

## **Gaps in Examination Records Management Procedures: The Reasons for Missing Marks Syndrome in Universities in Kenya**

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### **Abstract**

Universities are institutions of higher education which confer undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in a variety of subjects. There is need for greater care in the management of examination records at every stage of the university student's life cycle so as to avoid the pain of students failing to graduate on time. This study was conceived with the purpose of establishing if examination records management procedures could be the cause of missing examination marks in universities in Meru and Nyeri counties in Kenya. The objective in this paper is to demonstrate the relationship between missing marks and examination records management procedures in universities. Descriptive survey research design was used in the study. Target population of 482 full time lecturers and school examination coordinators with sample size of 214 respondents, and whose response rate was 128(60%) was used. Structured questionnaires were used to collect data. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics. The findings revealed that the selected universities had documented examination records management procedures that were updated after every five years; unfortunately, the enforcement of the procedure was lacking. The study concludes that the main cause of missing marks in the universities was lack of central enforcement of examination procedures. The study recommends the training of all lecturers and examination coordinators on basic records management to ensure adherence to examination procedures to check cases of missing marks and scripts.

**Key Words:** *Examination records, Missing marks, Examination procedures, Examination system, Examination coordinators*

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### **1.0 Introduction**

Universities are institutions of higher education which grant academic degrees in a variety of subjects and provide both undergraduate education and postgraduate education. Examinations are vital procedures in determining the performance of learners in learning institutions. Indeed,

Papadopoulos and Goudiras (2004) note that examinations in higher education play a direct role in the assessment of students and the measurement of their progress. Bhardwaj and Singh (2011) observe that the backbone of the university education is in its quality of teaching and examination.

Thus examination records form part of the body of records generated by universities that need proper management. Chinyemba and Ngulube (2005) in their study in KwaZulu-Natal University in South Africa encouraged universities to support proper management of examination records. They argued that effective records management could help universities manage their information efficiently, fulfill their mandate, preserve their corporate memory, and foster accountability and good governance. Atulomah (2011) of Nigeria also affirms that “accurate records and good records keeping are the bedrock of planning for the future in the university system”. The University College Dublin (2012) was of the same view when they insisted that examination records security is paramount at all stages of a records life cycle.

Since examinations are the life of university education, the process of examination and the resultant records are classified among the vital records that must be well managed. Examination records must be well managed to ensure a trail of student’s performance and moderate graduation delays due to missing academic. Timely retrieval of academic records of a student becomes a key performance indicator for a university. Poor management of examination records would easily tarnish the university’s image to the public as this would affect university students whose wish is to graduate with authentic academics degree certificates and transcripts that are acceptable in the job market.

In Kenya for example, the Commission for University Education (CUE, 2014) demands for an elaborate description of examination processes. It is therefore critical to effectively manage examinations records as they form the bulk of records in universities due to the high frequency of examinations and the high number of courses that are

examined every semester. This study demonstrates the relationship between failure in examination records management procedures in Kenyan Universities and missing examination marks

Chinyemba and Ngulube (2005) from South Africa, argue that if examination records are not properly managed or misplaced, then valuable evidence would be lost forever. Shepherd (2006) on his part holds that if records are not properly managed, records will often be unavailable for purposes for which they were created. Improper records management practices would lead to loss of records, premature destruction of records or retaining unnecessary records in active storage space.

Dublin (2012) defines examination record as a documented proof of a formal test or transaction which refers to academic activity which falls within the normal routine of an academic institution. Oche (2012) summarizes the appalling state of records management in Nigeria thus;

one of the major issues in the examination process in the university that has often pricked and agitated the minds of many persons in the society is therefore the incidence of missing scripts and scores in many departments and faculties in our universities... students after writing the examination, it turns out to be that they have no scores and grades recorded against their names and registration numbers as a result of missing scripts (pp.138-139).

In Kenya there has been an outcry of missing marks in both public and private universities which has consequently led to hundreds of students missing graduation (Gisesa, 2012). Muindi (2011) commenting on the matter of missing marks concurred that majority of students who had failed to graduate from the University of Nairobi

claimed that they had done and passed all the examinations. However, the university examination records showed contrary to their claims.

Gisesa (2012) reported that missing marks had delayed some students' dreams of graduating. Thousands of students across the country's public and private universities were forced to put off their graduation until their marks were found or they had to re-sit the units. Makworo (2013) lamented on the issue of missing marks noting that affected students had to make 'a million trips to and from the university' trying to find a solution. Makworo (2013) continues to say that others missed lifetime employment opportunities and even graduation because of mistakes of those responsible for taking care of examination answer booklets. Magazine Reel (2014) reported that there were fears that two hundred (200) students could not graduate in the second graduation ceremony of 2014 because of missing marks in a local university in Kenya (Magazine Reel, 2014).

The issue of missing marks is a common phenomenon in many universities in Kenya. Since students are the main complainants in the issue of missing marks, it is assumed that the same problem of missing marks is inherent in the universities under study. The four Universities chosen were among the 39 chartered universities in Kenya according to the Commission for University Education (CUE) of Kenya. The two counties, out of 47 counties in Kenya, were purposely chosen due to convenience.

These counties have four universities three of which are public universities that were once constituent colleges of older universities. These public universities have traditions inherited from the mother universities and which have been blended well with their own established attributes as newly founded universities. The private university in the study is a well-established

chartered university with an enrolment of over 5000 students. As such, the findings from the selected universities are a true representation of the situation in all universities in Kenya. Failure to strictly enforce the examination records management procedures could be a contributor to the current state where there are complaints on missing marks in Kenyan universities. The study discusses how examination records management procedures could affect availability of students' examination marks/grades in the universities, hence leading to missing marks.

## **2.0 Materials and Methods**

The study employed descriptive survey research design which describes the state of affairs as it exists by collecting information about peoples' attitudes, opinions or habits (Kombo & Tromp, 2006). The study involved four universities situated in Meru and Nyeri counties of Kenya, namely; Dedan Kimathi University of Technology (DeKUT), Karatina University (KARU), Kenya Methodist University (KeMU) and Meru University of Science and Technology (MUST).

The two counties were purposively sampled. The target population of the study was 482 (459 full time lecturers and 23 school examination coordinators) working in three public and one private university in Nyeri and Meru Counties in Kenya. Of the 482 respondents, a sample size comprising of 214 respondents was obtained using Krejcie and Morgan (1970) Table of Determining Sample Size for Research Activities. The study employed stratified and simple random sampling techniques. Out of the sampled population, 128 comprising of 113 full time lecturers and 15 school examination coordinators responded, translating to approximately 60% return rate.

Two sets of structured questionnaires were administered to collect data from the fulltime lecturers and school examination coordinators. The respondents were given two weeks to fill the questionnaires before they were collected. The respondents were treated with respect and caution was exercised not to infringe their rights to privacy. The respondents were assured of confidentiality, and hence encouraged to be honest and provide truthful information. The data that was collected was strictly used for the purpose of the study. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics. The quantitative data was analyzed using percentages and presented in tables and graphs developed using Microsoft Excel.

### **3.0 Results and Discussions**

Response to a question meant to establish whether the examination procedures were made available to the respondents was in the affirmative at 100(88%) lecturers, and 14(93%) examination coordinators. This finding points to the fact that the universities had documented examination records management procedures. The availability of examination procedure manuals to lecturers and examination officers should be used as a guide to effectively manage examination records. As an attempt to establish how conversant the respondents were in examination records handling procedures, they were asked to indicate exam procedures they were involved in. Table 1 shows the procedures lecturers were involved in.

**Table 1**

*Lecturers' Response on Examination Records Management Procedures Involved In*

<b>Examination Procedures</b>	<b>Respondents</b>	<b>Responses</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Setting examination papers	113	113	100.0
Moderating examination papers	113	104	92.0
Proof reading examinations	113	103	91.0
Invigilating/supervising examinations	113	103	91.0
Marking examinations	113	101	89.4
Posting/keying/entering in examinations marks	113	72	64.0
Storing and safeguarding marked answer scripts	113	43	38.1
Generating marks/grades sheets	113	41	36.0
Generating graduation lists	113	0	0.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>113</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>100</b>

Lecturers indicated that they were involved in a number of examination-related activities as shown in table 1 above. The activities that had over 50% response included; exam setting, moderating, proof reading examination papers, invigilating/supervising examinations, marking examinations and posting/keying/entering in examinations marks. Although 43(38%) of the lecturers

asserted they do not store or safeguard marked answer scripts, this could be their responsibility until they deliver them to the final custodian. Failure to have this loophole sealed could have been a factor contributing to loss of marked examination booklets.

41(36%) of the respondents were of the view that they do not generate marks/grades sheets which could be an indication that this

procedure might not be what the lecturers are expected to do. The moment the answer script is not well guarded and it happens that it is lost before it is submitted to the examination coordinator, then there could be

high chances of missing mark. The examination coordinators were also asked to indicate exam procedures they were involved in, the responses were as reflected in table 2.

**Table 2**

*Responsibilities of Examination Coordinators*

<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>Respondents</b>	<b>Responses</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Receiving draft examination question papers	15	15	100
Receiving marked answer scripts	15	15	100
Storing and maintaining answer booklets	15	10	67
Updating/entry of missing marks	15	14	93
Entering/posting marks into electronic systems	15	5	33
Archiving/ disposing examination records	15	5	33
Maintaining transcripts and certificates	15	0	0

From the research findings, the examination coordinators were involved in receiving draft examination question papers and marked answer scripts, and updating/entry of missing marks, storing and maintaining answer booklets. It was evident that a small portion of examination coordinators 5(33%) indicated that they were involved in entering/posting marks into electronic systems and archiving/disposing examination records. This low response rate could also be attributed to the fact that the examination coordinators are involved in uploading backlog marks in the system or posting marks for courses they have taught in a semester as they are also lecturers.

It is evident that examination coordinators are custodians of the examination records and execute activities and follow procedures that relate to the sensitive examination records. It goes without saying that the examination coordinators' offices should be well secured for protection of the valuable information accruing from examination procedures. University College of Dublin (2012) is of the same view that examination

records security is paramount at all stages of a records life cycle. To be able to manage these records efficiently, some basic records management skills and competencies are in order.

It can be noted that there are procedures that overlap between lecturers and examination coordinators which include posting examination marks in the students' management system, and storing of marked answer booklets. This could be attributed to the fact that examination coordinators are lecturers and post their examination results in the system. The research findings showed that examination coordinators were charged with the responsibility of inputting missing marks.

This activity relates well to policies established in some universities for example in Kenyatta University (2017) where school examination coordinators are charged with the responsibility of posting un-posted historical marks into the examination system. This is an attempt to reduce the incidences of incomplete examination

records or missing marks which if not addressed can affect negatively the management of examination records. The research sought to establish if the respondents had basic records management skills competencies.

The outcome indicated that a majority of the lecturers 71(63%) and examination coordinators 9(60%) had no training in records management with only 42(37%) of lecturers and 6(40%) of examination coordinators indicating that they had training in records management. Information Communication Technology (ICT) competencies. ICT competencies among staff would be paramount in the success in inputting marks into the electronic examination systems.

Lack of ICT competencies could lead to loss of valuable data hence leading to missing marks, incomplete grades, distorted marks/grades or even wrong data entry in the system. To establish the frequency of updates of the examination procedures manual, a question to that effect was asked.

The study sought to establish if the manuals had loop holes that could lead to mishandling of examination records hence leading to missing marks or lost answer scripts. Responses varied from five years to once in two years. A majority of the lecturer respondents 30(30%) and examination coordinators 7(50%) indicated that the examination procedures manual was updated once in five years. However, there were varied responses as indicated in table 3.

**Table 3**

*Frequency of updating examination procedures manual*

Frequency of Update	Lecturers		Examination Coordinators	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Five Years	30	30%	7	50%
Once Per Year	25	25%	1	7%
Once in two years	21	21%	5	36%
Never	0	0%	0	0%
Any other	24	24%	1	7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>100%</b>

The varied responses is an indicator that users of developed procedures were never involved or simply ignorant. The findings point to the fact that if the users of the examination records management procedures manual are not sure of when the updates to the tool is done, then the tool might not even be current.

Lack of regular updates of the examination records management procedures could be one of the issues affecting effective management of examination records as

policies relating to examinations might change and the manual is not updated to capture the issues at hand, for example; how to upload incomplete examination grades, hence bringing disparities. There is need for enforcement of the examination records management procedures manual to ensure efficiency and standardization of procedures in any university.

Too much delays in regularly updating the examination records management, manual assumes that examination management

systems are static. In case changes are made in the examination management systems, for example; upgrades, a corresponding update in the manual should be done. Failure to do so would lead to complacency by the examination records handlers and hence possibilities of loss of vital information such as marks. The researcher sought to find out if there was enforcement in the use of the examination records management procedures.

This question was posed to lecturers and examination coordinators. The findings pointed that lecturers 102(90%) and examination coordinators 13(87%) were in agreement that there was enforcement of examination procedures. Only 13(10%) and 2(13%) of the lecturers and examination coordinators respectively were of the contrary opinion. The high response rates in favor of enforcement of the examination records management procedures manual meant that the universities acknowledge importance of conformity to records management procedures.

The findings indicated that there were respondents that were of the contrary response on enforcement, this would be an indication that there could be a possibility of laxity in ensuring that marks are entered in the examination systems by the time they are released by the university senates. It would also indicate that there could be some

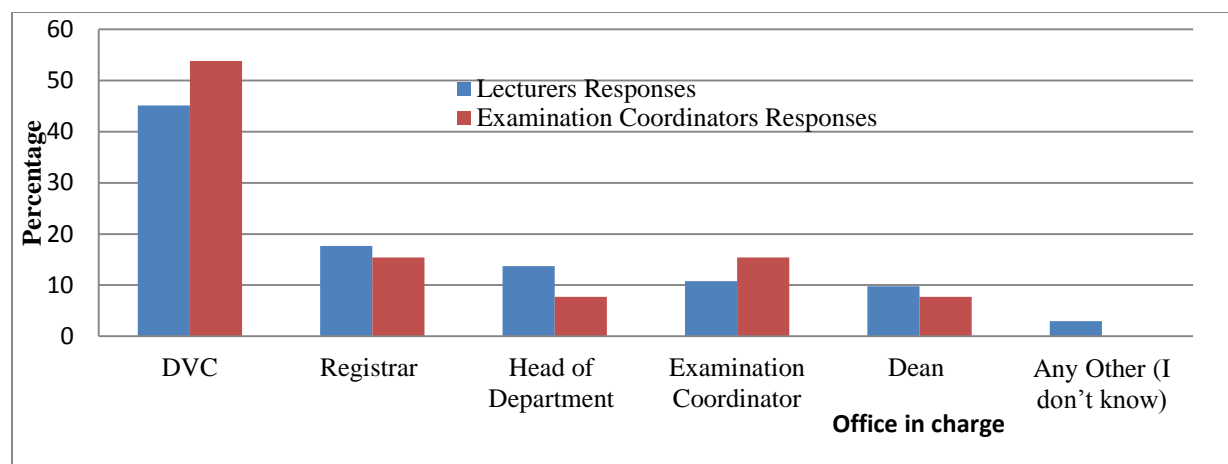
examination records handlers not be keen when safeguarding records, after all according to them there is no enforcement of the dictates of the examination records procedures.

A follow up question meant to establish which office was in charge of enforcement of the examination procedures was asked. There were varied responses with a majority of respondents at 46(45%), and examination coordinators at 7(54%). Lecturers were of the view that Deputy Vice Chancellor was in charge. Other offices cited included Academic Registrar, Head of Department, Examination coordinator and Dean of Schools. For a high level office to be in charge of enforcement of examination procedures would be excellent. It simply means that uniformity and compliance to the manual across the different schools and academic departments would be encouraged.

The varied responses mean that there is ambiguity in enforcement of the procedures in some universities under this study. This could be an issue affecting management of examination records because if the enforcement is not specific, it can lead to relaxation of the implementation of the procedure by the examination coordinators and lecturers. Figure 1 compares the responses between lecturers and examination coordinators

**Figure 1**

*Office in charge of enforcement of examination records management procedures*



The researcher sought to find out the respondents' opinion on the efficiency of the examination records management procedures. Both categories of respondents, namely; the lecturers and the examination coordinators were asked the same question. The findings from the lecturers indicated that the procedures were generally efficient 107(96%), while the examination coordinators indicated that the procedures were efficient 14(93%). It can be said from these responses that the procedures laid down to manage examination records are okay.

To confirm that indeed the procedures were truly efficient, the researcher sought to establish whether there were examination related complaints from students. A question to establish if there were complaints was asked. The coordinators indicated that missing marks, incomplete results and lost answer scripts were the common complaints from students with 6(67%), 5(56%) and 4(44%) respectively. The common complaints received by lecturers and examination coordinators were 49 (49%), 34(34%) and 20(20%) respectively, as shown in table 4.

**Table 4**

*Complaints received by Coordinators and Lecturers from Students*

Category	Coordinators	%	Lecturers	%
Missing marks/grades	6	67	49	49
Distorted marks/grades	3	33	2	2
Wrong student's registration number in the system	2	22	8	8
Mis-spelt student's names	3	33	19	19
Lost answer scripts	4	44	20	20
Incomplete results in the transcripts	5	56	34	34
Data loss in electronic examination system	0	0	0	0
Hacking of electronic examination system	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	-	-	-	-



The above complaints vividly indicate that there are issues affecting examination records management in the universities under study. These issues are a pointer that examination records management is not effective. Several factors such as lack of records management training, inadequate Information Technology (IT) competencies, lack of regular updates of procedures, lack of a central office that enforces compliance to procedures could be attributed to this. These findings resonate with other previous researches such as Muindi (2011), Gisesa (2012), Makworo (2013) and Magazine Reel (2014) who had alluded that there was an outcry in Kenyan Universities on 'missing marks' and students failing to graduate on time because of the problem.

The respondents were asked to propose measures that can be taken by universities to overcome challenges relating to examination records management. Several proposals were floated including: proper storage and archiving of answer scripts, marking of exams and results posting to be done as per timelines, enforcement of examination policy, monitoring of the implementation of examination management procedures, holding lecturers accountable for missing marks and disciplining lecturers who fail to submit all marks or fail to enter exams into system on time, decentralize exams records management to the departments, and conduct in-service training for teaching staff and examination coordinators in how to handle missing marks.

Missing marks is a dependent variable, and if the independent variable would be altered by strictly following the dictates, then cases of missing marks would reduce but if not strictly followed, there would be escalation of missing marks.

#### **4.0 Conclusion**

The study was conceived with a purpose of establishing if examination records management procedures could be the cause of missing examination marks. The universities under study had well laid examination records management procedures. Nevertheless, there were complaints that were received from students by the respondents. Majority of complaints revolved around missing marks and lost answer scripts. The missing marks syndrome is indeed lack of total adherence to laid down examination records management procedures.

If lecturers followed all the examination procedures as stipulated in the manual, there would be a great reduction in cases of missing marks in universities. Missing marks could also be attributed to lack basic records management competencies, lack of regular updates of examination records management procedures, lack of a central office that enforces compliance to procedures and poor storage and safeguarding of marked answer scripts before delivery to the final custodian. The complaints raised by students touching on examination records could be mitigated with effective records management competencies to all who handle examinations records. This will help avoid untold suffering to students who may miss to graduate on time or often times graduate with wrong grades. Indeed, the compliance or non-compliance to the examination records management procedures affects the missing marks.

#### **5.0 Value and Implication**

Failure to implement the examination records management procedures is tantamount to missing examination marks in the universities. The universities should hold lecturers accountable for missing marks as

they are the primary handlers of answer scripts for marking purposes and safe custody during marking. The lecturers should account for each and every script and marks posted under their mandate.

Serious consequences on this issue should be outlined in examination policies. There is need to develop and enforce policies and procedures that have direct impact on how examination records are managed at all stages of a student's life cycle. There is need for clarity on the office that develops and enforces policies and procedures for accountability. Basic record management training should be provided to all those appointed to be in charge of records management activities.

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