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Forms of Examination Malpractice Experienced by Invigilators in Secondary Schools of Kabwe District, Zambia

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Abstract

Examination malpractice remains a threat to the credibility, fairness and integrity of educational assessment in Zambia. Although examination authorities have instituted measures to safeguard national examinations, different forms of malpractice continue to emerge, including practices that are increasingly aided by technological advancement. This article explored the forms of examination malpractice experienced by invigilators in selected secondary schools of Kabwe District, Zambia. The study was guided by an interpretive paradigm and adopted a qualitative approach using a descriptive phenomenological research design. Thirty examination invigilators drawn from ten selected secondary schools were purposively selected based on their experience in examination administration and handling examination malpractice. Data were collected through unstructured in-depth interviews and focus group discussions and analysed using Colaizzi's phenomenological

method. The findings revealed five major forms of examination malpractice experienced by invigilators: smuggling of unauthorised materials, use of electronic gadgets, collusion and assistance, swapping and tampering with answer scripts, and impersonation. The findings further showed that examination malpractice had moved beyond conventional practices such as concealed written notes to more sophisticated methods involving smartphones, smartwatches, Bluetooth devices and coordinated assistance from actors within and outside examination centres. The study concludes that examination malpractice in secondary schools is dynamic and increasingly difficult to detect using conventional invigilation practices alone. It recommends strengthening candidate screening, introducing appropriate electronic detection mechanisms, improving candidate identification procedures and reinforcing accountability among all personnel involved in examination administration.

Keywords: Examination Malpractice, Invigilators, Secondary Schools, Electronic Cheating, Impersonation, Examination Integrity, Zambia

1. Introduction

Examinations are an important component of educational systems because they provide a basis for assessing learners' achievement, certification, progression and selection for further education. The credibility of examinations, however, depends on the extent to which they are administered under conditions that promote fairness and accurately reflect candidates' knowledge and abilities. Examination malpractice undermines this purpose because it introduces dishonest practices that interfere with the validity of assessment outcomes. In Zambia, examination malpractice has remained a concern within the education system despite the existence of regulatory mechanisms intended to safeguard the administration of examinations. Practices such as cheating, impersonation and other forms of academic dishonesty have continued to raise concerns about the credibility of examination results and public confidence in educational assessment (Mweemba, 2017; Sakala, 2018).

The examination malpractice is not a single practice but encompasses different forms of misconduct committed before, during or after an examination. The forms adopted by candidates and other actors may also change as examination regulations and monitoring systems become stricter. Czek (2000) ^[5] observed that examination malpractice is adaptive, with candidates employing practices such as copying, impersonation, possession of unauthorised materials, collusion with invigilators and concealed technological devices. This changing character of malpractice means that the practices encountered in examination rooms may not always correspond with conventional forms of cheating that invigilators have previously experienced. Consequently, understanding the forms currently encountered by examination invigilators is important because effective

examination control begins with recognising the actual practices taking place within examination environments. Studies conducted in different educational contexts show that examination malpractice increasingly involves both individual and coordinated activities. Dey and Sanyal (2018) [6], for example, identified answer whispering, organised copying, pre-arranged seating arrangements, examination leakage and invigilator-assisted cheating among the practices encountered during examinations. Their findings are important because they demonstrate that malpractice cannot always be understood as misconduct committed independently by candidates. Other individuals within or around an examination environment may participate in facilitating dishonest practices. This broadens examination malpractice from individual cheating to organised conduct involving candidates, school personnel and, in some circumstances, persons outside examination centres. It therefore becomes important to examine malpractice through the experiences of invigilators who directly observe activities taking place during examination administration.

Technological advancement has further transformed the nature of examination malpractice. Traditional practices such as written notes and copying from other candidates increasingly coexist with the use of electronic devices that can store, retrieve and transmit information. The growing availability of mobile phones, smartwatches, Bluetooth devices and other communication technologies has created additional opportunities through which candidates can access information or communicate with persons outside examination rooms. This development complicates examination supervision because electronic devices may be small, concealed or disguised as ordinary personal items. Literature reviewed in the study suggests that concealed technological devices have become part of emerging examination malpractice and may present forms of cheating for which conventional examination monitoring procedures were not originally designed (Czek, 2000) [5]. The changing technological environment therefore provides an important reason for continually documenting the forms of malpractice encountered by those responsible for supervising examinations.

Evidence from African education systems similarly indicates that examination malpractice occurs in diverse and sometimes sophisticated forms. Common practices reported in the literature include possession of unauthorised materials, impersonation, collusion, teacher-assisted cheating and prior access to examination information. Such practices demonstrate that malpractice may occur through interactions between candidates and other individuals rather than through candidates acting alone. In particular, the involvement of school personnel or other actors creates serious concerns because examination security depends partly on the integrity of individuals entrusted with examination administration. Where assistance, collusion or organised cheating occurs, malpractice becomes more difficult to detect because individuals who are expected to protect the examination process may themselves become part of the irregularity.

Within Zambia, examination malpractice has been documented as a continuing problem in secondary education. Banda (2015) [2] found that common forms included copying from peers, possession of unauthorised materials, collusion among candidates and invigilator-assisted cheating. These findings demonstrate that

examination malpractice in Zambia has involved both candidate-centred and collaborative forms. Earlier concerns surrounding malpractice also contributed to the development and strengthening of examination regulation through institutions such as the Examinations Council of Zambia. Nevertheless, the persistence of different forms of malpractice suggests that regulatory measures alone have not eliminated dishonest practices from examination settings. As cheating methods evolve, evidence based on the experiences of individuals who directly supervise candidates becomes increasingly important for understanding what actually occurs in examination rooms.

The position of examination invigilators is particularly important in examining this problem. Invigilators occupy the immediate examination environment and are responsible for observing candidates, maintaining examination conditions and identifying irregular behaviour. Their experiences can therefore provide detailed evidence about forms of malpractice that may not be adequately captured through administrative records, candidate surveys or general studies of academic dishonesty. Existing studies have documented examination malpractice from perspectives that include learners, teachers, administrators and institutions, but comparatively less attention has been directed towards the lived experiences of invigilators themselves. Even studies that identify common forms of malpractice may provide limited detail regarding how these practices are actually encountered by invigilators during examination administration.

This limitation is evident in the Zambian literature. Although previous research has established the presence of practices such as copying, unauthorised materials, collusion and invigilator-assisted cheating, much of the available work has concentrated on the general nature, causes and prevalence of examination malpractice. For example, Banda (2015) [2] examined examination malpractice using teachers, pupils and school administrators and provided important evidence about common forms of misconduct. However, the study did not primarily investigate the lived experiences of examination invigilators. Consequently, limited locally grounded evidence exists on the specific forms of malpractice that invigilators themselves encounter while performing examination duties, particularly within Kabwe District. This creates a contextual and empirical gap because forms of malpractice may differ according to local examination environments, available technologies and the ways candidates and other actors attempt to circumvent examination regulations.

Kabwe District provides an important context in which to examine these experiences because secondary school invigilators operate directly within examination settings where conventional and emerging forms of malpractice may occur. Exploring their experiences provides an opportunity to move beyond broad descriptions of examination malpractice and document the actual forms encountered during examination administration. Such evidence can contribute to a clearer understanding of how malpractice manifests itself at school level and provide a basis for strengthening examination integrity within Zambia. It can also contribute to the wider literature by foregrounding the voices of invigilators, whose experiences remain comparatively underrepresented in studies of examination malpractice.

Against this background, this article explores the forms of

examination malpractice experienced by invigilators in selected secondary schools of Kabwe District, Zambia. Specifically, it focuses on the different manifestations of malpractice encountered by invigilators and how these reflect the changing character of examination dishonesty within secondary school examination settings. By concentrating exclusively on the forms of malpractice experienced by invigilators, the article provides locally grounded evidence on an aspect of examination integrity that has received limited focused attention in the Zambian secondary school context.

2. Objective and Research Question

The article was guided by the following objective:

1. To explore the types of examination malpractice experienced by invigilators in selected secondary schools in Kabwe District, Zambia.

The study sought to answer the following research question:

1. What types of examination malpractice do invigilators experience in secondary schools in Kabwe District, Zambia?

3. Theoretical Framework

This article was guided by Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) developed by Albert Bandura (1986) [3]. The theory explains human behaviour through the reciprocal interaction of personal factors, behaviour and the environment. According to Bandura (1986) [3], individuals learn not only through their own direct experiences but also by observing the behaviour of other people and the consequences associated with such behaviour. Important concepts within the theory include observational learning, modelling, reinforcement, outcome expectations, self-efficacy and reciprocal determinism.

Social Cognitive Theory was relevant to this article because examination malpractice occurs within a social and institutional environment in which candidates and other actors interact. Behaviours may be observed, learnt, copied and modified according to the opportunities available within an examination environment. For instance, when candidates observe particular cheating practices being successfully used by others, such practices may be imitated or adapted. Similarly, where dishonest behaviour is tolerated or does not attract immediate consequences, the examination environment may unintentionally reinforce its recurrence. The theory therefore provides a useful lens for understanding why different forms of examination malpractice may persist and evolve within secondary school examination settings.

In relation to the objective of this article, SCT guided the exploration and interpretation of the different forms of examination malpractice encountered by invigilators. Its emphasis on the interaction between behaviour and environmental conditions was particularly relevant to understanding practices ranging from conventional forms of cheating to more organised and technologically facilitated malpractice. The theory consequently helped to situate the experiences reported by invigilators within the wider examination environment rather than treating examination malpractice solely as isolated acts of individual candidates.

4. Methodology

Research Paradigm and Approach

The study was situated within the interpretive paradigm and

employed a qualitative research approach. The interpretive orientation was appropriate because the article sought to understand examination malpractice from the experiences of invigilators who had directly encountered different forms of misconduct during examination administration. The qualitative approach provided an opportunity for participants to describe these experiences in detail and allowed the researcher to identify the different forms of malpractice emerging from their accounts.

Research Design

A descriptive phenomenological research design was employed. The design was appropriate because the study was concerned with the lived experiences of examination invigilators in selected secondary schools of Kabwe District. Descriptive phenomenology enabled the researcher to obtain first-hand accounts of the forms of examination malpractice encountered by invigilators rather than relying exclusively on official examination records or numerical reports. It therefore provided an appropriate framework for describing examination malpractice as experienced within actual examination settings.

Study Population and Sample

The target population comprised examination invigilators with experience in managing examinations in selected secondary schools of Kabwe District. A total of 30 examination invigilators drawn from ten secondary schools participated in the study. The participants had experience in examination administration and were therefore positioned to provide first-hand information concerning the different forms of examination malpractice encountered during examinations.

The study focused on invigilators involved in administering Grade 9 internal examinations (JSSLE), Grade 9 external examinations (JSEE), School Certificate (SC) and General Certificate of Education (GCE) examinations. The experiences considered in the study covered the period 2020–2024, thereby allowing participants to reflect on forms of malpractice encountered across several examination cycles.

Sampling Technique

The participants were selected using purposive sampling. This technique enabled the researcher to deliberately select invigilators who possessed direct knowledge and experience relevant to examination malpractice. Participants were required to have a minimum of two years' experience in examination administration and to have been directly exposed to examination malpractice cases, including involvement in identifying, reporting or handling such incidents. The selection of information-rich participants was important because the article sought detailed accounts of the actual forms of malpractice encountered during examination administration.

Data Collection

Data were collected through unstructured in-depth interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs). The unstructured interviews enabled individual invigilators to describe their experiences freely and provide detailed accounts of the forms of examination malpractice they had encountered. The flexible nature of the interviews also allowed the researcher to probe emerging issues and obtain

clarification where necessary.

Focus group discussions complemented the individual interviews by providing an opportunity for invigilators to share and reflect upon common experiences. Interaction among participants enabled similarities and variations in the forms of malpractice encountered across different examination settings to emerge. With participants' permission, the interviews and discussions were audio-recorded, while field notes were taken to capture additional contextual information relevant to participants' accounts.

Data Analysis

The qualitative data were analysed using Colaizzi's (1978) phenomenological method. The researcher first read and re-read the interview and focus group transcripts to become familiar with participants' accounts. Statements directly relating to the types of examination malpractice encountered by invigilators were then extracted. Meanings were formulated from these statements while remaining faithful to participants' descriptions, after which related meanings were clustered into themes.

Through this analytical process, recurring experiences were organised into the major forms of examination malpractice reported by participants. The analysis ultimately generated five themes: smuggling of unauthorised materials, use of electronic gadgets, collusion and assistance, script swapping and tampering, and impersonation. Member checking was also undertaken with selected participants to establish whether the interpretations adequately reflected their experiences.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles were observed throughout the study. Participants were informed about the purpose and procedures of the research before taking part, and informed consent was obtained. Participation was voluntary, and participants retained the right to withdraw from the study without negative consequences. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained through the use of participant codes or pseudonyms, while research information was securely handled to protect participants' identities.

5. Findings

The findings presented in this section respond specifically to the research objective which sought to explore the types of examination malpractice experienced by invigilators in selected secondary schools in Kabwe District, Zambia. Analysis of participants' accounts revealed five major forms of examination malpractice: **smuggling of unauthorised materials, use of electronic gadgets, assistance, changing or swapping answer scripts, and impersonation**. The findings demonstrate that invigilators encountered both conventional and emerging forms of examination malpractice, some of which involved candidates acting individually while others involved cooperation with teachers, fellow invigilators and other actors (Chileshe *et al.*, 2025) ^[7].

5.1 Smuggling of Unauthorised Materials

The study findings revealed that the smuggling of foreign materials into the examination room was one of the most dominant forms of examination malpractice experienced by invigilators. Invigilators who participated in the study

expressed that candidates often employed various tactics to sneak unauthorised materials into the examination setting. They reported encountering concealed notes, improvised storage methods and creatively disguised aids intended to help candidates cheat.

One invigilator described how candidates relied on improvised methods such as concealing notes on small pieces of paper, rulers or even body parts. These tactics were difficult to detect during screening because of the hidden locations used. Participant K1 had this to say:

From the time I started invigilating exams I have on many occasions caught candidates using what they call 'umwembeshi'. These are either small pieces of paper with pre-written information meant to aid the candidate in the exam or information written on rulers or body parts such as thighs and palms. These are usually difficult to detect during screening because they are hidden in not so accessible areas such as pants and bras (Interview, 2025).

Another participant highlighted that smuggling sometimes occurred long before the examination began, with candidates hiding materials in the examination room itself. Commenting on the same issue, Participant B1 observed that:

Some candidates smuggle materials way before the examination begins. That is why it is important to search the entire room before you allow the candidates in. I have found notebooks stuck to chairs and tables (Interview, 2025).

Reflecting on experiences during the COVID-19 period, another invigilator recounted how candidates exploited face masks to conceal notes. Participant JB1 stated that:

One candidate had written notes on the inside of a face mask. It was folded in a way that made it look untouched, but when they removed it to drink water, I noticed the writing (Interview, 2025).

These accounts show the different ways in which candidates concealed unauthorised materials. The malpractice extended beyond carrying ordinary written notes into examination rooms to include information written on body parts and rulers, materials hidden in clothing, notebooks concealed within examination rooms and notes disguised in ordinary personal items such as face masks.

5.2 Use of Electronic Gadgets

The study also revealed that the use of electronic gadgets had become an increasingly common form of examination malpractice. Invigilators reported that candidates were relying on technologies such as smartphones, smartwatches, Bluetooth devices and concealed earpieces to unlawfully access information during examinations. Participants described this form of malpractice as increasingly sophisticated, particularly because digital devices could be concealed and used to communicate with people outside the examination room.

Discussing the growing use of technology, Participant N1 explained that:

Nowadays it is very common to catch candidates with smart phones in the examination room. Especially the GCE candidates for this year (2025). A lot were found with phones and electronic watches. Some ladies were even using Bluetooth earphones hidden in their wigs. AI has really made things worse (Interview, 2025).

The use of electronic devices was not restricted to retrieving information already stored on a device. Participants also encountered cases in which candidates communicated with individuals outside the examination centre. Participant B3 had this to say:

I caught a candidate who was communicating on WhatsApp with a teacher who was working out answers in a car parked nearby. Asked how they sneaked the phone in, they responded that they came with it when they asked for permission to visit the toilet because they knew they would not be searched again (Interview, 2025).

Other participants described incidents involving smaller and less visible communication devices. Participant JB2 explained that:

During the exam, I noticed a candidate constantly touching their ear. Upon closer inspection, I found a tiny Bluetooth earpiece hidden under their hair (Interview, 2025).

Similarly, Participant KA2 reported the use of a smartwatch that appeared to be an ordinary watch:

A candidate had a smartwatch that looked like a regular watch. It was synced to a phone outside the exam room. They were scrolling through notes during the paper (Interview, 2025).

The experiences demonstrate the technological dimension that examination malpractice had assumed. Invigilators encountered devices ranging from smartphones and smartwatches to concealed Bluetooth earpieces. Particularly notable were cases where technology enabled communication between candidates inside examination rooms and individuals located outside the rooms.

5.3 Assistance

The study findings further revealed that some forms of examination malpractice involved direct assistance given to candidates by both internal and external actors. Invigilators reported instances where teachers, administrators, fellow invigilators and candidates themselves attempted to influence the examination process through different forms of support or collusion. Such assistance ranged from subtle pressure to direct provision of answers and financial inducements.

Some invigilators described situations where school staff actively facilitated cheating. Participant N2 said:

In 2022, I was invigilating in a school where teachers could be seen standing near windows and trying to pass pieces of paper to candidates. When I tried to prevent them, I was replaced by the head teacher. This

goes to show that some administrators are culprits (Interview, 2025).

Other invigilators recounted experiences involving bribery by candidates. Participant K3 submitted that:

There are many temptations in invigilating exams. Sometimes candidates offer money in order for the invigilator to assist them with answers for one or two questions. I had an encounter with a candidate who placed cash on his desk and beckoned to me to pick it so that I assist them. At first, I resisted but later gave in. After all they only needed to be assisted with one or two and they wouldn't see the marks even if I gave them wrong answers. So, I got the money. I regret the action as it was against my principles and the oath I took (Interview, 2025).

Invigilators also reported subtle forms of pressure from teachers. Participant LK2 said:

I was approached by a teacher who asked me to 'be lenient' with a particular candidate. When I refused, they stopped talking to me for the rest of the exam period (Interview, 2025).

Assistance was also reported among examination personnel themselves. Participant B1 described the following experience:

A fellow invigilator whispered answers to a candidate when I stepped out briefly. I reported the incident, but no action was taken because the invigilator was a senior staff member (Interview, 2025).

The findings therefore show that assistance-related examination malpractice involved several actors. The accounts included teachers attempting to pass information to candidates, candidates offering money for assistance, teachers pressuring invigilators to be lenient and fellow invigilators directly providing answers to candidates.

5.4 Changing or Swapping Answer Scripts

Changing or swapping answer scripts emerged as another form of examination malpractice experienced by invigilators. Participants reported incidents involving both candidates and school staff attempting to alter, exchange or replace answer scripts in order to influence examination outcomes. Such activities occurred both during examinations and at vulnerable stages such as the collection and packing of scripts.

Participant K2 recalled an incident involving two candidates:

I witnessed a situation where two candidates sitting next to each other tried to swap answer scripts. Upon interrogation, we discovered that one had registered to assist the other (Interview, 2025).

Participant JB3 similarly described an attempted exchange of scripts towards the end of an examination:

Two candidates tried to exchange scripts during the

last five minutes of the exam. They claimed it was a mistake, but their seating arrangement and identical handwriting raised suspicion (Interview, 2025).

The malpractice was, however, not confined to candidates. Participants also reported attempts by school staff to interfere with answer scripts after examinations. Participant B2 had this to say:

I saw an attempt by a teacher to swap scripts during packing of scripts after the exam. As the invigilator was moving from one class to the other carrying scripts in her hand, this teacher ran after her claiming the candidate had submitted a wrong script which they should have cancelled but instead handed it in. The truth is that someone was writing on behalf of the candidate from an office and took the opportunity during collection of scripts to swap the scripts. Our investigation revealed that the two scripts actually had different handwritings (Interview, 2025).

Another invigilator narrated a case in which a teacher attempted to replace a Grade Nine candidate's examination script. Participant H1 submitted that:

I also encountered a case involving a teacher who wanted to swap scripts for a grade nine candidate. This teacher just came in and tried to find the paper written by the candidate but when they realized they could not find it, they just pushed in the other paper. This case even prompted ECZ to come to the school for investigation after the marking centre reported receiving two scripts with the same exam number but different handwritings and marks (Interview, 2025).

These accounts demonstrate that script swapping occurred at different stages of examination administration and involved both candidates and school personnel. While some candidates attempted to exchange scripts inside the examination room, other incidents involved attempts to replace completed scripts during collection and packing.

5.5 Impersonation

The study revealed that impersonation had become a growing and sophisticated form of examination malpractice. Invigilators reported that candidates increasingly resorted to hiring other individuals, often perceived to be more academically capable, to sit examinations on their behalf. Participants further indicated that the practice could involve teachers, private tuition centres and the manipulation of identification documents.

One invigilator explained that impersonation had become increasingly common, with some candidates paying substantial amounts of money for another person to sit an examination on their behalf. Participant N2 noted that:

Impersonation is very common nowadays because people know that no paper leaks. So, the only thing they can do is find someone to write the exam on their behalf. What people are doing now is to connive with some teachers to find a school leaver who can write the examination on their behalf. Some are even paying as much as twelve thousand kwacha just to have

someone help them (Interview, 2025).

Participants also identified private tuition centres as actors involved in facilitating impersonation. Participant M1 submitted that:

Some private tuition centers are at the centre of impersonation. They collaborate with teachers at GCE centers to register candidates. Usually, they bring a long list of candidates instead of letting candidates register on their own. These same tuition centers organize NRCs for impersonators who then use them to sit the exam on behalf of the actual people whose details are on the NRC (Interview, 2025).

Another incident involved alteration of identification documents. Participant H1 narrated that:

I came across a candidate who looked relatively young. Her age could be approximated to be 19 but the details on the NRC were indicating that she was 36 years old. When we quizzed her further, she revealed that she was writing the exam on behalf of her sister. What she did was to replace the picture on the NRC. The candidate was expelled from the exam and handed over to the police (Interview, 2025).

Participant M3 further observed that:

Impersonation is a growing trend, often facilitated by organised networks. These cases show the need for biometric verification, strict ID checks, and collaboration with law enforcement to deter identity fraud (Interview, 2025).

Therefore, the participants' accounts show that impersonation was not merely an isolated arrangement between two individuals. Cases reported by invigilators involved payments to impersonators, collaboration with teachers and private tuition centres, use of NRCs belonging to other individuals and alteration of photographs on identification documents. Collectively, the findings portray impersonation as an organised form of examination malpractice encountered by invigilators in the selected secondary schools.

6. Discussion of Findings

The study explored the types of examination malpractice experienced by invigilators in selected secondary schools in Kabwe District, Zambia. Five major forms emerged from the participants' experiences: smuggling of unauthorised materials, use of electronic gadgets, collusion and assistance, script swapping and tampering, and impersonation. These findings demonstrate that examination malpractice within secondary schools is no longer confined to conventional practices such as carrying written notes or copying from another candidate. Instead, the experiences of invigilators revealed a combination of traditional, technologically enabled and organised forms of malpractice involving candidates as well as other actors within and outside examination centres. The findings therefore reinforce the view that examination malpractice continues to evolve in response to technological developments and

opportunities existing within examination environments (Oko and Adie, 2016; Okunlola, 2024) ^[11, 12].

6.1 Smuggling of Unauthorised Materials

The study established that smuggling of unauthorised materials was one of the most dominant forms of examination malpractice experienced by invigilators. Candidates concealed pre-written information on small pieces of paper, rulers and body parts such as thighs and palms, while some materials were hidden in clothing, including pants and bras. Other candidates went further by placing materials in examination rooms before examinations commenced. An interesting dimension was the use of ordinary personal items to conceal information, illustrated by the case in which notes were written inside a face mask. These experiences demonstrate that although smuggling is one of the conventional forms of examination malpractice, the methods through which it is practised continue to change.

This finding is consistent with Okunlola (2024) ^[12], who observed that candidates conceal unauthorised materials in clothing and other locations that are difficult for examination personnel to search. Saleh (2025) ^[13] similarly identified concealed notes and micro-sheets among the common forms of malpractice encountered during examinations. The finding further agrees with earlier observations by Czek (2000) ^[5] that examination malpractice is adaptive because candidates continually modify cheating techniques in response to examination controls. The experiences from Kabwe therefore demonstrate that the persistence of unauthorised materials should not be interpreted as evidence that examination malpractice has remained unchanged. Rather, candidates have become increasingly creative in where and how such materials are concealed.

Viewed through Social Cognitive Theory, these practices can be understood partly in relation to observational learning and modelling. Bandura (1986) ^[3] argues that individuals may acquire behaviour by observing others, particularly where the observed behaviour appears to produce desired outcomes. In an examination environment, candidates may learn methods of concealing unauthorised materials from peers who have previously used such techniques. A successful method can subsequently be copied, modified and transmitted among candidates. The variety of concealment techniques reported by invigilators therefore suggests that examination malpractice may develop within a social environment in which cheating practices are learnt and refined rather than occurring entirely as isolated individual actions.

6.2 Use of Electronic Gadgets

The use of electronic gadgets emerged as one of the most significant developments in the changing character of examination malpractice. Invigilators encountered smartphones, electronic watches, smartwatches, Bluetooth earpieces and other concealed digital devices. Particularly striking was the finding that some candidates concealed Bluetooth earphones beneath their hair or wigs, while smartwatches were disguised as ordinary watches. The case of a candidate communicating through WhatsApp with a teacher who was solving examination questions from a car outside the examination centre further illustrates how technology has extended examination malpractice beyond

the physical boundaries of the examination room. The dissertation findings clearly demonstrate that candidates were using smartphones, smartwatches and Bluetooth devices to access or communicate information during examinations.

The finding supports Giray *et al.* (2025) and Hysaj *et al.* (2023) ^[9], whose work points to the growing role of digital technologies in academic dishonesty. It also corresponds with Czek's (2000) ^[5] observation that technological advancement creates new opportunities for candidates to conceal and access information during examinations. What distinguishes the Kabwe findings is the manner in which relatively accessible consumer technologies were adapted for examination malpractice. A smartwatch could appear to an invigilator as an ordinary wristwatch, while a miniature Bluetooth earpiece could be hidden underneath hair. Smartphones further enabled candidates to communicate with individuals who were not physically present in the examination room.

The findings suggest that technological advancement is altering both the form and spatial character of examination malpractice. Previously, cheating largely depended upon information physically carried into the examination room or communication between candidates sitting within proximity to one another. Electronic communication allows assistance to originate from outside the examination centre while reaching a candidate almost instantaneously. The WhatsApp incident reported in this study demonstrates this transformation particularly clearly because the candidate and the individual providing answers did not need to occupy the same physical space. Examination malpractice can therefore involve a network of actors connected digitally rather than merely candidates interacting within the examination room.

Social Cognitive Theory is useful in interpreting this development because behaviour is understood as arising from reciprocal interactions between individuals, behaviour and their environment (Bandura, 1986) ^[3]. The contemporary technological environment provides candidates with devices and communication platforms that can be adapted for dishonest purposes. At the same time, observing others successfully use these technologies may encourage imitation and further innovation. The examination environment and technological environment consequently interact in ways that create new possibilities for malpractice. This explains why examination malpractice should be viewed as dynamic rather than as a fixed collection of dishonest practices.

6.3 Collusion and Assistance

Another important finding was that examination malpractice involved assistance and collusion between candidates and different actors within and outside schools. Participants reported teachers attempting to pass pieces of paper through examination-room windows, candidates offering money to invigilators, teachers requesting invigilators to be lenient with particular candidates and fellow invigilators whispering answers. One of the most revealing accounts came from an invigilator who admitted accepting money from a candidate and subsequently providing assistance. These experiences demonstrate that examination malpractice cannot always be attributed exclusively to candidates because individuals entrusted with educational and examination responsibilities may also become participants in the malpractice. The

original findings explicitly identified teachers, administrators and fellow invigilators among actors involved in assistance.

These findings are consistent with Dey and Sanyal (2018) [6], who identified organised copying and invigilator-assisted cheating as important manifestations of examination malpractice. They also correspond with Banda (2015) [2], who reported candidate collusion and invigilator-assisted cheating within Zambian secondary schools. The present study, however, provides a more direct view of such malpractice through the lived experiences of invigilators. Rather than merely establishing that collusion occurs, the participants' narratives demonstrate how it can occur through bribery, whispering of answers, passing written information and pressure exerted upon examination personnel.

The involvement of teachers and invigilators makes collusion particularly serious because these are among the personnel expected to preserve examination integrity. Where an invigilator or teacher becomes an active participant in malpractice, the distinction between the person committing malpractice and the person expected to prevent it becomes blurred. The finding that one invigilator reported another senior staff member for whispering answers but no action was taken also indicates how authority relationships within examination environments may interact with malpractice. The implication from the findings is that examination dishonesty can assume an organised social character rather than remaining an individual candidate's attempt to gain an unfair advantage.

This finding strongly resonates with Bandura's (1986) [3] Social Cognitive Theory. Observational learning implies that behaviour can become normalised when individuals repeatedly observe others engaging in it without meaningful negative consequences. If candidates observe teachers, invigilators or other authority figures facilitating malpractice, such behaviour may communicate that cheating is tolerated or achievable. Similarly, examination personnel who observe colleagues benefiting from unethical conduct without sanctions may become more susceptible to reproducing such behaviour. The social environment can therefore reinforce either examination integrity or examination malpractice depending on the behavioural examples and consequences that individuals observe.

6.4 Script Swapping and Tampering

The study further established changing or swapping answer scripts as a distinct form of examination malpractice. Candidates were reported attempting to exchange scripts during examinations, particularly towards the end of examination sessions. More serious incidents involved teachers attempting to replace candidates' scripts during the collection and packing process. In one case, an investigation established that two scripts associated with the same candidate had different handwriting. Another incident eventually attracted investigation by the Examinations Council of Zambia after two scripts bearing the same examination number but different handwriting and marks were received at the marking centre. These accounts demonstrate that examination malpractice can continue even after a candidate has completed writing an examination.

The finding is consistent with studies such as Mumba (2020) [10], Chikezie (2018) [4] and Awoniyi *et al.* (2024) [1], which identify manipulation and substitution of examination

scripts among serious forms of examination malpractice. However, the Kabwe findings add an important contextual dimension by showing that script swapping occurred at different points in the examination process. Candidates could attempt to exchange scripts while still inside examination rooms, whereas other actors could attempt to substitute scripts during collection and packing. This means that the integrity of an examination does not depend solely upon what happens while candidates are writing; the handling of completed scripts is equally important.

Another notable aspect of this finding is the degree of coordination involved. The case in which an individual was reportedly writing a replacement script from an office suggests that script tampering can require planning and cooperation beyond the examination room. Similarly, the finding that one candidate had apparently registered in order to assist another suggests that some forms of malpractice may be organised before the examination begins. These findings strengthen the argument that contemporary examination malpractice may operate through coordinated arrangements involving several individuals rather than spontaneous actions by individual candidates.

From the perspective of Social Cognitive Theory, such coordinated behaviour reflects the interaction between individual intentions and enabling social environments. Bandura (1986) [3] emphasises that behaviour is affected by environmental opportunities and social influences. Where individuals perceive weaknesses during script collection, movement or packing, these environmental conditions may provide opportunities for malpractice. Moreover, where such practices have previously succeeded, observation and reinforcement can contribute to their reproduction. The findings therefore suggest that the examination environment itself forms part of the context within which malpractice behaviours are learnt and enacted.

6.5 Impersonation

Impersonation emerged as another serious and increasingly organised form of examination malpractice. Invigilators reported cases in which individuals were hired to write examinations on behalf of registered candidates. Some participants indicated that candidates could pay as much as **K12,000** for impersonation services. Other cases involved altered National Registration Cards (NRCs), substituted photographs and collaboration involving teachers and private tuition centres. In one particularly revealing incident, an individual who appeared approximately 19 years old presented an NRC indicating an age of 36 years and subsequently admitted that she was sitting the examination on behalf of her sister. The photograph on the NRC had been replaced. These accounts are directly documented in the study findings.

The findings are consistent with the wider literature identifying impersonation as an established form of examination malpractice. Saleh (2025) [13] and Mwanza (2019) similarly report impersonation and identity manipulation within examination contexts. What is particularly significant in the present study is the indication that impersonation may operate through organised arrangements involving several actors. Participants did not describe impersonation simply as one candidate asking another individual to write an examination. Instead, their accounts included payments, recruitment of school leavers, collaboration with teachers, private tuition centres and

manipulation of official identification documents.

The reported payment of up to K12,000 further indicates that impersonation may have acquired a commercial dimension. Where individuals are financially rewarded for sitting examinations on behalf of others, malpractice potentially becomes an organised transaction involving a provider and a beneficiary. Similarly, the alleged involvement of some private tuition centres suggests that examination malpractice may extend beyond individual examination centres into wider networks. This is particularly concerning because organised impersonation can undermine the fundamental assumption that the person receiving an examination result is the same person whose knowledge and competence were assessed.

The finding can also be interpreted through Social Cognitive Theory. Bandura (1986) [3] maintains that behaviour is influenced by observed outcomes and environmental reinforcement. Where candidates perceive that impersonation has enabled others to obtain desired examination outcomes, they may become more willing to reproduce the behaviour. The financial rewards reportedly offered to impersonators may provide another form of reinforcement. The social networks described by participants can further facilitate modelling and transmission of the practice by connecting individuals seeking examination assistance with persons capable of providing it.

6.6 Overall Interpretation of the Findings

Across the five themes, the study demonstrates that examination malpractice experienced by invigilators in Kabwe District was **multifaceted, adaptive and increasingly organised**. Traditional methods remained evident, particularly through smuggling of written materials, but these existed alongside technologically enabled practices involving smartphones, smartwatches and Bluetooth devices. At the same time, collusion, script swapping and impersonation demonstrated that malpractice could involve coordinated relationships among candidates, teachers, invigilators and other actors. The study therefore moves beyond understanding examination malpractice simply as an individual learner's dishonest behaviour and shows that some forms operate through broader social interactions and organised arrangements.

Social Cognitive Theory provides an important explanation for this pattern. Bandura's (1986) [3] concept of reciprocal determinism suggests that personal factors, behaviour and environmental influences continually interact. Within examination settings, candidates and other actors operate in environments where they observe the actions of peers and authority figures, assess the consequences of those actions and potentially reproduce behaviours that appear successful. Examination malpractice can therefore be learnt, reinforced, modified and transmitted within social environments. The changing forms identified in this study from *umwembeshi* and concealed notes to digitally mediated communication and organised impersonation illustrate how dishonest behaviour may adapt to changing opportunities and environments.

The findings consequently contribute to the literature by providing direct evidence from invigilators who encounter malpractice during examination administration. Whereas earlier Zambian studies such as Banda (2015) [2] documented copying, unauthorised materials and collusion more generally, the present study provides detailed accounts

of how particular forms manifest themselves within examination settings in Kabwe District. The emergence of concealed digital devices, communication with external actors, organised script replacement and financially motivated impersonation indicates that the nature of examination malpractice is becoming more complex. Understanding these changing forms is therefore essential to preserving the validity, fairness and credibility of examinations within Zambia's secondary education system.

7. Conclusion

The study concludes that examination malpractice experienced by invigilators in selected secondary schools of Kabwe District takes diverse and increasingly sophisticated forms. The major forms identified were smuggling of unauthorised materials, use of electronic gadgets, collusion and assistance, script swapping and tampering, and impersonation. While conventional practices such as concealed written notes remain prevalent, the increasing use of smartphones, smartwatches, Bluetooth devices and organised assistance demonstrates that examination malpractice is continually evolving. The involvement of candidates, teachers, invigilators and other actors further shows that some forms of malpractice extend beyond individual cheating to coordinated practices that threaten the credibility and integrity of examinations.

8. Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were:

1. Examination authorities and secondary schools should strengthen examination security to respond to both conventional and emerging forms of malpractice.
2. Greater attention should be given to detecting concealed electronic devices and unauthorised materials, strengthening candidate identification procedures to reduce impersonation, and safeguarding answer scripts during collection and packing.
3. Accountability among all personnel involved in examination administration should also be strengthened because some forms of malpractice involve collaboration between candidates and examination personnel.

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