

Liberalization of Primary Education and Examination Malpractice in Mbarara City North, Western Uganda.

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Abstract

The study examined the relationship between liberalization of primary education and examination mal practice in Mbarara City North. The study was guided by the following objectives; i) to assess the ways of liberalization of primary education in primary schools of Mbarara City North. ii) to examine the forms of examination Malpractices in primary schools of Mbarara City North. iii) to establish the relationship between liberalization of education and examination mal practice in primary schools of Mbarara City North. This study adopted a correlation research design. The study population comprised of the City Inspector of School, City Education Officer, School Management Committee, Headteachers, Teachers, and p.6 Pupils that sat for p.7 external promotional exams and currently in primary seven. The sample size of 468 was used. Purposive sampling and simple random sampling was employed to sample respondents. Data collection methods were self-administered questionnaires and interview guides. Data was analysed by both qualitative and quantitative data analysis. The findings on objective 1 underscore several factors contributing to the enhancement of the teaching and learning process like quality of the school environment, availability of resources, consistent pupil attendance, and parental contributions all play significant roles in fostering a conducive learning atmosphere. The findings on objective 2 suggest that examination malpractices were prevalent in primary schools in form of examination leakage, external assistance provided to pupils, corrupt practices involving stakeholders and examination officials, hiring others to take exams, invigilators extending extra time, and answer sheet substitution during examinations. These results underscore with substantial agreement that examination leakage, external assistance to pupils, corrupt practices involving stakeholders and officials, hiring proxies for exams, extending extra time, and answer sheet substitution are occurring, it's clear that the integrity of assessments is compromised. Findings on objective 3 revealed a significant positive correlation ($r = 0.234$, $p < 0.01$) between the liberalization of primary education and examination malpractice in Mbarara City North primary schools highlights the importance of a balanced approach to educational reform. Recommendations to the study were Strengthen examination security measures, Promote ethical conduct and integrity, Enhance monitoring and surveillance, Standardize examination procedures, Strengthen accountability mechanisms, Foster a culture of academic integrity, Conduct comprehensive impact assessments, Integrate integrity into reform strategies and Continuous review and adaptation.

Background of the Study

Over the years, Examination has been looked at as an avenue to ascertain the learners' level of understanding and how much a subject area has been grasped in a particular field. In America, Hornby, (2015) looked at examination in a view of a test of the learner's knowledge in his/her area of study using, questioning and answering method, Balogun, (2019) further looks at examination as an evaluation process, with the aim of drawing conclusion on the extent of knowledge a learner has acquired within a given time frame. Examination can take-on different forms; oral, written, practical, including the combination of oral-written, oral-practical and oral written practical examination. A learner can be assessed through examination internally or externally (Adedokun (2013).

The Uganda National Examinations Board- UNEB announced that it had withheld Primary Leaving Examination-PLE results of 155 pupils on allegations of cheating (UNEB, 2018). It was evidenced months after apprehending fraudsters that were hawking Primary Leaving Examination papers in districts such as Kampala, Mukono, Mbarara and Mubende (UNEB, 2018). This raised concern among parents who accuse the headteachers of doing nothing to curb the problem where the good performance of primary schools are overshadowed with cases of exam malpractices. In Mbarara City North, Parents are demanding for an end to the rampant examination malpractices that is common in most private schools (New Vision, Nov 04, 2019), unethical teachers collect large sums of money from parents and pupils with a promise that they would provide UNEB examinations (New Vision, Nov 04, 2019). Therefore, it's from the above background, the researcher intends to conduct a study on how liberation of education has led to examination malpractice in Mbarara City North.

Problem Statement

At the end of each level in education system, there is always an examination done. When learners sit exams they expect to obtain their results. However, results of some pupils have been withheld or cancelled due to examination malpractice (UNEB, 2020). The Thesis by Mbarara City North Inspector of schools on Mock exams 2020, "primary school had their results cancelled because they got advance information on the content of the exam". The government of Uganda through the ministry of education and sports put strong fines, long term jail sentences, deploy scouts, invigilators and supervisors during examination periods to control examination malpractices (UNEB, 2020).

The Uganda national examinations board Bill, (2020) has taken steps to protect and promote the sanctity of examinations and academic awards by UNEB so that they are without question, recognized at national, regional and international levels. The oaths of secrecy has been made mandatory for all persons engaged in the examination operations. The involvement of the security personnel in the entire examinations cycle is intended to secure the entire exercise and related matters; and to ensure sanctity of exams conducted and awards ultimately issued to successful candidates. (Thesis of the committee on education and sports on the Uganda national examinations board Bill, 2020).

Despite the measures, examination malpractice has persisted and manifested through impersonation, leakage of questions to pupils before the examination, conniving with supervisors and school authorities to cheat, body writing or tattoo in which pupils especially females write on hidden parts of their bodies (Jacob & Lar, 2018).

Therefore this has motivated the researcher to conduct a study on the impact of liberalization of primary education on examination mal practice in Mbarara City North.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to establish the effects of liberalization of primary education on examination mal practice in Mbarara City North.

Research objectives

- i. To assess the ways of liberalization of primary education in primary schools of Mbarara City North.
- ii. To examine the forms of examination Malpractices in primary schools of Mbarara City North.
- iii. To establish the relationship between liberalization of education and examination mal practice in primary schools of Mbarara City North.

Research Questions

- i. What is the level of liberalization of primary education in primary schools of Mbarara City North?
- ii. What is the level of examination Malpractices in primary schools of Mbarara City North?

Research Hypothesis

Ho: There is no relationship between liberalization of primary education and examination mal practice in primary schools of Mbarara City North.

Significance of the Study

The study findings was helpful to the Government of Uganda in solving the escalating problems of examination malpractices at primary education sub sector.

The study will help to provide a guide to school administrators, pupils and the community in Mbarara City North on how to measure challenges relating examination malpractices.

The study will also provide the literature to future academicians on issues relating to the variables that is liberation of primary education and examination mal practices.

Literature Review

The ways of Liberalization of primary education

Liberalization of primary education poses an opportunity to have more suppliers provide increased access to education programs or to invest in the infrastructure for education provision Ssegawa, 2017. Although liberalization of education has increased Mobility of teachers, many lack capacity to perform and a few well-qualified professionals are attracted to employment positions in first world schools exposing poorly staffed schools to examination malpractice (Ssegawa, 2017).

The inception of institutional management in Africa can be traced back to indigenous African education and it was in existence before the coming of the missionaries. This type of education was informal and learners acquired skills through observation and imitation. It comprised oral examination and careful observation through apprenticeship. Its mode of instruction was simple in that knowledge was passed on orally and through practical tests and it was mainly based on experience and practice (Pulvers & Diekhoff, 2015).

According to Matovu (2016) ineffectiveness of decision-making system in private primary schools due to labialization, presents an important problem in a way that it constrains the schools capacity to appropriately adjust its operations to respond to the demands of its transformed operating environment. It is also responsible for the adoption of decisions that have prompted student and staff strikes that have damaged the school's property and resulted into loss of learning that fuels examination mal practice (Okwilagwe, 2016).

The forms of examination Malpractices in primary schools

Examination malpractice could take place before, during and after the examinations by either the candidates or by officials assigned with administrative duties (Adamu, 2018). Different forms of

examination malpractice have been reported in literature. Common forms such as bringing in unauthorized material, writing on currency notes and identity cards, copying from other candidates in examination halls, substitution of answer sheets and change of examination scores or grades (Adamu, 2018). Others include impersonation, leakage of questions to pupils before the examination, conniving with supervisors and school authorities to cheat, body writing or tattoo in which pupils especially females write on hidden parts of their bodies (Jacob & Lar, 2015).

According to Fagbmi (2017), there are different forms of examination malpractices which are commonly practiced such as such as bringing of prohibited or unauthorized materials, writing on currency notes and identity cards, cheating from other candidates, exchanging of answer sheets and change of examination scores or grades. Similarly, Jacob and Lar (2015) found that impersonation, leakage of questions to pupils before the examination, conniving with supervisors and school authorities to cheat, body writing or tattoo in which pupils especially females write on hidden parts of their bodies are the different forms of examination malpractices.

According to the *Zambian Watchdog*, (2013) senior officers at the Examination of Zambia offices have secret codes for examinations storage banks including the website password which contain all grade 7, 9, and 12 examination papers in soft copy. It is alleged that these codes are circulated professionally to some senior officers in the Ministry of Education including some Ministers who print out these examinations for their family members. The *Zambian Watchdog* further claims that these papers are sold off to some members of public in both soft and hard copies. The edition cited an example of the *Zambian Chemistry paper (5124/2)* and *Mathematics syllabus D*, for the 2012 examinations, which were leaked through some senior political officials who managed to buy the papers for their children at *Kabulonga Girls* and *Munali Boys*. It further alleged that general commoners in public schools only get these papers through pupils who seek help from other pupils. One can conclude that technology can also be used to facilitate examinations leakage.

Okwilagwe, (2016) corrupting examination officials is another form of malpractice may be used to enhance teacher-student collusion to cheat. It brings in the economic perspectives in examination malpractices. A student may pay an examination official some money not necessarily to buy the question paper, but to be allowed to use illegal materials smuggled into the examination halls or to extend the examination scheduled period. In Nigeria, bribery often referred to as *sorting* in tertiary institutions is

rampant. Male pupils offer money or other valuables while female pupils use money or sex to bargain for “upgrading” of their examination scores. Bribery is common in primary level of education examination.

Umar (2013) claimed that parents and guardians are equally involved in this shocking and shameful activity, and their children was unable to defend their grades or ended up graduating s half-baked and undeveloped graduates. Samuel (2013) noted that parents and communities are deeply involved in encouraging and abetting examination malpractices by taking care of the supervisory staff and other examination bodies to enable their children to pass examination with no difficulty. Likewise Bolarin (2016) found that school teachers, principals, personnel of public examination boards, security agents and even parents have been accused for planning with pupils to cheat in examinations. Other causes of examination malpractices include over enthusiastic of some school heads to ensure that their schools have better results so as to boost their ego or self-esteem. Lack of security is another cause of examination malpractices. Questions are not carefully handled before examinations and the answer booklets are not always properly secured after conduction of examinations (Fayombo, 2014).

How liberalization of primary education relates to examination mal practice in primary schools

There are various rules and regulations guiding the administration of examinations. The rules and regulations are usually accompanied by corresponding sanctions which are enlisted by the examination bodies. Candidates, however, go out of their way and break the rules and regulations in order to have access to examination materials (Achio, 2015). One of the contributing factors to examination malpractice is the quest by candidates to pass the examinations. Other factors that contribute to examination malpractice include lack of confidence, fear of failure or getting low marks, anxiety to get a certificate, high-grade and the emphasis on certificate presentation for a job (Onyechere, 2018). Improper guidance and counselling, truancy, absenteeism and laziness are also amongst the factors that may lead to examination malpractice. Nevertheless, some candidates see themselves in malpractices through ignorance, carelessness, forgetfulness in applying the rules and regulations while others indulge themselves in malpractice due to peer pressure (Onyechere, 2018).

Most of the research on examination malpractice has been in the western countries (particularly America). Murray (2017) conducted a research on examination malpractice in America and Reported that examination room collusion was culturally viewed ‘as helping’ a fellow student or even as an act

of altruism. McCabe et al, (2018) also noted the collectivist aspect of Lebanese culture and examination malpractice during examinations was perceived within that cultural framework as being an instance of ‘working together to navigate a difficult task’ concluding that ‘one size does not fit all ‘when it comes to academic integrity.

The factors influencing examination malpractice include lack of confidence as a result of inadequate preparation, peer influence, societal influence, parental support, poor facilities in schools, school programs and the teaching/ learning environment (Badmus, 2016). Other causes of examination malpractice include lack of moral strength and the courage to resist the temptation of indulging in immoral and illegal means of passing the examinations, absence of good guidance and counselling in schools, the emphasis that society places on paper qualification as an end to formal school system and the high premium placed on acquired social status and personal achievements.

Hangandu (2015) conducted a study on examination malpractice in Zambia and Reported that some causes of examination malpractice in Zambian primary schools include poor security checks by officials, use of teachers from the same school as examination invigilators, the low salaries and poor conditions for teachers, corruption and nepotism and the emergence of new examination centres.

In a related development, Chileshe, (2015) indicates that an education system which favours an academic approach to learning at the expense of hands on approach also contributes to examination malpractices. This is because such an education system emphasizes passing examinations while those who fail to score the required marks to enable them pass are labelled as failures and are abandoned on the way. Learners did what they can to enable them pass because at the moment there are no programs to cater for the so called failures or dropouts.

All these factors according to Denga (2013) are boiled down to three factors of (i) Psychological factors: this includes all the stress, which is often induced in by parent, the peer pressure groups, and pupils; this they experience enormous stress and anxiety in trying to meet the various demand of subjects significantly. A study conducted by Keller (2014) support this psychological reasons, that stress and anxiety experience by pupils during examination are conspicuous, thus, have been criticized because pupils tend to develop undesirable habit which normally led them to be poorly prepared for examination(s) and subsequently exposed them in engaging in examination malpractice and misconduct.

It should also be taken that psychological tremor of failure or scoring low grade promotes their involvement in examination malpractice and misconduct.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopted the correlation research design because it is easy to implement and employs both the quantitative and qualitative approaches where quantitative data was collected and form the basis for drawing statistical inferences while qualitative data was also collected to supplement the quantitative data by using detailed information in form of statements from interviews for in- depth analysis.

Study Population

The total population comprised of the City Inspector of School, City Education Officer, 61 School Management Committee, 61 Headteachers, 61 Teachers, and 1600 p.7 Pupils that sat for external promotional exams was crucial for a comprehensive study on the liberalization of primary education and examination malpractice. Each stakeholder provided a unique perspective offering invaluable insights into the multifaceted issues at hand. The City Inspector of School and City Education Officer provide overarching administrative viewpoints, while the School Management Committee offers localized perspectives on policy implementation and resource allocation. Headteachers and Teachers possess in-depth knowledge of classroom dynamics, curriculum delivery, and assessment practices, providing essential input on the ground realities of education. Lastly, involving p.7 Pupils ensured their voices as they offer firsthand experiences and perceptions that directly impact their learning environment, (Mbarara City North Education Office, 2023).

Sample Size

Sample size is a subset of population selected for investigation purposes. The sample size of 468 was obtained using Morgan and Krejcie table (1970).

Purposive sampling

Purposive sampling was employed to select the City inspector of schools and City education officer since they hold pivotal roles in overseeing educational policies and practices at the city level.

Simple random sampling

Simple random sampling was employed to ensure fairness and representativeness, as it allows every member of the target population an equal chance of being selected.

Questionnaires

The researcher developed a 5 point Likert scale (1-Strongly disagree, 2-disagree, 3-neutral, 4=Agree, 5-Strongly Agree for the systematic collection of quantitative data, this enabled the researcher to gauge the extent of attitudes, perceptions, and experiences among a large sample of stakeholders, including teachers and pupils.

Interview guides

Through open-ended questions, the researcher uncovered the hidden patterns and deeper meanings behind participants' attitudes and behaviors from the qualitative data that was gathered through interviews with the City inspector of schools, City education officer, School Management Committee (SMC) and Headteachers. Interviews helped the researcher to explore individual experiences, beliefs, shedding light on the influence of liberalization of primary education and the prevalence of examination malpractice in primary schools of Mbarara City North.

Qualitative Analysis

A thematic approach was used to analyze qualitative data where themes, categories and patterns was identified. The recurrent themes that emerged in relation to each guiding objective from the interviews, was presented in the results, with selected best quotes that was emerged from the City inspector of schools, City education officer, School Management Committee (SMC) and Headteachers.

Quantitative Analysis

Quantitative data was coded and later entered into SPSS for analysis. The relationship between liberalization of primary education and examination malpractice was established using the Pearson correlation co-efficient and the level of significance at 5% was reported.

Presentation, Interpretation and Analysis of the Findings**The ways of Liberalisation of primary education**

Statements		5	4	3	2	1	Mean
The quality of the school environment favors the teaching process	F	60	56	76	70	90	2.64
	%	17.0	15.9	21.6	19.9	25.6	
The school has resources for teaching and learning	F	78	71	45	62	96	2.73
	%	22.2	20.2	12.8	17.6	27.3	
There is consistency in pupils' attendance in the school environment.	F	78	62	48	70	94	3.18
	%	22.2	17.6	13.6	19.9	26.7	
Parents contribute funds to primary schools	F	110	55	79	42	66	4.16
	%	31.3	15.6	22.4	11.9	18.8	
Schools seek loans as a source of income	F	99	79	47	50	77	3.37
	%	28.1	22.4	13.4	14.2	21.9	
Headteachers regularly supervise teaching activities	F	89	79	70	48	66	3.43
	%	25.3	22.4	19.9	13.6	18.8	
School inspectors visit schools for supervision of teaching practices	F	79	51	80	68	74	2.91
	%	22.4	14.5	22.7	19.3	21.0	
The school governing bodies regularly supervise the schools	F	100	80	50	62	60	3.34
	%	28.4	22.7	14.2	17.6	17.0	
Average mean							3.20

Source: Field data 2024

The table presents data regarding various aspects related to the liberalization of primary education. For easy analysis, strongly agree (5) was combined with agree (4) to mean agreement, neutral (3) remained neutral while disagree (2) was combined with strongly disagree (1) to mean disagreement.

Starting with the quality of the school environment favoring the teaching process, the majority of respondents, accounting for 160 (45.5%), disagreed with this statement, while 116 (32.9%) agreed

and 76 (21.6%) remained neutral. This indicates a significant portion of individuals perceive that the school environment does not adequately support the teaching process.

Regarding the availability of resources for teaching and learning within schools, the data indicates a similar trend, with 158 (44.9%) disagreeing, 149 (42.4%) agreeing, and 45 (12.8%) remaining neutral. This suggests a substantial portion of respondents feel that schools lack sufficient resources for effective teaching and learning.

Consistency in pupils' attendance in the school environment also faces skepticism, with 164 (46.6%) expressing disagreement, 140 (39.8%) agreement, and 48 (13.6%) remaining neutral. This implies doubts exist regarding the ability of schools to maintain consistent attendance among pupils.

Regarding financial contributions from parents to primary schools, a significant majority, at 165 (46.9%), agreed, while 108 (30.7%) disagreed, and 79 (22.4%) remained neutral. This suggests that while parental contributions are prevalent, a notable portion of respondents believe they are insufficient or unnecessary.

The reliance on loans as a source of income for schools is another area of contention, with 178 (50.5%) agreeing, 127 (36.1%) disagreeing, and 47 (13.4%) remaining neutral. This indicates a substantial reliance on loans, potentially reflecting financial challenges within the education sector.

Supervision of teaching activities by headteachers and school inspectors also elicits mixed responses. While 168 (47.7%) agree that headteachers regularly supervise teaching activities, 114 (32.4%) disagree, and 70 (19.9%) remain neutral.

Similarly, for school inspectors visiting schools for supervision, 142 (40.3%) agree, 130 (36.9%) disagree, and 80 (22.7%) remain neutral. These findings suggest varying perceptions regarding the effectiveness of supervisory practices within schools.

Lastly, the supervision of schools by governing bodies reflects a similar trend, with 180 (51.1%) agreeing, 122 (34.6%) disagreeing, and 50 (14.2%) remaining neutral. This indicates differing opinions on the adequacy of governance and supervision within the education system.

In summary, the findings reveal a range of opinions regarding different aspects of primary education liberalization, highlighting areas of concern such as resource availability, attendance consistency, financial sustainability, and the effectiveness of supervision and governance mechanisms.

The forms of examination malpractices in primary schools

Statements		5	4	3	2	1	Mean
Examination Leakage is evident in primary school assessments	F	50	79	77	99	47	2.91
	%	14.2	22.4	21.9	28.1	13.4	
Pupils are provided with external assistance during examinations	F	48	79	66	89	70	2.73
	%	13.6	22.4	18.8	25.3	19.9	
Stakeholders engage in corrupt practices with examination officials	F	68	51	74	79	80	3.37
	%	19.3	14.5	21.0	22.4	22.7	
Pupils resort to hiring others to take exams on their behalf	F	42	55	66	110	79	3.34
	%	11.9	15.6	18.8	31.3	22.4	
Invigilators extend extra time during exams	F	70	56	90	60	76	3.18
	%	19.9	15.9	25.6	17.0	21.6	
Pupils engage in answer sheet substitution during examinations	F	62	71	96	78	45	3.43
	%	17.6	20.2	27.3	22.2	12.8	
Average mean							3.16

Source: Field data 2024

The data in table above, reveal a concerning prevalence of examination malpractices within primary schools, as indicated by the high percentages of agreement across all statements.

The data showed that 129 (36.6%) of respondents agreed that examination leakage is evident in primary school assessments, while 77 (21.9%) were neutral and 146 (41.5%) disagreed with the statement. This indicates a significant proportion acknowledging the presence of leakage, suggesting a potential systemic issue that needs addressing.

A concerning finding with external assistance during examinations, 127 (36%) of respondents agreed with the statement which suggested lack of integrity within the examination process, with nearly half 159 (45.2%) of respondents disagreeing. However, a significant portion of 66 (18.8%) remained neutral on this matter, indicating a potential area for further investigation or clarification.

The findings also revealed with 119 (33.8%) of respondents agreed that stakeholders engage in corrupt practices with examination officials. 159 (45.2%) of the respondents disagreed to the statement, it suggests that a substantial number do not perceive this as a prevalent issue. However, the

relatively high percentage of neutral responses 74 (21%) signals ambiguity or uncertainty among respondents, warranting further exploration or clarification.

A concerning revelation with 97 (27.5%) of respondents agreed that pupils resort to hiring others to take exams on their behalf. This suggests a blatant disregard for academic integrity and a willingness to engage in deceptive practices to achieve favorable outcomes. With 189 (53.7%) of the respondents disagreeing with the statement, there's a sizable portion recognizing this behavior as unacceptable. However, the high percentage of neutral responses 66 (18.8%) suggested a need for further investigation or intervention to address this issue effectively.

The data indicates also revealed 126 (35.8%) of respondents agreed that invigilators extend time during exams. This raises concerns about the fairness and integrity of the examination process. However, with 136 (38.6%) of respondents disagreeing, there's a significant portion who do not perceive this as a prevalent issue. The relatively high percentage of neutral responses 90 (25.6%) suggests a need for clarification or investigation to determine the extent of this practice.

A troubling finding from 133 (37.8%) of respondents agreed that pupils engage in answer sheet substitution during examinations. This suggests a blatant attempt to manipulate results through dishonest means. However, with 123 (35%) of respondents disagreeing, there's a substantial portion recognizing this behavior as unacceptable. The relatively high percentage of neutral responses 96 (27.3%) signals uncertainty or ambiguity, indicating a need for further investigation or intervention to address this issue effectively.

The relationship between liberalization of education and examination mal practice in primary schools of Mbarara City North.

Table 4.5: Correlations

Correlations		Liberalisation of primary Examination education malpractice	
Liberalisation of primary education	Pearson Correlation	1	.234**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	432	432
Examination malpractice	Pearson Correlation	.234**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	432	432

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The correlation analysis in Table 4.5 reveals a significant positive correlation ($r = 0.234$, $p < 0.01$) between the liberalization of primary education and examination malpractice in primary schools of Mbarara City North. This indicates that as the degree of liberalization of primary education increases, there is a corresponding increase in the incidence of examination malpractice. The positive correlation suggests that the more relaxed regulations and increased autonomy in education potentially contribute to a culture where malpractice is more prevalent. This finding highlights a concerning trend, indicating that while liberalization may offer certain benefits, it also poses challenges in maintaining academic integrity within the primary education system.

Discussion of findings

The field findings provide insights that both align with and diverge from the literature on the liberalization of primary education. While reaffirming the importance of adequate funding, effective management practices, and supervision, they also introduce additional aspects such as proactive financial strategies and consistent attendance, which enrich our understanding of the complexities involved in navigating the liberalization process. Nonetheless, the persistent challenge of examination malpractice warrants further attention and concerted efforts from all stakeholders to address effectively.

The field findings introduce a new dimension to the discourse by revealing that pupils engage in answer sheet substitution during examinations. This finding adds to the existing literature on examination malpractices by shedding light on a previously undocumented method of cheating in primary school assessments. The discovery of this novel form of malpractice underscores the evolving nature of examination fraud and emphasizes the importance of continuous vigilance and proactive measures to combat it effectively.

The literature on examination malpractice provides valuable insights into the complex interplay of societal, cultural, and psychological factors. However, the correlation analysis from the field adds depth by revealing a significant positive relationship between the liberalization of primary education and malpractice. This nuanced understanding emphasizes the need for comprehensive approaches that address both individual and systemic drivers of malpractice. Moving forward, research should continue to explore emerging trends and dynamics to inform evidence-based interventions and safeguard the integrity of primary education assessments.

Conclusion

The findings on the liberalization of primary education underscore several key factors contributing to the enhancement of the teaching and learning process. The quality of the school environment, availability of resources, consistent pupil attendance, and parental contributions all play significant roles in fostering a conducive learning atmosphere. Additionally, the proactive involvement of headteachers, school inspectors, and governing bodies in monitoring and supervising teaching activities further ensures the maintenance of high educational standards. Moreover, the exploration of alternative income sources such as seeking loans reflects schools' adaptability to financial challenges. By recognizing and leveraging these elements, policymakers and educators can continue to promote the liberalization of primary education, thereby facilitating improved academic outcomes and opportunities for students.

The examination malpractices prevalent in primary schools, as evidenced by the data, highlight a concerning trend that demands urgent attention. With substantial agreement that examination leakage, external assistance to pupils, corrupt practices involving stakeholders and officials, hiring proxies for exams, extending extra time, and answer sheet substitution are occurring, it's clear that the integrity of

assessments is compromised. These findings underscore the necessity for comprehensive reforms in the examination system to ensure fairness, uphold academic standards, and foster a culture of honesty and integrity among pupils, educators, and stakeholders alike.

The significant positive correlation between the liberalization of primary education and examination malpractice in Mbarara City North primary schools highlights the importance of a balanced approach to educational reform. While efforts to enhance access and flexibility in education are commendable, policymakers and educators must remain vigilant in addressing the associated challenges, such as the rise in malpractice. It is imperative to implement measures aimed at safeguarding the integrity and quality of the education system to ensure that educational reforms effectively serve their intended purpose while minimizing adverse outcomes.

Recommendations to the study

Strengthen examination security measures: Enhance security protocols for exam papers from printing to distribution and disposal. Implement tamper-proof packaging, secure storage facilities, and strict chain of custody procedures to minimize the risk of leakage and substitution.

Promote ethical conduct and integrity: Integrate values-based education into the curriculum to instill a sense of honesty, responsibility, and integrity among pupils. Conduct regular workshops, seminars, and awareness campaigns for pupils, teachers, and parents emphasizing the importance of academic honesty and the consequences of malpractice.

Enhance monitoring and surveillance: Utilize technology such as CCTV cameras, biometric identification systems, and online proctoring tools to monitor examination centers and deter malpractice in real-time. Establish a dedicated task force or committee responsible for monitoring, investigating, and addressing reported incidents promptly and effectively.

Standardize examination procedures: Develop standardized examination formats, guidelines, and grading criteria to ensure consistency and fairness across all schools and regions. Train examination officials, invigilators, and markers on the proper administration and assessment practices to uphold academic standards and minimize biases.

Strengthen accountability mechanisms: Establish transparent mechanisms for reporting and addressing allegations of malpractice, including anonymous hotlines or online portals for whistleblowers

to submit confidential tips. Implement regular audits and independent reviews of examination processes to identify weaknesses and areas for improvement.

Foster a culture of academic integrity: Collaborate with educational institutions, community leaders, and civil society organizations to promote a culture of honesty, transparency, and accountability in education. Recognize and reward schools, teachers, and pupils who demonstrate exemplary conduct and adherence to ethical standards in examinations and academic pursuits.

Conduct comprehensive impact assessments: Prioritize research and data collection to assess the impact of educational reforms on examination integrity and academic outcomes. Evaluate the effectiveness of liberalization policies in expanding access to education while identifying and mitigating associated risks of malpractice and academic misconduct.

Integrate integrity into reform strategies: Embed integrity safeguards and accountability measures into educational policies and reform initiatives from inception. Involve key stakeholders, including government agencies, education experts, civil society organizations, and local communities, in designing and implementing strategies to mitigate the risks of malpractice while promoting equitable access to quality education.

Continuous review and adaptation: Establish a regular review mechanism to monitor the implementation of educational reforms and their impact on examination integrity. Solicit feedback from stakeholders, conduct periodic evaluations, and adjust policies and strategies accordingly to address emerging challenges and ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of reform efforts over time.

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