that date back several decades. The prolonged civil conflicts and weak governmental oversight led to the collapse of the education system, resulting in the destruction of nearly 70 percent of the educational infrastructure and the displacement of most teaching personnel (Kromah, 2015; Radelet, 2007). These historical setbacks continue to have a negative impact on student performance (Barrios-Tao et al., 2017). The World Bank (2023) reports that learners in West Africa perform among the lowest globally, with fewer than 15 percent of secondary school students demonstrating basic competence.

The West African Examinations Council, established in 1952, remains responsible for administering standardised examinations across Anglophone West Africa, which includes Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone, The Gambia, and Liberia (Okenwa, 2013). In Liberia, the WASSCE examination serves as the central assessment for determining university entry eligibility. However, the increasing number of irregularities has raised concerns about the reliability of Liberia's educational evaluation system. According to the Liberian Ministry of Education (2023), examination malpractice occurs throughout the entire assessment cycle, which includes the period before examinations, the examination period, and the post examination phase, and often involves students, invigilators, and administrative staff.

Although research on examination malpractice is substantial across West Africa, there is limited evidence regarding its specific forms and causes within Liberian secondary schools, particularly in Harper, Maryland County. Existing studies tend to focus on national trends but overlook how local contexts shape the phenomenon (Akinrefon et al., 2016; Nganchi and Charlotte, 2020b; Sendur, 2022). Localised research is necessary for developing targeted interventions that align with community needs. The semi urban environment of Harper, with its growing student population and consistently poor

performance in national assessments, presents an ideal context for studying examination malpractice. This study, therefore, investigates the forms and perceived causes of examination malpractice among students in Harper Secondary Schools in Maryland County, Liberia. The study also examines the relationship between identified causes and the types of malpractice exhibited, as well as potential gender differences.

The findings will help identify the forms and underlying causes of examination malpractice, including possible gender disparities. These insights will support WAEC Liberia, educational institutions, and policymakers in developing programmes that address both systemic and student level contributors to examination malpractice. The study is particularly important because Liberia seeks to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 4, which emphasises equitable access to high quality learning and reliable assessment systems.

Examination Malpractice

Students who engage in examination malpractice deliberately take actions before, during, or after examinations to gain illegitimate academic advantages (Nganchi & Charlotte, 2020). These actions include impersonation, question paper leakage, collaboration during tests, and the use of unauthorised materials (Nganchi and Charlotte, 2020). Students often resort to cheating when confronted with academic difficulties. Cheating violates ethical standards because it produces falsified results and undermines the integrity of examination procedures (Ogunji, 2011).

Malpractices in examinations have been extensively documented by Nganchi and Charlotte (2020). Research by Owusu et al. (2023) and Peters et al. (2022) indicates that digital methods of cheating have become increasingly prevalent, as modern technologies make it more challenging to maintain examination security. Peters et al. (2022) categorise examination malpractice into three major types, which include the use of forbidden materials such as unauthorised notes and smart devices, candidate collaboration, and document fabrication. Oko and Adie (2016) highlight additional forms of malpractice, including student impersonation, question leakage, giraffing, and outside assistance. According to the International Centre for Academic Integrity (ICAI, 2022), most students globally cheat at least once during their academic journey, with digital cheating being the most common. In a cross regional study of 1,309 students from Europe and the United States, Sendur (2022) found that students from different cultural backgrounds used technology to cheat and shared examination content at similar rates.

Research studies conducted in different educational environments shows that cheating has spread as a major academic problem. The research by Buccioli et al. (2017) reveals that 48% of Italian university students admitted to cheating throughout their academic years. The research by Smith et al. (2017) shows that 52.9% of American college students committed plagiarism as their form of cheating. The research by Alsuwaileh et al. (2016) reveals that Kuwaiti students commonly used academic dishonesty by obtaining examination information and giving money to their professors. The research by Ampofo (2021) and Isibor et al. (2020) reveals that Nigerian and Ghanaian educational institutions faced extensive cheating problems because of mass

cheating and document leaks and student teamwork. Research data shows that unethical academic behaviour has gained acceptance throughout the world.

Theoretical Perspectives

The study of examination malpractice uses behavioural and moral psychological theories to explain its occurrence. According to Bandura (1971) people acquire new behaviours by watching others and then repeating their actions while receiving positive feedback from their surroundings. Students develop cheating behaviours through observing their peers and teachers and societal examples that justify unethical achievement methods. The Theory of Planned Behaviour by Ajzen (1991) demonstrates that people decide to cheat based on their personal beliefs about cheating and what others expect from them and their ability to perform the action. Students who receive positive outcomes from cheating such as good grades and social approval will continue to cheat according to Skinner's operant conditioning theory (Skinner, 1971). These theories collectively explain how social context, reinforcement, and perceived control interact to influence deviant academic behaviour.

Based on the literature reviewed and the theory guiding this study, a conceptual framework was developed. This study reviewed and adopted Skinner's Theory of Operant Conditioning. The premise of operant conditioning is that actions that receive reinforcement will become stronger and more likely to recur in the future. In the current study, we demonstrate that the act of examination malpractice is a behaviour perpetuated by various factors. Examination malpractice is rampant because the environment allows for it. Factors such as society, groups, and institutions influence students to engage in various forms of examination malpractice. Thus, the causal factors (family, students, teachers) reinforce the action of examination malpractice, and hence the forms or methods of examination malpractice are continually strengthened. See Figure 1 for the conceptual framework.

Forms of Examination Malpractice

Research findings indicate that examination malpractice occurs in various forms. The practice of impersonation occurs when someone who is not registered takes an examination in place of another person through arrangements with examination administrators (Chirumamilla et al., 2020; Oko & Adie, 2016). The unauthorized release of examination materials before their scheduled time constitutes the definition of leakage (Isibor et al., 2020). Students frequently use forbidden items, including hidden notes, calculators, microchips, and smartphones, as their most prevalent method of cheating (Peters et al., 2022). Students have used the practice of "giraffing", which involves stretching their necks to steal answers from classmates since the beginning of time (Davies et al., 2018). The different types of academic dishonesty include student collaboration with each other and mobile device use by outsiders, and academic staff providing illicit help (Chirumamilla et al., 2020; Onyibe et al., 2015).

The introduction of modern technology has enabled students to develop various innovative methods for cheating during their examinations. Students now use digital communication platforms such as WhatsApp and Telegram to share examination

answers instantly (Kell et al., 2025). Students employ artificial intelligence tools which include chatbots to generate responses during their online tests. The worldwide adoption of AI-powered proctoring systems by examination bodies has begun to combat academic dishonesty yet faces continuous ethical dilemmas regarding student monitoring practices.

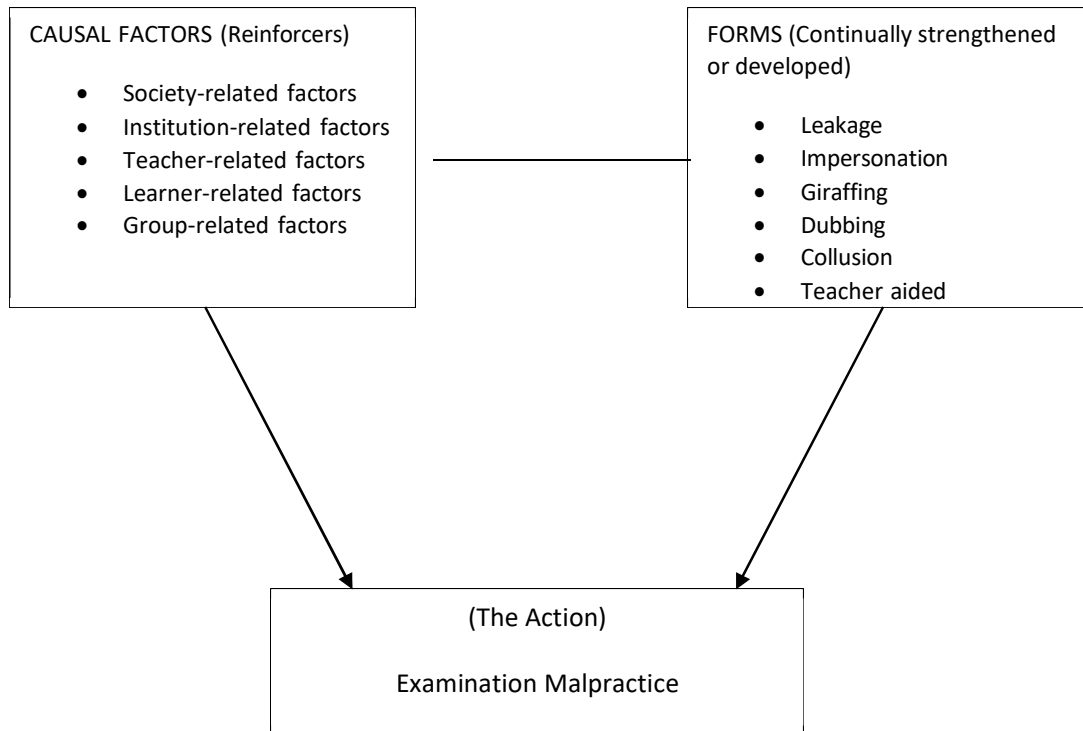


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Source: Authors' construction

Causes of Examination Malpractices

The examination malpractice occurs because of social elements and institutional aspects and teacher conduct and student behaviour and peer group activities (Alhassan & Adamma, 2018). The main factors that drive students to cheat during examinations according to Peters et al. (2022) stem from their desire to get good grades and their lack of study interest and their desire to please peers and their inability to manage time effectively because of social or work obligations. The educational system faces additional challenges because society places excessive emphasis on certificates which serve as social status indicators (Makaula, 2018). The combination of weak supervision and difficult examinations and learning environments that do not suit students results in major instances of malpractice at educational institutions (Isibor et al., 2020).

Students who experience test anxiety and fear of failure develop psychological factors which drive them to participate in malpractice activities (Petters & Okon, 2014; Hamzah et al., 2018). Students who experience severe anxiety develop self-doubt which makes them resort to unethical methods for handling their situation. The practice of imitating peer behaviour for social approval makes adolescents participate in peer

pressure activities (Makaula, 2018; Isibor et al., 2020). Students from affluent families engage in malpractice because they possess enough money to give bribes to officials (Akaranga & Ongong, 2013).

Okafor (2021) studied Lagos Nigeria to discover that students participate in examination malpractice because of sexual harassment by teachers and bribery from examination officials. Makaula (2018) documented that students resort to examination malpractice because they face extreme competition for scarce university spots and professional positions. The combination of personal insecurity and cultural expectations and weak institutional frameworks and widespread educational system corruption lead to examination malpractice.

Research on examination malpractice exists extensively throughout Nigeria and Ghana and Kenya yet Liberia lacks sufficient data on this subject. The current research about this topic lacks sufficient analysis of cheating behaviours that occur during specific subjects and environmental differences. The post-conflict education system in Liberia faces ongoing difficulties because of insufficient resources and high teacher absences and substandard educational facilities which affect students' likelihood of cheating during examinations (Barrios-Tao et al., 2017).

The study examines different cheating methods that students use during secondary school examinations at Harper schools in Maryland County Liberia. The research on contextual factors helps policymakers create specific solutions which promote academic integrity and sustainable educational success.

Materials and Methods

The research design used cross-sectional survey methods to collect data to study examination malpractice types and student and teachers' perceptions about their origins and gender-related differences in Harper, Maryland County, Liberia. The research design allows researchers to collect numerical data from participants during one session to analyse relationships between different variables (Dannels, 2018).

The research examined students and teachers from Harper Liberia who attended public and private schools across Maryland County. The research population consisted of students and teachers who understand examinations and have experience with examination misconduct thus enabling them to provide relevant information about examination cheating.

The research used stratified sampling to select schools because it maintained equal numbers of different school types. The sampling approach generates improved representation of the population while it reduces variations between internal groups (Bhardwaj, 2019). Five secondary schools from Harper District were stratified for participation. The schools were stratified based on location. After stratifying the schools by their location, the participants were selected purposefully. Fifty participants (7 students and 3 teachers from each school) were selected through purposive sampling. Purposive sampling was used to achieve gender balance and select students and teachers who

have knowledge and experience in examination and examination administration. That was done using school records. See Table 1 for the characteristics of respondents.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	29	58.0
	Female	21	42.0
	Total	50	100.0
Role	Student	35	70.0
	Teacher	15	30.0
	Total	50	100.0
Experience (teacher)	0 - 2 years	1	4.0
	3 - 5 years	2	28.0
	6 - 10 years	6	52.0
	10 - 15 years	1	12.0
	15 years and above	5	4.0
	Total	15	100.0
Form (student)	1	3	10
	2	3	10
	3	9	30
	4	2	6.7
	5	8	26.7
	6	5	16.7
	Total	30	100.0
Age group	10 - 20 years	35	70.0
	21 - 30 years	2	4.0
	31 - 40 years	4	8.0
	41 and above	9	18.0
	Total	50	100.0
Cheated	Yes	26	52.0
	No	24	48.0
	Total	50	100.0
Repeated	Yes	31	62.0
	No	19	38.0
	Total	50	100.0

A structured survey questionnaire with Likert scale questions was used to collect data from participants. The survey questionnaire items were adopted from established examination malpractice assessment tools which previous studies had validated (Akaranga & Ongong, 2013; Petters & Okon, 2014; Makaula, 2018). The research instrument included sections on participant demographics, their views on forms of examination malpractice, and its causes.

Google Form was used as a digital survey platform to collect data through its web-based interface, ensuring secure and efficient data collection. Educational research now widely uses digital survey tools, including Google Forms, Qualtrics, and SurveyMonkey, because they enable researchers to access distant participants. The survey link was distributed through email and social media platforms, while trained research assistants

provided assistance to participants during the survey process. Data collection was done over three weeks to achieve sufficient participant responses and maintain data accuracy. See Table 1 for the demographic characteristics of respondents.

The internal reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient to calculate the values for each item measuring the variables in the study questions. See results in Table 2 below.

Table 2

Results of Cronbach's Alpha Test of Reliability

Variable	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Standardised Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha	N. Cases	Valid
Forms	50	0.918	0.911		50	
Causes	50	0.937	0.932		50	

The Cronbach's Alpha coefficients of 0.918 for examination malpractice forms and 0.937 for examination malpractice causes demonstrate excellent internal consistency because the items within each construct measure the same concept reliably. The measurement scales in this study demonstrates high reliability because Bonett and Wright (2015) and Tavakol and Dennick (2011) state that Cronbach's Alpha values above 0.9 indicate very high reliability for future research applications.

The collected data was analysed with the use of Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 26. Descriptive statistics were used to present data through frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations to understand the extent, form, and trend of the issue being investigated. A mean of 1.00 to 1.80, 1.81 to 2.60, 2.61 to 3.40, 3.41 to 4.20, and 4.21 to 5.00 for a benchmark of very low, low, moderate, high, and very high, respectively (Ribeiro dos Santos, 2019). Independent t-tests, correlation analyses, and principal component analyses were employed to identify the primary types of examination malpractice and their relationships. The benchmarks are 0.00 to 0.19, 0.20 to 0.39, 0.40 to 0.59, 0.60 to 0.79, 0.80 to 1.00, for very weak, weak, moderate, strong, and very strong, respectively (Dancey et al., 2012). The survey data analysis software, SPSS version 26, enables researchers to perform reliable statistical tests that produce valid results, according to Pallant (2020).

Results

Forms of Examination Malpractice Identified

Table 3 provides descriptive statistics for different types of exam malpractices among the sampled population. The table shows the descriptive statistics for 15 different examination malpractices based on a sample size of 50. The mean score for each malpractice ranges from 1.60 to 2.38, with higher scores indicating a higher frequency of

that malpractice in the sample population. The items are listed in descending order based on their mean scores.

The item with the highest mean score is "Writing examinations at special centres known for examination malpractice" ($M = 2.38$, $SD = 1.441$), indicating that this is the most commonly reported form of examination malpractice among the sample. The items with the next highest mean scores are "Hiring other people to write examinations on behalf of candidates" ($M = 2.16$, $SD = 1.149$) and "Invigilators giving unreasonable extra time to write examinations" ($M = 2.16$, $SD = 1.167$), suggesting that these forms of examination malpractice are also relatively common. The item with the lowest mean score is "Bringing prepared answers to examination venue" ($M = 1.60$, $SD = .904$), indicating that this is the least commonly reported form of examination malpractice among the sample.

These findings have shown that there are various forms of examination malpractices, the most common being examination centres known for examination malpractices, hiring persons to write an examination for a learner, invigilators giving unreasonably more time than is assigned for examinations, and teachers abetting in examination malpractices. The problem of examination malpractice continues to expand throughout educational institutions across different countries throughout the world. Students who cheat and plagiarize and impersonate others and work together to cheat represent different types of examination malpractice. The origins of examination malpractice exist as multiple interconnected factors (Alhassan & Adamma, 2018; Davies et al., 2018; Udim et al., 2018).

The practice of cheating stands as the primary method which students use to commit examination malpractice. Students who cheat through multiple methods which include stealing work from peers and using prohibited resources and maintaining contact with others during tests. The study by Madara and Namango (2016) showed that Nigerian students most frequently cheated by copying from their classmates' work.

A student who impersonates another person becomes involved in examination malpractice through this action. The Kenyan student population views impersonation as their most critical form of examination misconduct according to Akaranga and Ongong (2013).

Students who want to cheat together with their peers engage in examination malpractice through collusion. Students who want to cheat together with their peers during examinations form a group known as colluders. The study by Obama et al. (2016) revealed that Kenyan students frequently used collusion as their cheating method.

Students who use unauthorized materials during their examinations face penalties for examination malpractice. Students who use their notes and textbooks and electronic devices during examinations face penalties for examination malpractice. The practice of using unauthorized materials during examinations proved to be a widespread cheating method among Nigerian students according to Alsuwaileh et al. (2016).

Table 3

Forms of examination malpractice

Examination Malpractice	Mean (M)	SD
Writing examinations at special centres known for examination malpractice	2.38	1.441
Hiring other people to write examinations on behalf of candidates	2.16	1.149
Invigilators giving unreasonable extra time to write examinations	2.16	1.167
Leaking examination answers by teachers and West African Examination Council officials	2.06	1.077
Teachers sharing answers with students during examination time	2.02	1.253
Replacing scripts with new revised scripts after examinations	1.94	1.300
Copying answers directly from textbooks or any similar material	1.90	1.074
Using electronic devices such as mobile phones	1.88	.982
Invigilators conniving with students to cheat in examination halls	1.88	1.206
Using reading materials hidden in the washrooms, e.g., notebooks	1.86	1.050
School authorities colluding with examination invigilators to assist students	1.86	1.143
Copying another student's work during the actual examination writing	1.80	.990
Swapping or exchanging question papers with answers written on them	1.80	1.125
Writing answers on some parts of the body, e.g., palms, thighs	1.76	.916
Bringing prepared answers to examination venue	1.60	.904

Causes of Examination Malpractice

Table 4 below shows the results of the analysis of the data about the causes of examination malpractice. The table shows the average values and standard deviations for each perceived causes together with the number of participants who provided valid responses. The three items which received the highest mean scores were fear of failure ($M = 4.22$, $SD = 0.648$) and desire to meet societal expectations ($M = 4.20$, $SD = 0.808$) and lack of confidence in one's ability/anxiety ($M = 4.20$, $SD = 0.571$). The results indicate students engage in examination malpractice because they experience fear and social expectations and doubt their academic abilities.

The survey results show that students rate inadequate preparation ($M = 4.10$, $SD = 1.015$) and parental pressure ($M = 4.08$, $SD = 1.259$) and unsuitable examination settings ($M = 3.98$, $SD = 0.869$) as significant factors. The research findings demonstrate that students cheat in examinations because of outside influences and environmental

difficulties. The survey results show that students rate certificate importance ($M = 1.74$, $SD = 1.046$) and school program disruptions from strikes ($M = 2.30$, $SD = 1.359$) as the least important factors leading to examination misconduct. The research data shows that various elements lead to examination malpractices because most survey items achieved scores above 3.0 while participants showed wide variation in their responses. The research indicates that examination malpractices need multiple solutions because they stem from various factors.

The research shows that students most often cheat in examinations because they fear failure and want to meet social standards and experience anxiety and do not prepare well and face parental pressure and encounter corrupt examination officials. The research findings align with existing academic evidence. Students who want to achieve success in their studies frequently become victims of examination malpractice. Students face examination pressure because they need to meet their own goals and fulfil their parents' expectations and social norms which drives them to cheat during tests. According to Akinrefon et al. (2016), Nigerian students cheated in examinations because they wanted to succeed and believed their academic success depended on examination results.

Students who lack proper preparation for examinations tend to cheat because they need help to understand the material. Students who perform poorly in their studies tend to cheat during examinations because they lack sufficient knowledge according to Udim et al. (2018).

The absence of proper examination supervision creates conditions which allow students to cheat during tests. Students who face weak supervision during examinations can cheat more successfully because they face reduced chances of getting caught. Akaranga and Ongong (2013) studied Kenyan students who cheated during examinations because they believed the risk of getting caught was low. Students who believe they can cheat without consequences tend to engage in examination malpractice according to Obama et al. (2016).

Finally, access to technology has introduced new dimensions to the issue of examination malpractice. With the increasing availability of devices such as smartphones and smartwatches, students have found innovative ways to cheat. Bot et al. (2016) reported that technology-enabled cheating was becoming increasingly common among Nigerian students, with those who had access to electronic devices being more likely to engage in malpractice.

Table 4

Perceived causes of exam malpractices

Cause	Mean	SD
The fear of failure	4.22	.648
Desire to meet societal expectations	4.20	.808
Lack of confidence in one's ability/Anxiety	4.20	.571
Inadequate preparation	4.10	1.015
Pressure from Parents/Guardians	4.08	1.259
Lack of conducive examination environment	3.98	.869
Corrupt examination officials	3.98	1.000
Poor and corrupt law enforcement agents	3.86	1.246
Lack of commitment on the part of teachers	3.78	1.093
Leakages through teachers	3.78	1.148
Too difficult examination questions	3.72	1.310
There is often poor invigilation	3.68	1.316
Anxiety caused by non-completion of the syllabus	3.58	1.326
Laxity in prosecuting offenders	3.44	1.343
There is inadequate funding	3.40	1.525
There is poor staffing of schools	3.34	1.547
Teacher's threat to fail students	3.28	1.429
Poor course materials	3.22	1.447
Strikes that often interrupt the school programme	2.30	1.359
There is undue emphasis on Certificates	1.74	1.046

Linkage Between the Perceived Causes and the Forms of Examination Malpractice

Table 5 below presents the correlation between various forms of examination malpractices and perceived causes of examination malpractices. The Pearson correlation coefficient between forms of examination malpractices and perceived causes of examination malpractices is .264. This indicates a positive correlation between the two variables, but the strength of the correlation is considered weak to moderate. The p-value of 0.024 (two-tailed) suggests that this correlation is statistically significant, indicating a

relationship between the two variables. These results suggest a positive relationship between the forms of examination malpractice and perceived causes of examination malpractice. This means that as the perceived causes of examination malpractices increase, so do the forms of examination malpractices.

Table 5

Correlation between forms and perceived causes of examination malpractice

Forms	Forms	Perceived causes
	1	
	0.264	
Perceived causes	(0.024)	1

Table 6 shows the results of the normality test. The Shapiro-Wilk test was used to evaluate the normal distribution of examination malpractice forms and causes among different gender groups. The results indicate that all p-values exceed 0.05 ($p > 0.05$) for both male and female participants. The W-statistic values for male participants were 0.981 ($p = 0.823$) for forms of malpractice and 0.972 ($p = 0.951$) for causes of malpractice. The W-statistic values for female participants were 0.988 ($p = 0.501$) for forms of malpractice and 0.965 ($p = 0.647$) for causes of malpractice. The null hypothesis of normality fails to be rejected because all p-values exceed the 0.05 significance threshold. The variables show normal distribution patterns for both gender groups. The data allows the performance of parametric tests, including the independent samples t-test, for additional analysis.

Table 6

Results of Shapiro-Wilk Test for Normality

Variable	Gender	Statistic (W)	p-value
Forms of malpractice	Male	0.981	0.823
	Female	0.988	0.501
Causes of malpractice	Male	0.972	0.951
	Female	0.965	0.647

Table 7 shows the results of the equality of variance. The Levene's Test for Equality of Variance evaluated the equal variances assumption between gender groups for forms of malpractice and causes of malpractice. The analysis yielded F values of 0.248 for forms of malpractice and 0.571 for causes of malpractice, with corresponding p values of 0.621 and 0.455. The null hypothesis of equal variances remains accepted because both p-

values exceed 0.05 ($p > 0.05$). The results show that male and female participants demonstrate equal variance levels for both variables. The t-test for independent samples with equal variances can be used in subsequent analysis because the assumption of homogeneity of variance is fulfilled.

Table 7

Results of Levene's Test for Equality of Variance

Variable Category	Levene's F	p-value
Forms of malpractice	F = 0.248	0.621
Causes of malpractice	F = 0.571	0.455

Table 8 shows the result of the test of significance difference between gender for both the forms and causes of examination malpractices. The independent samples t-test analysed how gender affects the different types of examination malpractice that participants experienced. The results indicate that males ($M = 3.75$, $SD = 0.82$) obtained slightly higher scores than females ($M = 3.25$, $SD = 0.74$) on the malpractice forms, but the t-value reached 1.45 and $p = 0.154$. The p-value exceeds 0.05, which indicates that the observed difference between male and female participants lacks statistical significance. The results indicate that there are no significant differences between male and female participants in their examination malpractice behaviours or perceptions. The results show males ($M = 4.05$, $SD = 0.65$) scored higher than females ($M = 3.64$, $SD = 0.76$) for malpractice causes, with a t-value of 2.88 and $p = 0.006$. This result shows that gender differences are statistically significant in the causes of examination malpractices. The higher male score indicates that males are more prone to the causes than females.

Table 8

Independent Sample t-test of Gender Difference

Variable	Gender	No.	Mean	Std.	t-value	Df	p-value
Forms of malpractice	Male	29	3.75	0.82	1.45	48	0.154
	Female	21	3.25	0.74			
Causes of malpractice	Male	29	4.05	0.65	2.88	48	0.006*
	Female	21	3.64	0.76			

Discussion

The research findings from this study reveal crucial evidence about examination malpractice types and their causes and gender-related aspects which occur among secondary school teachers in Harper Maryland County Liberia. The research shows that

students most commonly engage in examination malpractice through special centres for cheating and by paying others to take their tests and by receiving extended testing periods from invigilators and through teacher or official examination answer disclosure. The research data shows that students cheat because they fear failure and face social expectations and lack self-assurance and do not prepare adequately for their exams. The study found a statistically significant difference between male and female students and teachers regarding their perception of malpractice causes but no difference existed between genders regarding malpractice types.

Research studies worldwide demonstrate that examination malpractice exists as a complex problem which results from individual and institutional elements. Research conducted across different countries worldwide shows that students commonly cheat and impersonate others and collude with peers and leak examination materials to achieve academic success (Dawson, 2020; Maheka, 2015; Ogunji, 2011). The existence of "special centres" in Liberia follows the pattern of Nigeria and Ghana where cheating centres have developed into major threats to examination integrity (Ampofo, 2021; Bot et al., 2016). The practice of impersonation stands as one of the top three malpractices according to this study while also being documented in East African countries including Kenya and Uganda because of inadequate identification systems and insufficient invigilation (Qi & Chen, 2018). Research conducted worldwide demonstrates that technological advancements have led to the development of new cheating methods during examinations. Research conducted in Asia and the Middle East demonstrates that students use their smartphones and smartwatches and online communication tools to access unauthorized materials during examinations (Bayaa Martin Saana et al., 2016; Dawson, 2020; Osafo et al., 2021). The study found that electronic device usage scored 1.88 on the scale but the growing digital presence in educational settings creates concerns about future expansion of technological cheating methods.

The main reasons students cheat according to this study include their fear of failure and social expectations and their lack of confidence. The research findings from Sub-Saharan Africa show that students cheat to avoid failure because of their psychological and environmental challenges. Students in Nigeria use malpractice as a survival strategy because their society places high value on certification and failure brings social consequences (Makaula, 2018). Students who face parental pressure and have low self-efficacy tend to cheat according to research conducted in Kenya (Ojwan, 2019). The research indicates that examination malpractice in African educational systems stems from cultural expectations and educational system weaknesses instead of individual misconduct.

The study results show that teacher's rate "undue emphasis on certificates" and "strikes disrupting academic programmes" as less important factors than other variables. The education system in Liberia shows signs of stabilization because the country has spent time rebuilding its institutions after civil unrest. The education system in Liberia operates under smaller-scale centralised control which reduces the occurrence of prolonged strikes and systemic disruptions (Hamouda et al., 2025). The ongoing occurrence of examination malpractice shows that behavioural and ethical aspects need to become the main focus of educational reform.

The research findings from this study contribute to the existing body of knowledge about gender differences in examination malpractice. The study results show that gender differences exist in the causes of examination malpractice, but no gender difference exists in the types of malpractice. The research findings from South Africa by Tucker and Collins (2009) support this finding because male students frequently defend their cheating behaviour through performance-related justifications. Research on psychology shows that males demonstrate higher risk-taking behaviour which could explain their acceptance of malpractice causes (Bayaa, Martin, & Saana, 2016). The research findings show a weak to moderate positive relationship ($r = 0.264$, $p = 0.024$) between the perceived causes and forms of malpractice which supports the idea that personal motivations and institutional weaknesses create a dynamic system. Students who experience higher levels of anxiety and face stronger social expectations and institutional failures become more likely to participate in cheating activities. The expectation theory of motivation supports this finding because people will cheat when they believe the benefits of passing an examination exceed the potential consequences (Vroom, 1964; Osafo et al., 2021).

The research findings from Liberia provide valuable insights about specific factors which lead to examination malpractice. The dominance of "special centres" demonstrates how the national examination system lacks proper governance and oversight mechanisms. The West African Examinations Council (WAEC) faces ongoing problems with its examination administration because it lacks sufficient monitoring resources and faces issues with bribery and operational inefficiencies (Johnson & Munir, 2023). The research confirms previous qualitative studies which showed that underpaid teachers and weak regulatory enforcement create an environment where unethical conduct becomes accepted practice (Osafo et al., 2021). The institutional involvement in unethical conduct makes it harder to establish academic integrity standards in Liberia's post-war educational system.

The research results establish essential implications which affect both Liberia's educational system and African-wide initiatives to enhance educational integrity. The high rate of examination misconduct requires educational institutions to enhance their internal oversight systems and enforce ethical conduct among staff members and students. Educational policymakers need to create better examination centre monitoring systems and should implement surveillance technology and establish clear reporting systems for invigilators and administrators.

The research findings show that students need psychological and academic support programs because their fear of failure and lack of confidence drive their malpractice behaviour. Teachers need training about motivational approaches and counselling methods to help students develop coping skills and manage their test-related stress (Meribe et al., 2020). The implementation of formative assessments and ongoing evaluations would decrease student reliance on final exams because these high-stakes tests often lead to cheating behaviour.

The solution to parental and social pressure demands interventions which target community-level populations. Educational programs should teach people to value learning achievements instead of focusing on obtaining certificates to transform societal

views of success. Schools together with parents and local education authorities should work to create learning environments which support students in developing honesty and discipline and working hard instead of seeking quick success.

The Ministry of Education together with WAEC needs to foster a National Policy on Examination Ethics which will establish standardised penalties and safeguard whistleblowers and implement digital integrity solutions. The implementation of digital invigilation tools and biometric authentication systems would effectively minimise the occurrence of impersonation and collusion incidents (Boahen, 2025). The proposed educational reforms would bring Liberia's examination integrity standards into alignment with UNESCO (2023) and the African Union's Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA 16-25) global best practices.

The research confirms that Liberia shares common examination malpractice patterns with other African countries, but its specific institutional and cultural elements differ. The solution to these problems demands a complete approach which combines policy changes with teacher ethics education and student support services and open system operations. The improvement of educational integrity in Liberia will create a trustworthy education system which produces students who maintain ethical conduct and continue learning throughout their lives.

Limitations

Future research needs to increase its participant base from different geographic areas while gathering input from WAEC officials and parents and teachers and policymakers to understand broader institutional elements. Research studies that track students over time and compare different countries and use in-depth interviews and group discussions will help scientists understand cheating reasons and create data-driven educational improvements.

Implications of the Study

The findings of this study carry several important implications for educational integrity, school management practices, and national examination policy in Liberia. First, the high prevalence of sophisticated examination malpractices—such as writing exams at special centres, collusion with invigilators, and impersonation—signals systemic weaknesses in exam administration and oversight. These results underscore the urgent need for stricter monitoring mechanisms, increased accountability of examination officials, and the introduction of digital or biometric verification systems to curb impersonation and unauthorized support. Second, the strong influence of psychological and social factors—including fear of failure, societal expectations, and anxiety—suggests that interventions should go beyond punitive approaches and incorporate student support services, such as counselling, study-skills programmes, and improved pedagogical methods that reduce performance pressure.

Additionally, the significant gender differences in the causes of malpractice indicate that prevention measures should be gender-responsive, ensuring that male and female students receive targeted support based on their motivational and psychological

needs. For teachers, the findings imply the need for improved professional ethics training and strengthened supervision during examinations. At the policy level, the results advocate for a comprehensive national strategy on academic integrity, which includes reforms in teacher accountability, school governance, and consequences for malpractice. Finally, since findings reveal a moderate correlation between causes and forms of malpractice, future reforms must adopt a multi-layered approach, addressing both individual-level motivations and **structural gaps within the examination system to ensure sustainable improvements in educational quality and fairness.

Conclusion

The research aims to achieve two main objectives. The research investigates both the different types of examination misconduct and their underlying causes while studying how male and female students in Harper Maryland County Liberia behave during examinations. Cross-section survey was used for data collection. Descriptive statistical analysis reveals that cheating during examinations persists as a major issue which threatens academic standards and makes it difficult to trust test results. Students most often cheat during examinations by taking tests at cheating centres and by paying others to write their examinations and by asking invigilators for extra time and by obtaining examination answers from teachers and examination staff. The research data shows students cheat during examinations because they fear failure and want to meet social expectations and lack self-assurance and do not prepare well and their parents want them to achieve good grades. Students who experience elevated levels of pressure and anxiety tend to perform dishonest actions during their examinations according to the research findings. The inferential analysis shows that students from both sexes have equal potential to engage in malpractice but their reasons for doing so differ. The research data shows that the national examination system needs immediate solutions which will establish trust and fairness throughout all levels of the system.

Recommendations

The research provides multiple explanations which will help limit examination cheating and protect academic integrity in Liberia. The Ministry of Education together with WAEC needs to establish independent monitoring groups which should use CCTV cameras and biometric identification and digital test delivery systems to minimise human participation during examinations.

Teachers and invigilators need to receive ongoing professional training about ethical conduct and examination supervision and the negative effects of cheating. Staff members who aid cheating during examinations should face severe penalties which will help schools maintain proper institutional conduct.

Schools need to establish student-centred programs which will tackle both academic and psychological elements that lead students to cheat. Student anxiety reduction and confidence growth can be achieved through counselling and mentorship programs and regular practice tests. The public needs to understand that cheating has negative effects through awareness campaigns which should also prevent parents and communities from supporting cheating activities.

The responsible ministry and agencies need to create educational policies which enhance teacher qualifications and distribute resources properly and maintain proper student-to-teacher ratios. They need to implement laws and policies which will help prevent cheating during examinations through consistent enforcement.

The combination of educational institution partnerships with data-based monitoring and international cooperation will help Liberia develop better anti-cheating measures that match international standards of fairness and accountability.

Declarations

Ethics approval and consent to participate

The consent of the participating schools, along with their teachers and students, was individually solicited. Anonymity was preserved to safeguard individual privacy and uphold the dignity of minors. Before initiating data collection, ethical approval was obtained from the William V.S Tubman University ethical committee and the Ministry of Education to ensure compliance with ethical standards.

Consent for publication

The authors have given full consents for the publication of this research, including all findings and supporting materials.

Availability of data and materials

Data and other relevant documents for this manuscript are available upon request.

Conflict of interest statement

The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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Authors' contributions

F.S.D, U.I.O, and I.M designed this study. F.S.D led the data collection. I.M did the data analysis. All authors contributed to the writing of the paper. U.I.O reviewed the manuscript. All authors read and approved the manuscript.

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