

**A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF KENYAN DAILY NEWSPAPERS'
REPRESENTATION OF NATIONAL EXAMINATIONS CHEATING**

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ABSTRACT

Although there are considerable studies on examination cheating globally and in Kenya, there is limited focus on how the media discursively construct the phenomenon. The study explored Kenyan daily newspapers' representation of national examinations cheating guided by the following objectives: to examine how the act of examination cheating is discursively constructed in Kenyan daily newspapers; to investigate how social actors in national examination cheating are discursively constructed in Kenyan daily newspaper; to evaluate how the measures against examination cheating are discursively constructed in Kenyan daily newspapers. Data was drawn from the *Daily Nation* and *The Standard*, Kenyan newspapers with the widest readership. Focus was given to the news and opinion articles, and their headlines. The study focused on the period between 2022 and 2024, a period that was characterized by the massive development in the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI), which contributed to ease of cheating. It further concentrated on the months of November and December and a month post- result release, a period when there is usually wide coverage of examination issues. Sampling followed a cyclic and iterative procedure until discursive saturation was reached. The study was guided by Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) which is both a theory and a method. It further adopted Michel Foucault's theory of disciplinary power. CDA was employed to make transparent linguistic and discursive strategies through which examination cheating and its aspects are constructed in newspapers' discourse. Foucault's theory of disciplinary power provided a broader sociological lens to explain how the discursive constructions relate to mechanisms of surveillance, normalization and punishment. This integration enhanced triangulation, making it possible to connect micro-level textual choices to macro-level structures of power. The analysis was further complemented by corpus tools; AntConc (Version 4.3.1) to aid in finding frequencies, salient lexical and grammatical patterns and SKELL Engine to further support the analysis of collocations. The findings reveal that the act of examination cheating is dominantly constructed as a crime rather than as a structural problem embedded within the education system. Through naming and reference, collocations, overwording, and metaphors, cheating is framed as a threat that must be battled, contained, and eradicated. Grammatical patterns such as modality, nominalization and grammatical processes foreground cheating act as deviance while backgrounding structural pressures such as high-stakes testing and inequality. Institutional actors are positioned as competent and morally committed guardians of national integrity. Non-institutional actors like students are labelled as cheats; teachers are represented as professional traitors; parents appear as facilitators; and barely named criminalized groups are constructed as cartels and syndicates. Institutional and elite voices dominate the discourse, while the perspectives of students, parents, and other non-elite actors are marginalized or silenced. Measures against national examination cheating are naturalized as inevitable, necessary and sufficient by constructing them as punitive and deterrent, security and surveillance operation, legally mandated, technological and reform-oriented. Examinations emerge as tools that render individuals visible, measurable, and correctable, while legitimizing expanded surveillance and punitive control. The study concludes that Kenyan newspapers do not merely report on cheating; they normalize institutional authority, reproduce their discourses and sustain them. This study offers insights into

linguistic and discursive strategies used in examination cheating discourse, important to linguists. It also informs journalistic practices in reporting about examination cheating. It is hoped that it will contribute to education reforms, specifically on matters of assessment and evaluation