



The Impact of Examination Dishonesty on Educational Outcomes in Tanzania

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Abstract

Examinations serve as fundamental mechanisms for measuring students' academic achievement, determining eligibility for further education, and shaping future career trajectories. However, the prevalence of examination dishonesty globally has raised alarms regarding the authenticity of academic outcomes and the erosion of educational values. This study investigates the persistence of examination dishonesty in the National Form Four Examinations and its impacts on educational outcomes in Tanzania. Grounded in Rational Choice Theory and employing a phenomenographic research design, the research utilised qualitative methodology, collecting data through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and documentary reviews. Key informants included City Secondary Education Officers, Heads of School, primary school teachers, academic masters, and students from Mwanza City. The findings highlight several significant impacts, including a decline in educational quality, the emergence of an incompetent workforce, underachievement of educational goals, underperformance in the selection process, and damage to the country's educational reputation. Despite existing policies and interventions by NECTA, the continued prevalence of dishonest practices underscores critical gaps in policy enforcement and ethical awareness. This study advocates for comprehensive reforms prioritizing teaching quality, stakeholder training, improved resource allocation, and a restructuring of examination incentives to mitigate malpractice and foster academic integrity, ultimately enhancing the quality of education.

Keywords: Examination dishonesty, National Form Four Examinations, Rational Choice Theory, Educational Outcomes, Tanzania

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1. Introduction

Examination dishonesty, defined as any behavior that enables candidates to achieve success in assessments without relying solely on their own merit (Noorbehbahani et al., 2022), poses a significant threat to the integrity of educational systems worldwide. This phenomenon not only undermines the quality of education but also has far-reaching implications for societal development. As students navigate their academic journeys, the outcomes of assessments play a pivotal role in shaping their future opportunities and professional pathways.

In Tanzania, the National Form Four Examinations represent a crucial milestone in the educational landscape, serving as a gateway for students to progress to higher education and enter the workforce. However, the prevalence of examination dishonesty raises critical concerns about the validity of these assessments and the qualifications conferred upon students. The integrity of educational evaluations is paramount; when dishonesty infiltrates this process, it compromises the very foundation upon which academic achievement is built.

Academic literature points to a multitude of contributing factors that sustain dishonest behaviour during examinations. These include pressure to succeed, lack of adequate preparation, ineffective invigilation, teacher complicity, and institutional weaknesses (Nwankwo, 2020; Kabwe, 2022; Kinoti, 2022). A study by Panjaitan (2017) emphasizes that cheating behaviours often arise from environments where students feel unsupported or overwhelmed by expectations.

In parallel, Khan (2024) explores how time mismanagement, mental fatigue, and unrealistic academic demands significantly affect students' moral decision-making, thus reinforcing the psychological triggers behind dishonest actions. Likewise, Razzaq (2023) identifies systemic flaws in instructional methods and limited student engagement as indirect drivers of academic misconduct, particularly when learners perceive formal education as disconnected from real outcomes or support.

Gyamfi (2022) found that in Ghana, examination dishonesty adversely affects educational outcomes by reducing student commitment to learning and undermining professional performance. Furthermore, it compromises the credibility of academic certificates, complicating the employment process for individuals who rely on these qualifications. This finding underscores critical challenges within educational systems and emphasizes the need to maintain academic integrity to ensure that qualifications genuinely reflect competence.

Ukwueze (2014) utilized a survey research design to examine teachers' involvement in examination malpractice and its implications for counseling and the quality of secondary education in Nigeria. The results indicated that examination dishonesty undermines educational

quality by compromising the integrity of assessments and eroding public confidence in their validity. Consequently, higher education institutions often require additional verification of candidates' qualifications through supplementary examinations. These outcomes highlight the broader ramifications of examination dishonesty on the education system and the increasing necessity for strategies that uphold examination credibility.

In the context of globalization, societal values and communication norms are rapidly evolving, often resulting in weakened moral anchors and increasing individualistic competition. Razzaq (2023) highlights how postmodern fragmentation and cultural pluralism have transformed traditional narratives, including those governing religious and ethical behavior. Similarly, in educational settings, this shift may contribute to the erosion of academic integrity, where students prioritize success over honesty in high-stakes examinations.

Similarly, Eneji et al. (2022) explored academic dishonesty in Nigerian universities and its impact on graduate quality, particularly concerning national development and global competitiveness. Their study revealed that universities affected by examination dishonesty produce graduates who are ill-equipped to contribute to national development or compete globally. This suggests that the persistence of examination dishonesty negatively impacts educational outcomes across all levels, not just in higher education.

Olabisi et al. (2022) investigated the causes, effects, and remedies of examination malpractice among Senior Secondary School students in Osun State. Their study found that the consequences of examination malpractice include the demoralization of hardworking students, increased truancy, and a deterioration of educational standards. These issues lead to community underdevelopment and diminish the credibility of professions such as law, education, engineering, and accounting. Furthermore, examination dishonesty undermines public confidence in the educational system and is perceived as a moral failing that brings shame to individuals, families, and the nation. It also contributes to increased corruption, low self-esteem, and the erosion of national values. Despite these findings, further research is necessary to understand the persistence and impact of examination dishonesty in various educational settings.

Obasi et al. (2021) recommended that examination stakeholders should be disciplined and adequately compensated to discourage their involvement in examination dishonesty. Overall, examination misconduct fosters dishonesty and extortion, undermining educational standards and obstructing economic progress. While their study employed structured questionnaires for data collection, the current research utilized interviews, focus group discussions, and documentary reviews to gain deeper insights.

In the Tanzanian context, several scholars have examined the persistence of examination dishonesty. Nchimbi (2015) identified panic, parental pressure, and inter-school competition as major contributors in primary school exams, while Nkukurah (2016) attributed dishonesty to societal values, economic hardship, and weak infrastructure across various educational levels.

Namboyo (2019) focused on the Arusha District and found that teacher involvement, inadequate resources, and poor preparation were major triggers. However, the current study builds on these insights by adopting a purely qualitative approach to gather deeper stakeholder narratives from Mwanza City, allowing for a richer exploration of lived experiences and perceptions.

Regional dynamics also complicate the issue. In some regions of Tanzania, contextual vulnerabilities, such as inadequate school infrastructure, teacher shortages, and competitive school ranking systems, create loopholes that permit malpractice to thrive. As noted by Nadeem et al. (2023), weaknesses in Results-Based Management (RBM) frameworks and inconsistent policy execution across geographic areas can contribute to administrative complacency and weaken accountability in the examination system. These system-level inadequacies compound individual-level pressures, allowing dishonest behaviours to persist even under supposedly strict supervision.

The literature reviewed demonstrates that examination dishonesty severely compromises the credibility and integrity of academic credentials, diminishes student engagement in authentic learning, and ultimately produces graduates who are poorly equipped for societal and economic participation. Although previous research spans various contexts, highlighting the broad consequences of malpractice, there remains a lack of comprehensive qualitative investigation specifically addressing stakeholder perceptions and lived experiences concerning examination dishonesty in the Tanzanian context, particularly within Mwanza City. While earlier Tanzanian studies have identified factors such as teacher complicity, resource inadequacies, and societal pressures, deeper exploration of how these dynamics specifically impact educational outcomes through qualitative methods remains limited.

Thus, the current study seeks to bridge this gap by adopting a phenomenographic qualitative approach to explore the nuanced experiences, motivations, and perceptions of stakeholders involved, thereby contributing novel insights into why and how examination dishonesty persists in Mwanza City and its direct implications on educational outcomes. By examining the perspectives of various stakeholders, this study seeks to illuminate the broader consequences of examination misconduct, highlighting the need for effective strategies to uphold academic integrity. Understanding the dynamics of examination dishonesty is essential

for fostering an education system that truly reflects student competence and enhances overall societal well-being.

1.1 Research Question

1. What is the impact of examination dishonesty on educational outcomes?

1.2 Theoretical Framework

This study employs Rational Choice Theory as the primary framework to examine the persistence of examination dishonesty in national form four examinations and its impacts on educational outcomes in Tanzania. Initially proposed by Becker (1976) and further developed by Coleman (1990), this theory suggests that individuals make decisions based on a cost-benefit analysis. In the context of examination dishonesty, this implies that students, school administrators, invigilators, and other stakeholders may resort to unethical practices when they perceive the benefits, such as improved academic performance, enhanced job prospects, or institutional advantages, outweigh the risks or penalties of being caught.

According to this theory, each participant in the examination process is viewed as a rational decision-maker who evaluates available opportunities and constraints before taking action (Coleman, 1990). For instance, students might choose to engage in dishonest behavior if they believe the immediate rewards of passing an examination surpass the potential consequences of detection and punishment. Similarly, school administrators and invigilators may overlook or even condone examination dishonesty if the incentives, like improved school performance metrics or significant financial benefits, seem to outweigh the associated risks. This systematic decision-making process elucidates why examination dishonesty persists, even when preventive measures are in place.

Rational Choice Theory indicates that examination dishonesty continues when perceived benefits exceed potential costs or when institutional deterrents are inadequate. This framework offers a structured explanation for why individuals and institutions maintain unethical behaviors despite existing preventive strategies and highlights the necessity of effective institutional enforcement. Weak enforcement mechanisms, inconsistent policies, and minimal sanctions create environments that are conducive to ongoing dishonesty.

1.2.1 Relevance of the Theory to the Study

Rational Choice Theory is particularly relevant to this research as it facilitates a comprehensive examination of the calculated decisions made by various stakeholders in the examination process. The theory aids in exploring how stakeholders in Tanzania's examination system evaluate the risks and rewards of dishonest actions. This is crucial, considering the findings suggest that examination dishonesty is not solely a concern for students. The theory

effectively explains why school administrators might engage in or facilitate unethical practices motivated by the desire to enhance the school's reputation or secure financial gains.

Furthermore, Rational Choice Theory uncovers the impact of institutional deficiencies, such as weak policy enforcement and inadequate deterrents. It directs the researcher to assess whether current policies, monitoring mechanisms, and enforcement strategies create conditions that render dishonest behavior a rational choice. By investigating these elements, the study aims to identify the factors that perpetuate examination dishonesty and propose interventions to promote ethical conduct.

The theory also aligns with the research objectives by providing a framework for formulating research questions that focus on the trade-offs and decisions made by stakeholders involved in the examination process. Through qualitative methods such as interviews and focus group discussions, the study seeks to gather in-depth insights into how these actors perceive the costs and benefits of examination dishonesty. Rational Choice Theory not only informs the research design but also enriches the interpretation of findings by connecting individual and institutional behaviors to the overall persistence of unethical practices within the examination context.

2. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative approach grounded in a phenomenographic research design to examine examination dishonesty in Tanzania's National Form Four Examinations and its impact on educational outcomes. This approach allowed for an in-depth exploration of the lived experiences and diverse perceptions of the informants.

Data were collected in Mwanza City, a location identified due to its high incidence of nullified examination results, notably with 140 out of 333 nullified cases nationwide in 2022. Purposive sampling was used to select 19 informants, including one City Secondary Education Officer, two heads of school, two academic masters/mistresses, two primary school teachers, and twelve student leaders.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and a review of relevant documents and policies. Each method contributed to a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. Thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2012) six-step model, was employed to code and interpret the data.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, various measures were implemented: credibility was enhanced through member checking and expert review; dependability was ensured via systematic documentation; transferability was achieved through rich descriptions; and confirmability was supported by utilizing a codebook and audit trail.

Ethical approval was obtained from the University of Dodoma and relevant governmental offices. Informed consent, anonymity, and confidentiality were strictly observed, and the study complied with UDOM's Anti-Plagiarism Policy.

3. Findings and Discussions

3.1 Decline of the Quality of Education

The analysis indicates that the persistence of examination dishonesty significantly contributes to a decline in educational quality, undermining the integrity of assessments. This makes it challenging to differentiate between students who succeed through genuine effort and those who resort to cheating. Insights from the City Secondary Education Officer (CSEO) illustrate this concern:

“If this evil of examination dishonesty continues, it will cause education to decrease in value, which also causes even those who get that education to decrease in value compared to others who pass without being involved in examination dishonesty....., As an educational leader, I am committed to implementing all necessary measures to prevent the occurrence of examination dishonesty in my schools (Interview with the City education officer on the 09/05/2024)”

Echoing this perspective, the academic master from school A articulated:

“I believe that if the issue of examination dishonesty is not properly addressed, it poses a danger to the overall quality of education. To determine whether a student has truly understood what they have learned, we must consider their performance in examinations. If a student engaged in dishonesty in the examination, it indicates that they did not fully grasp the material they were taught (Interview with the Academic master from school A, on the 08/05/2024)”

The Head of School B also emphasized this point:

“The persistence of examination dishonesty contributes to a decline in the quality of education. For instance, if a student passes the Form Four Examinations through dishonest means, it indicates a lack of adequate preparation. Consequently, when such a student progresses to form five and six, they are likely to struggle with the advanced subjects due to insufficient foundational knowledge (Interview with the Head of school B, on the 09/05/2024)”

These perspectives highlight that examination dishonesty significantly undermines the quality of education by creating a divide between students who achieve success honestly and those who do not, thereby hindering their preparedness for advanced studies. This dishonesty not only reflects a lack of understanding but also adversely impacts students'

performance and comprehension of the material, ultimately compromising their ability to engage with more complex subjects in the future.

A student from School B expressed a different but valid concern:

“If this problem persists, it could significantly hinder the development of education. When a student succeeds by dishonesty on examinations, they may develop a habitual reliance on such behaviour to pass exams thus ultimately leading to an education that fails to meet established standards (A student from school B, in FGD on the 09/05/2024)”

This insight reveals that examination dishonesty fosters a reliance on unethical practices, severely impeding educational development and undermining standards. Such habitual dishonesty not only affects individual learning but also jeopardizes the integrity of the entire education system. Collectively, these observations resonate with Rational Choice Theory: when the benefits of dishonest practices are perceived as high and the risks of being caught are low due to inadequate deterrents, both students and educators may engage in unethical behavior. This cost-benefit calculation reinforces a cycle of examination dishonesty, contributing to a decline in overall educational quality.

3.2 Creation of Incompetent Workforce

The findings reveal that the persistence of examination dishonesty in the National Form Four Examinations has profound implications for educational outcomes, particularly concerning the development of a competent workforce. When unethical practices become normalized, future professionals across various sectors risk emerging without the necessary skills or knowledge to meet industry standards. This compromised academic integrity results in graduates who are ill-prepared for their careers, as their qualifications no longer accurately reflect their actual competencies.

During interviews, the CSEO expressed concern about this issue:

“If this problem continues, in the quality of education...we will produce future professionals who do not meet the criteria. For example, you will find that if it is a teacher, the teacher will not meet the teaching standards, if it is a producer in the industry, he or she will not meet the standards and if he or she is a doctor, will not meet the standards either. Therefore, the final result of this will lead to poor development in the nation (Interview with City secondary education officer, on the 09/05/2024)”

On the same matter, the Head of School B echoed this concern:

“....., for example, a student has passed the form four national examination by engaging in examination dishonesty and went to form five and later form six, then, unfortunately, gets another chance to make dishonesty in the form six national examination and

succeeds chosen to join the college or university and he or she continued to use the same methods he had been using in the past and he managed to finish college and was assigned a job as a teacher. What do you think that person will teach? He will be a teacher who has nothing in his head (Interview with the Head of school B, on the 09/05/2024)”

These statements underscore the direct impact of unchecked examination dishonesty, which risks producing an incompetent workforce. The informants highlighted that if this issue persists, we risk creating future professionals—teachers, industry workers, and doctors—who fail to meet necessary standards. This lack of competence not only jeopardizes individual career prospects but also threatens the overall effectiveness of the workforce.

Supporting this concern, the Academic Master from School A remarked,

“If examination dishonesty continues, we will produce future professionals who are not the best and lack quality. Students will not take their studies seriously, expecting to make dishonesty on examinations instead..... (Interview with the Academic master from school A, on the 08/05/2024)”

A student from School A further supported this view during a focus group discussion:

“If the quality of education declines, it will lead to teachers and students not putting in their best efforts at all stages of learning and teaching, as they will rely solely on dishonesty. Students who perform well will become discouraged (A student from school A in FGD on the 08/05/2024)”

The findings indicate that persistent examination dishonesty threatens both the quality of education and the competence of future professionals. The Academic Master’s warning that students may not take their studies seriously, relying on dishonesty instead, compromises their learning outcomes. Additionally, the student’s perspective highlights that a decline in educational quality demotivates both teachers and students, leading to a lack of effort in learning and teaching. This cycle of dishonesty not only diminishes the standards of future professionals but also discourages those who strive to excel, ultimately undermining the integrity of the educational system.

From the perspective of Rational Choice Theory, when the benefits of cheating, such as achieving passing grades or avoiding academic failure, are perceived to outweigh the risks due to weak deterrents, individuals make calculated decisions that undermine the educational process. In this scenario, both students and educators may opt for examination dishonesty to secure favorable outcomes, thereby reducing the overall quality of education. Consequently, this imbalance jeopardizes not only individual career prospects but also the

credibility of the entire educational system, leading to challenges in hiring qualified professionals whose credentials do not accurately represent their abilities.

Moreover, the data suggest that when students and stakeholders observe that dishonest behavior yields immediate rewards without sufficient long-term consequences, they are less likely to invest in developing the necessary skills for genuine academic and professional success. This dynamic perpetuates a cycle in which unethical practices become the norm, ultimately resulting in a workforce incapable of contributing effectively to national development. Therefore, addressing examination dishonesty is essential not only for preserving the integrity of the assessment process but also for ensuring the production of a competent and capable workforce.

3.3 Underachievement of Educational Goals

The analysis indicates that ongoing examination dishonesty in the National Form Four Examinations significantly compromises educational quality, thereby undermining the attainment of educational goals. This dishonesty obscures students' true understanding of the material, hindering the government's ability to accurately assess learning outcomes and produce competent graduates. When students succeed through unethical means, the integrity of academic assessments is jeopardized, preventing the education system from achieving its objectives.

During the interview with the CSEO, it was revealed that:

“The government's objective in providing education is to assess students' understanding of what they have learned over a specific period. Therefore, if examination dishonesty allows students to pass, it indicates that the government's goals have not been achieved. Consequently, the government continually strives to combat the persistence of examination dishonesty to ensure the production of competent graduates (Interview with the City Secondary Education Officer, on the 09/05/2024)”

This situation illustrates that examination dishonesty enables students to progress without adequate understanding, compromising educational quality and undermining the examination process's integrity. Therefore, the government must continuously address this issue to ensure that graduates meet required educational standards.

The Academic Master from School A echoed this concern, stating;

“I believe that if examination dishonesty continues unchecked, there is a significant concern that our educational goals will not be achieved. This could result in the teaching and learning process for students being compromised (Interview with the Academic master from school A, on the 08/05/2024)”.

This perspective reinforces the idea that persistent dishonesty significantly threatens educational quality and hinders the nation's ability to achieve its educational objectives.

During a focus group discussion, a student from School A remarked,

“The government's goal is to provide quality education..... however, if examination dishonesty persists, this objective will remain unachieved. Therefore, I believe the government should impose penalties to address this issue effectively” (Student from School A, FGD, 08/05/2024).

Students recognize that dishonesty undermines their education and the purpose of government investment in the sector. According to Rational Choice Theory, when the perceived benefits of cheating—such as high scores—outweigh the risks, individuals rationalize their actions, explaining the persistence of examination dishonesty in Tanzania. Lenient penalties and a low likelihood of being caught make cheating a rational choice for some students and facilitators, normalizing unethical behavior and eroding educational quality. To address this issue, the perceived costs of dishonesty must be increased through stricter penalties, improved surveillance, and awareness programs. A multi-stakeholder approach is essential to reform the assessment culture and protect the integrity of Tanzania's education system.

3.4 Underperformance in the Selection Process

Underperformance in the selection process is a significant impact of examination dishonesty, as it undermines the acquisition of genuine knowledge and skills. An Academic Master from School B indicated that students who achieve passing grades through dishonest means are likely to struggle in job interviews due to a lack of necessary competencies. This deficiency often leads them to blame external factors, such as favoritism, rather than acknowledging their own lack of preparation.

The Academic Master stated:

"A student who passes through dishonest means may fail in job interviews because they lack sufficient knowledge. Consequently, they will blame others for being unfair or for favoritism when, in reality, they do not possess the necessary skills" (Interview with the Academic Master from School B, 09/05/2024)"

Similarly, a primary school teacher from School B noted that insufficient knowledge resulting from examination cheating directly contributes to graduates' failure to secure employment. These insights indicate that unethical practices in examinations compromise the quality of education, leaving students ill-prepared for real-world challenges.

“The lack of adequate knowledge among graduates, stemming from examination cheating, can lead to failures during job interviews and ultimately result in unemployment (Interview with a primary school teacher from School B, 10/05/2024).”

Additionally, a student from School B remarked,

"If a student becomes accustomed to cheating in examinations, there may come a time when they are asked questions in an interview, and they might struggle to answer them" (Student from School B, FGD, 09/05/2024) ”

From the perspective of Rational Choice Theory, individuals engage in dishonest behavior when the immediate benefits, such as passing exams, appear to outweigh the perceived risks. However, these short-term gains often lead to long-term consequences. Students who rely on examination dishonesty may later find themselves ill-prepared for the competitive job market, struggling to perform in interviews or demonstrate the required skills. In this context, the short-term benefits of cheating become counterproductive, resulting in a workforce that fails to meet industry standards.

This not only hampers individual career prospects but also erodes the credibility of the educational system as a whole. As Cao (2023) emphasizes, such practices present serious challenges for graduates and increase recruitment costs and difficulties for employers. Similarly, Mkwachu (2024) notes that examination dishonesty significantly undermines educational quality, leading to graduates with low academic value, a loss of trust in the education system, and fewer job opportunities for genuinely qualified candidates. These insights highlight the urgent need for effective strategies that ensure examination results accurately reflect students' actual abilities. Only through such measures can we cultivate a competent workforce that upholds the integrity and value of education.

3.5 Distraction of Country's Educational Image

The findings indicate that the persistence of examination dishonesty negatively affects the quality of education, detracting from the country's international reputation. Ongoing dishonesty in these examinations devalues the education system, making the nation less appealing to international students and parents considering enrollment. Data show that when examination dishonesty is prevalent, parents become hesitant to send their children to schools in that country, and neighboring nations may also be reluctant to accept students from such an educational environment.

An Academic Master from School A articulated this concern, stating:

"If the quality of education declines at the school or national level, parents will be concerned and reluctant to send their children to study here. This will lead to a loss of hope

among parents, and neighboring countries may be disinclined to bring their children for education here. If this problem continues, its consequences will be significant for the education system" (Interview with the Academic Master from School A, 08/05/2024)."

This highlights that a decline in educational quality causes parents to hesitate in enrolling their children due to concerns about inadequate standards, further eroding confidence in the system and discouraging neighboring countries from sending students.

Similarly, a primary school teacher from School A noted:

"If examination dishonesty continues in any nation, it results in the devaluation of that nation's education in the eyes of others. This diminished respect may deter international students from enrolling in institutions within that country (Interview with a Primary School Teacher from School A, 10/05/2024)".

This statement underscores how examination dishonesty undermines the value of a nation's education, negatively affecting both the diversity and reputation of local institutions.

During a focus group discussion, a student from School A added:

"Examination dishonesty leads to a decline in education quality. If this issue continues, our education standards will also fall. No country will be inclined to send their students to study in countries that engage in examination dishonesty" (Student from School A, FGD, 08/05/2024).

These findings suggest that the continuation of examination dishonesty not only compromises the integrity of academic assessments but also harms the nation's image on the global stage. From the perspective of Rational Choice Theory, when the perceived benefits of engaging in examination dishonesty—such as passing exams with minimal effort—outweigh the risks due to insufficient deterrents, unethical behavior becomes normalized. Consequently, credentials lose credibility internationally, further diminishing the country's reputation. Therefore, it is crucial to curb examination dishonesty to ensure that assessments genuinely reflect the capabilities of learners.

4. Recommendations of the Study

Based on the study's findings, a set recommendations is proposed to address the persistence of examination dishonesty in National Form Four examinations and its impacts on educational outcomes in Tanzania. These recommendations are organized into two integrated sections: Recommendations for Practice and Policy, and Recommendations for Further Research. Together they aim to foster immediate changes in operational practices while also guiding future investigations into this persistent problem.

4.1 Recommendations for Practice and Policy

To strengthen the integrity of Tanzania's examination processes and achieve meaningful improvements in educational outcomes, it is recommended that educational authorities rigorously intensify monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning practices. Emphasis should be placed on ensuring high-quality teaching, consistent lesson delivery, and comprehensive syllabus coverage, thereby enhancing students' preparedness and selfconfidence.

Concurrently, government authorities should reconsider remuneration structures for examination invigilators, aligning them more closely with standard per diem allowances received by employees in other public sectors. Currently, invigilators receive compensation based solely on guidelines established by PO-RALG. Providing competitive remuneration would reduce susceptibility to bribery, increase adherence to examination regulations, and effectively minimize unethical behaviours.

Additionally, educational institutions are advised to reform curriculum approaches, prioritizing skill acquisition, comprehensive knowledge, and critical thinking over mere examination score attainment. Promoting a learning culture that values genuine intellectual development will significantly diminish reliance on examination dishonest among students.

Policymakers should concurrently review existing examination regulations, introducing stricter and clearly enforceable penalties for examination dishonesty. For instance, candidates found guilty of examination dishonesty could face multi-year prohibitions from retaking national examinations, thereby substantially elevating the perceived risks of unethical conduct. Moreover, current anti-corruption policies should undergo thorough revisions to guarantee robust accountability mechanisms for invigilators and other stakeholders who engage in unethical practices. As stated in the Act, a person who contravenes or fails to comply with any provision under this part commits an offence and is liable, upon conviction, to a fine of not less than ten million shillings, or to imprisonment for a term of not less than three years but not exceeding five years, or to both. Clearly defined consequences, consistently applied, would reinforce the ethical standards expected within the examination system.

Religious discourse plays a powerful role in shaping community ethics and behavioural norms. Razzaq (2023) explores the linguistic and rhetorical strategies used in Islamic sermons, identifying how emotional appeals, logical reasoning, and textual authority are employed to guide moral conduct. In Tanzanian contexts where religious influence remains strong, these sermons may offer valuable avenues for promoting academic honesty. Educational stakeholders may perceive collaboration with religious leaders or the integration of moral

teachings into school activities as a practical strategy to reinforce values that counter examination dishonesty.

In efforts to promote academic integrity, particularly in examination systems vulnerable to dishonesty, scholars have increasingly emphasised the importance of ethical communication and community-based strategies. Razzaq et. al. (2023), argue that effective communication shaped by cultural and religious sensitivity enhances trust and compliance in healthcare systems. Drawing a parallel to the education sector, a culturally competent approach, especially in linguistically and religiously diverse regions like Tanzania, could involve leveraging religious leaders and belief systems to reinforce ethical behaviour among students. Such interdisciplinary insights support the inclusion of social and religious actors in strategies aimed at curbing examination dishonesty.

Implementing regular and targeted training programmes and orientation seminars for educational stakeholders is also strongly recommended. These programmes should comprehensively address ethical expectations, clarify the detrimental impact of examination dishonesty, and equip educators and invigilators with updated, effective supervisory techniques. Such professional development sessions should be frequent, thorough, and strategically scheduled before internal assessments, particularly at the conclusion of each academic term, and should continue consistently through to national examinations. This proactive strategy is intended to foster a robust commitment to integrity and ethical standards among all educational stakeholders, significantly reducing the prevalence of examination dishonesty. Scheduling these seminars before internal examinations help instill a sense of integrity early on, while extending them through national assessments strengthens long-term behavioural change.

These recommendations propose a multifaceted strategy that effectively leverages Rational Choice Theory principles. By restructuring incentives and reinforcing potential penalties, these measures recalibrate stakeholders' perceived cost-benefit analyses, thereby encouraging ethical conduct and fundamentally reducing the persistence of examination dishonesty.

4.2 Recommendations for Further Research

While the current study provides valuable insights into the persistence of examination dishonesty in the National Form Four Examinations in Mwanza City, Tanzania, future research should expand the scope and methodological approach to build on these findings. First, further studies should explore contextualized strategies for building confidence among secondary school students, as a strong academic foundation appears critical in reducing unethical practices. Second, given that this study was limited to Mwanza City, it is

recommended that subsequent research cover additional regions to determine whether similar patterns of dishonesty persist across Tanzania. This broader analysis will help identify national trends and enable the formulation of more comprehensive policy responses.

Moreover, employing a mixed-methods approach in future research could yield comparative insights by integrating quantitative data with qualitative findings. Such an approach would help to validate the results obtained in this study and provide a more nuanced understanding of factors for the persistence of examination dishonesty in national form four examinations and its impacts on educational outcomes. In addition, researchers should assess the effectiveness of current examination rules and regulations across all levels of education, not solely in secondary schools, to determine if there are systematic issues that require a uniform policy overhaul.

Finally, further research is recommended to evaluate the long-term impact of training and awareness programs on reducing examination dishonesty and its impacts on educational outcomes, with particular emphasis on stakeholder engagement and the sustainability of these interventions.

5. Conclusion

This study has provided a comprehensive and contextually grounded understanding of the persistent issue of examination dishonesty in Tanzania's National Form Four Examinations and its impacts on educational outcomes

Through the voices of students, teachers, academic masters, and education officers, it has revealed that cheating in examinations is not simply an individual moral failing but rather a systemic problem rooted in institutional weaknesses, inadequate teaching and learning resources, ineffective invigilation, and socio-economic pressures.

The study confirms that despite NECTA's various regulatory efforts, dishonest practices remain prevalent due to the complex interplay of psychological, infrastructural, and policy-related gaps. Key findings indicate that the normalization of malpractice, insufficient teacher preparedness, parental and peer pressure, and the emphasis on certificate acquisition over meaningful learning collectively contribute to the erosion of examination integrity.

These findings underscore an urgent need for holistic reform that addresses both preventive mechanisms and the foundational causes that enable dishonest behaviours to persist. A reformative approach must incorporate stronger enforcement of examination regulations, improved stakeholder training, enhanced school environments, and a renewed emphasis on ethical academic culture. Most importantly, the education system must evolve from being



results-driven to learning-centred, where students are supported, teachers are empowered, and ethical standards are consistently reinforced.

In advocating for systemic change, this study contributes to the broader discourse on academic integrity and quality education. It offers both theoretical insights through Rational Choice Theory and practical recommendations for mitigating examination dishonesty, serving as a valuable resource for policymakers, educators, and researchers committed to restoring the credibility of Tanzania's education system.

Statement

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