

CONCERNS ON ISSUES OF EXAMINATION MALPRACTICES A CASE STUDY OF ACCRA POLYTECHNIC

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ABSTRACT

Examination malpractice contravenes the rules and regulations set by examination bodies. This research looks at the forms, the factors and key players in examination malpractices, as well as the consequences and measures to combat this menace. Administering of questionnaires using random sampling, and analysis of collected data were done. 90 out of the 96 sampled-staff in Accra Polytechnic responded. Results reveal that most of the leakages came from candidate's peers (66.7 %). The common forms of examination malpractice included writings on items (100%) and on candidates' bodies (83.3 %). From 2000 to 2011 the various forms of examination malpractices increased, from 5 to 12. About 37 % of the respondents had ever been involved in a malpractice; and 94.5 % confessed that examination malpractice is bad. There was no correlation between the ages or gender and involvement in examination malpractices. Adequate orientation to all stakeholders and on-time implementation of approved sanctions to culprits, as well as the adaptation of the Competency Based Teaching / Learning (CBT / L) are measures highly recommended to help address the issues of examination malpractice.

Keywords: Competency, examination leakages, malpractice, menace, questionnaire

INTRODUCTION

Overview and Problem Statement

Examinations and interviews are the means commonly used to assess peoples' abilities in specified areas or disciplines. Examination malpractice is a form of cheating and is illegal a practice that derails the purpose of examinations; thus the need to identify the prevailing malpractices and their dynamics and taking the appropriate measures to curtail this menace. The way examinations are carried out may be with some loop holes, which could entice candidates to break examination rules. Some candidates may be relatively academic-weak and will want to go at the same pace, in terms of studies, with the relatively academic-strong ones. Other candidates know they are weak but because of laziness they will not want to learn hard to pass but prefer to take the risk to cheat. Some gained entrance to places outside their fields and find it difficult to cope; whilst others may be addicted to examination malpractices, and have over the years been involved in the act. Some parents of the candidates directly or indirectly aid their wards in this practice. Examination malpractices thus are of various forms, caused by various factors, and candidates and accomplices have diverse reasons for carrying them out. Though objectives of the act, by such candidates, could be achieved there are also consequences to the individual, the institution and even to the nation at large; whether the culprits are caught or not.

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AIM AND OBJECTIVES

This study aims at accessing concerns of examination malpractice in Accra Polytechnic. To achieve this goal the following objectives were taken into consideration:

1. To determine the sources and forms of, and reasons for examination malpractices.
2. To contrast the changes of various forms of malpractices over the years.
3. To suggest any form of control measures to these forms of malpractices.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Examination is the measurement of proficiency or knowledge, skills, orally or written form, and judging the adequacy of these properties possessed by candidates, by evaluation. This is the pivot around which the whole system of education evolves (Ammani, 2011; Wilayat, 2009). Examinations should be valid in the performance of its function; reliable in terms of consistency of measurement; and it should be able to evaluate the performance or judge the scholastic attainment of pupils or students. In some cases candidates are assessed on the content of a subject they have acquired after a given period of time, by their teacher or by an examining body. Examination could be a one time or a continued form of assessment. Any wrong doing or illegal action taken for one's own benefit is a malpractice. Examination malpractice involves some form of cheating committed by examination candidates single handed or in collaboration with others; before, during, after the examination, to take undue advantage over others. Technically, it is an act that contravenes the rules and regulations of a particular examination body, set at a particular period of time. Not only is it immoral and illegal but also undermines the credibility of the education system (The Ghanaian Times, 2011). Examination irregularities are experienced at all levels of the education ladder – Primary, JSS / JHS, SSS / SHS, post- secondary, tertiary levels. Plagiarism in students' report and project works, as well as in published research works are also some forms of malpractices in academia (Achio, 2005).

Forms of Examination Malpractices

Examination malpractice takes various forms and could be categorized into:

- a) Leakages – illegally getting wing of examination questions before the examination time;
- b) Impersonation – representing and writing an examination for another fellow;
- c) Cheating – transgressing any of the rules governing the conduct of examinations;
- d) Plagiarism – presenting someone else's work, as your own, without acknowledgement.
- e) Fabricated course work or assessments (Udoh, 2008).

These malpractices could take place before, during and after the examinations; by either the candidates or by officials assigned with administrative duties (Ajibola, 2011).

Examination Malpractices before the Examinations

The most common form of examination malpractice before the examination is leakage. This usually comes from persons who have access to the questions and / or the marking schemes. In the case of polytechnics such people include course lecturers / examiners, Examinations Officers, Heads of Departments, academic Deans, Vice Rectors as well as the examination bodies, like NABPTEX, and moderators of the questions. The children, spouses, other family members or personnel working in the offices of these personnel – secretaries, cleaners, messengers could also easily have access to the material (Examination Malpractice, 2011). Some lecturers do give their questions for typing, printing, photocopying; thus operators of such equipment and in collaboration with "examination contractors" could be sources of leakage of the questions. Some device innovative ways of "high-jacking" questions and marking schemes from computers and printers, especially those hooked to the internet. However, some candidates fall victims to "false contractors"; who only study the syllabi, set their own questions and sell them to their victims. Other forms of examination malpractice that could occur before the examination include:

- a. Secretly breaking into staff office for question papers and / or answer scripts.
- b. Writing of project(s) or report(s) for student(s) by staff or co-students.
- c. Falsifying candidates' particulars to qualify them take an examination.
- d. Plagiarism, unauthorized adaptation of some ones' work to earn marks for promotion, or for commercial ventures.
- e. Allotment of choice of examination centers or appointment of choice of invigilating staff to specified centers are indicating of possible attempts to cheat.

Examination Malpractices during the Examinations

During examination the following malpractice are common:

- a. Impersonation – contracting person(s) to write examination for a candidate.
- b. Writing on items (sheets of papers, handkerchief, erasers, and covers of calculator).
- c. Writing on parts of the body (arms, thighs, palm).
- d. Using programmable calculators during examination.
- e. Hiding materials in washrooms, pockets, private parts, pen corks, to be used, illegally, as reference materials.
- f. Writing answers on question papers and exchanging them with others to copy.
- g. Communicating orally or through gestures.
- h. Using a coding system (coding / decoding) to remember or recollect learnt material.
- i. Setting at wrong places with the aim of getting assistance.
- j. Taking in already answered script and replacing them with the answer script given them.
- k. "Giraffing" (stretching one's neck to look and copy the works of others).
- l. Text messaging, borrowing of stored material, using cell phones.
- m. Taking away answers scripts or sheets from the examination room.
- n. Insulting / assaulting any supervisor / invigilator.
- o. Taking part in mass or organized cheating in or around the examination hall.
- p. Use of hooligans to forcefully enter examination halls, remove question papers and later on throw in answered pieces of papers to candidate for them to copy (Eze, 1991).
- q. Possessing and copying from any authorized material in the examination room
- r. Assisting candidate(s), by invigilator(s) or supervisor(s), during examinations.
- s. Disclosing candidate's other unrequested identities in answer books.
- t. Misconduct (refusing to take instructions; impeding progress of examination).

Examination Malpractices after the Examinations

Some of the examination malpractice commonly noticed after the examinations include:

- a. Colluding with member(s) of staff to replace the original answered script with a new prepared answered script.
- b. Paying for marks or to have marks changed; mostly course lecturer, examination officers, and the office of Academic Affair are most prone to these acts.

Nowadays examination candidates do not learn hard for long or experience the examination fever; and examination halls are no longer as quiet as a grave yard as used to be. This is because some examination questions and sometimes including the marking schemes are already seen before the examinations or the answers to the questions are read out to candidates in the examination hall. Formally most schools in Ghana were run by the government and churches with high level of discipline and morality. Private schools, no doubt, play undisputed vital role in augmenting the challenges of public ones; however some of them are mainly to making profit at the expense of morality and discipline. The concept of over competition and the edge to attain wonderful results may entice even the management of those private schools to use whatever means including various forms of

examination malpractices. This act is not mainly to help candidate pass or pass will but as an advert to get more students to their schools for the next registration session, so as to increase their capital gains (Udoh, 2008). Some candidates may prefer to lure course lecturers or examination personnel to leak questions or change their marks than genuinely taking examinations, failing and paying for registration to resist their trailed papers, which they are not even sure of passing.

Key Players in Examination Malpractice

The whole citizenry of a nation have roles to play on issues of examination malpractices; however the key players include:

- I. Examination Bodies: appropriate sanctions may not be taken against institutions that fraud rules; for example second cycle schools do unlawfully allow private registration within school registration times, or over register their quota without any sanction.
- II. School proprietors, teachers and supervisors: some proprietors tend to lure supervisors to allow their candidates to be taught during the examination. In this regard the candidates are also often forced to pay monies to proprietors, to enable them arrange for the deal.
- III. Parents / guardians: Knowing that their children are academically weak and with the anxiety for them to get good grades parents send their children to schools that can “perform the magic” without caring about the knowledge or skill they can acquire (Ammani, 2011).
- IV. Examination contractors: These take up the business of seeking examination questions and selling them out to their consumers.
- V. Students / candidates: Candidates use the type of malpractice most suitable for them to pass examinations so as to earn a good certificate, for job acquisition.
- VI. Examiners and moderators: These personalities also have access to the questions before the examination and the question could be leaked by their children, friends, close neighbor or friends if appropriate security measures are not taken.

Factors Leading to Examination Malpractice

Various rules and regulations, and corresponding sanctions for various malpractices are normally enlisted by various examination bodies, but hardened and daring candidates try to find innovative ways to outwit authorities (Achio, 2005). A most important factor responsible for examination malpractice is the desire by candidate to pass at all cost; and the root cause lays in their lack of confidence and fear of failure or getting low marks, as well as being ill prepared for the examinations. The anxiety to get a certificate and high-grade and the emphasis on certificate presentation for a job, in most countries, leads to many candidates trying to acquire it by all forms or means, positively or negatively (Ajibola Olushola, 2011). Improper guidance and counseling, truancy, absenteeism and laziness attribute to this ill-preparedness for examinations. Whiles some candidates intentionally get indulge in the malpractices; others see themselves in it through ignorance, carelessness or forgetfulness in applying regulations or due to peer pressure (Malpractice, 2007). These factors could be put into three groups:

- I. Psychological – stress and anxiety to meet demands of various subjects; creation of tremor of failure or scoring low grades force some candidates to fall to the menace.
- II. Environmental – inadequate coverage of syllabus, coupled with close sitting nature of candidates at examinations could entice candidates to examination malpractice.
- III. Intelligence Factor: candidates are of different academic strengths or intelligent quotient (I.Qs) levels; and failure to recognize this can make weaker students compare themselves with naturally gifted ones. Not wanting to work extra hard to match these brilliant ones the academic-weak ones may get themselves involve with examination malpractice.

Consequence of Examination Malpractice

The consequences of examination malpractice are enormous. It ends up producing “half-baked students holding certificates without the know-how, thus cripples productivity. They may even end up running sacking themselves from highly demanding jobs, due to incompetence, even though the remuneration is high. Institution noted to be associated with examination malpractices normally pay

the price of their certificate not being recognized or rejected elsewhere due to its loss credibility. Examination malpractice is highly contagious, especially when an institution is not addressing the issue adequately enough. Thus even good students could be lured into the act and when they continuously succeed their learning spirit will die. Others who would prefer to work hard and get genuine results may unfortunately not attain competitive grades and may be denied admission or job. This thus deprives honest hard working student from achieving their targets in these highly competitive education system of ours. Also the time for processing of results may be prolonged, as a result of examination malpractice cases which need to be investigated, first, to ascertain the inclusion or cancellation of the culprits work. Some authors like Brown (2003) & Zhang (2004) indicated that teaching style has an indirect influence on examination malpractice. They see the Chinese teaching style to be tutor centered, content or theory oriented learning, field independent, less student involvement and with little creativity and novelty. Such a teaching style, according to them, may be helpful at the basic or early stages of each education. The American, Dutch or Japanese style of teaching, on the other hand, is student centered; encouraging them to reason for truth rather than from authority. The Ghanaian polytechnics, since 2000, is piloting the latter style, adopting the competency base training / learning, which has the potential of minimizing the examination malpractice, due to the nature assessing and evaluating the candidates capabilities.

METHODOLOGY

Interest Area: The area of interest is the staff (academic and administrative) and students from the three Schools: Schools of Applied Sciences and Arts; Engineering; Business and Management Studies, in Accra Polytechnic, which has a population of about twelve thousand.

Method: Questionnaires were administered, using random sampling method for categorized groups of staff, as well as taken recorded data on examination malpractices in the Polytechnic. Analysis of results was done with the aid of literature from various sources. The questions in the questionnaire were with possible choices for easy and fast responds. These were centered on age, knowledge on possible forms, sources, dynamics of examination malpractices, as well as the involvement and concerns of respondents to these issues. Distribution of questionnaires was done on the same day and the responses collected within a two-week period, before analysis and collation of results were done. For purpose of confidentiality only serial numbers were used on the forms, to help check the retrieval levels. The results were analyzed by tallying the numbers of occurrence of similar responses. Comparisons of the various activities were done and deductions and conclusions drawn.

Presentation and Analysis of Results

Table 1. Responsiveness

NN	Category	Gender	Sample Size	Response	% Response
1	Students, School of Bus.	Males	12	12	13.33 %
		Females	12	11	12.22%
2	Students, School of Eng.	Males	12	10	11.11%
		Females	12	12	13.33%
3	Students, Sch. of Appl. Sci. & Arts	Males	12	10	11.11%
		Females	12	11	12.22
4	Staff Members (Academics)	Males	6	6	6.67%
		Females	6	6	6.67%
	Staff Members (Administrators)	Males	6	6	6.67%
		Females	6	6	6.67%
Total:			96	90	100.00%

Out of a total of 96 distributed questionnaires, to students and staff, 90 (93.85 %) responded.

Table 2. Age Distribution of Respondents

Age Range	Frequency	Percent.
16-22	11	12.2 %
23-29	52	57.8 %
30-36	11	12.2 %
37 and above	16	17.8 %
Total	90	100.0 %

The respondents were within the ages of 16-37 and above; with 23-29 age range exhibiting the greatest frequency (52), representing about 58 % (table 2).

Table 3, below, indicates that the respondents have knowledge about the numerated leakage sources. The “friends/peers” as a source topped the list (67 %) and a few (6 %) from children or relations of course-lecturers or co-lecturers, as sources of the malpractice.

Table 4, below, shows that “Writings on items”, as a form of malpractice, is known by all respondents (100 %), knowledge of respondents on “writings on the body” was 83 %, and “copying from books placed at washrooms” (78 %), whilst the use of codes was the minimum (6 %). Respondents’ knowledge on malpractice after the examinations, though minimal was also remarkable: “changing old with new answered scripts”, “changing marks” and “paying for marks” recorded 6 %, 33 %, and 39 %, respectively.

Table 3. Knowledge on Possible Sources of Leakages of Examination Questions (%)

Sources of Leakages of Questions	Yes (%)	No (%)	Don't Know (%)
From the course lecturer	22	44	34
From co-lecturers	6	17	77
From friends/peers	67	17	16
From children / relations of course lecturer	6	20	74
From other staff from the polytechnic	44	17	49
From personnel from NABPTEX	11	6	83
From computers / photocopiers	17	6	77
From high-jacking through the internet facility	11	56	33
From examination questions / scheme vendors	44	11	45
From children of NABPTEX / moderators personnel	11	17	72

Table 4. Knowledge of Possible forms of Examination Malpractices

Form of Exam Malpractice	Yes (%)	No (%)	Not Certain (%)
Writings on sheets of items (paper, handkerchief, calculator cover)	90 (100)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Writing on body (arms, thighs, palms)	75 (83)	5 (6)	10 (11)
Programmable calculators	60 (67)	10 (11)	20 (22)
Notebooks in washrooms	70 (78)	10 (11)	10 (11)
Gestures	40 (45)	20 (22)	30 (33)
Coding system	5 (6)	33 (37)	52 (57)
Sneaking answered examination scripts into exam. hall.	10 (11)	30 (33)	50 (56)
*Changing old with new answered scripts, after exams.	5 (6)	60 (67)	25 (27)
Exchange question paper (with written answers)	40 (45)	20 (22)	30 (33)
Impersonation	5 (6)	70 (78)	15 (16)
*Paying for marks (Course lecturer involved)	35 (39)	20 (22)	35 (39)
*Change of marks (Other staff involved)	30 (33)	20 (22)	40 (45)
Wrongly seated	45 (50)	10 (11)	35 (39)

*Knowledge of the malpractice occurring after the examinations

Table 5. shows that from 2000 to 2003, five (5) out of the thirteen (13) forms of itemized malpractices were practiced, representing 38.46 %; within 2004 to 2007 the forms increased to nine (9), representing 61.55 %; and within the period of 2008-2011, eleven forms (92.23 %), were practiced. Thus candidates try to be very innovative with new ways to outwit the system.

Table 5. Dynamics of the Forms of Examination Malpractice in Accra Polytechnic

Form of Exam Malpractice	00-03	04-07	08-11
Writings on sheets of items (paper, handkerchief, calculator cover)	√	√	√
Writing on body (arms, thighs, palms)	x	√	√
Programmable calculators	x	x	√
Notebooks in washrooms	√	√	√
Gestures	√	√	√
Coding system	x	x	√
Sneaking answered examination scripts into exam. hall.	x	√	√
Replacing old answer scripts with new one after exams	x	x	x
Exchange question paper (with written answers)	√	√	√
Impersonation	x	x	√
Paying for marks (Course Lecturer involved)	x	√	√
Paying for change of marks (Other staff involved)	x	√	√
Wrongly seated	√	√	√

Key: √ - existed; x – Did not exist

Table 6a. Involvement of Respondents in any of the Forms of Examination Malpractice

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	33	36.7 %
No	57	63.3 %
Total	90	100.0 %

Out of the ninety respondents thirty-three, representing 36.7 %, admitted ever been engaged in one form of malpractice or another (table 6a).

Table 6b. Reason(s) for Involving in Examination Malpractice

Reasons	Frequency	Percent.
I have no reason / for fund	2	6.0 %
I did not learn well	10	30.3 %
I don't want to take re-sit	12	36.4 %
I want to get high marks	5	15.2 %
I do not understand the course (subject)	4	12.1 %
Total	33	100.0 %

Out of the thirty-three respondents a majority (36.4%) got involved in the malpractice to prevent failure and re-sitting the examinations (fig. 6b). A few of them (6.0%) said they had no reason for the act, and this might be as a result of peer pressure or a mere adventure.

Table 7. Respondents concerns on Examination Malpractice

Concerns	Frequency	Percent
It is good	1	1.1 %
It is not good	85	94.5 %
I cannot say	4	4.4 %
Total	90	100.0 %

Most of the respondents (94.5 %) declared that examination malpractice is not a good practice, and 1.1 % saw it to be good, probably because it aided them achieve an aim.

Table 8. Correlation between Age, Gender and Involvement of Respondents in Examination Malpractices

Age	Gender	Respondents	No./ (%) Involved
16-22	Male	7 (7.78 %)	4 (12.12 %)
	Female	4 (4.44 %)	1 (03.03 %)
23-29	Male	22 (22.22 %)	4 (12.12 %)
	Female	30 (30.30 %)	5 (15.15 %)
30-36	Male	5 (5.56 %)	4 (12.12 %)
	Female	6 (6.67 %)	6 (18.18 %)
37 and above	Male	10 (10.10 %)	7 (21.21 %)
	Female	6 (6.67 %)	2 (06.06 %)

The data reveals that out of 30 females within the 23-29 year group only 5 (15.15%) indicated involvement in the practice; whereas 10 males within the age group of 37 and above, recorded the highest number 7 (21.21%) involved in the malpractice. Thus there is no correlation between age or gender and involvement of respondents in examination malpractices.

From the results the following general analysis and deductions were drawn. Relatively high percentage, about 94%, was able to respond within two weeks (table 1). This could be attributed to the easiness to complete the well-structured multiple choice questions in the questionnaire. The most occurring age-group was within the range of 23-29 (about 58%) – majority of the students population fall within this range; and the least age-group being 30-36 (12%), whilst the male to female ratio was 1:1 (table 2). Amongst the responds on knowledge of sources of leakage of examination questions (table 3) those from “friends / peers” was recorded highest (67%), followed by “other staff from the polytechnic” (44%) as against the least “co-lecturers” and “children / relations from course lecturer” (6%). These sources have also been cited in a report on “Malpractice” (2007), though not with the same percentage distribution. Most respondents have relatively high knowledge of the numerated forms of examination malpractices: “Writing on items” and “writings on parts of the candidates’ bodies” were relatively high; 100 % and 75 %, respectively, whilst the “coding”, “changing old answered scripts with new ones after examinations” and “impersonation” were least – (6% in each case). The forms of examination malpractice was seen to graduate, dynamically, within the period from 2000-2011. The old tricks being “writing on items”, “gestures”, “placing and consulting written materials in washrooms”, “exchange of question papers”, “sitting at wrong places”, “Paying for marks or for change of marks”. The “coding” and “changing old answered scripts with new ones after examinations” are some of the most recent innovations in examination activities (table 5). Thus, from 2000 to 2003, five (5) forms of the malpractices (38.46%) were recorded; within 2004 to 2007 the forms of malpractice increased to nine (9) – (61.55%); and within the period of 2008-2011 twelve (12) forms, representing (92.23%) were recorded. Thus candidates try to be very innovative with new ways; before, during, and even after writing the examinations to outwit the system. A similar observation was also reported by Ajibola (2011). About 37% of the respondents indicated ever been involved in a form of examination malpractice; and the reasons given were: feared of failing, due to ill-preparation for the examinations; the implications of taken a re-sit examination, including payment for the re-sit, increase in the total credit hours taken and leading to possible decrease in the cumulative grade point average (CGPA); the uncertainty of passing after taken the re-sit examination was also a concern (table 6). However a greater number of the respondents (95%) admitted that the malpractice is bad, even though 1% sees it to be good, as it might have aided them achieve their aim. Most of the respondents (about 58%) were within the age group range of 23-29 (table 2), with the female gender being greater (30 or 30.3%), as seen in table 8, however 10 males within the age group of 37 and above, recorded the highest number (7 or 21.21%) involved in the malpractice. This shows that there is no correlation between age or gender and involvement of respondents in examination malpractices.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Though examination is inevitable in the educational sector, the mode of executing it is even more crucial. Various factors influencing candidates' involvement in examination malpractices include: psychological, environmental, non-recognition of one's intelligent quotients (I.Qs) or strengths. However all these come about as a result of the fear for candidates to fail or obtain low marks, due to inadequate preparation. There is no correlation between age or gender and involvement in examination malpractice. The ultimate aim for the candidates' involvement in this malpractice is to achieve a good certification; to enable them acquire a good job. Information technology is a good tool for progress and development; however it is greatly abused and used for various unlawful acts, including the tracking of examination questions. The consequences of examination malpractice are great: depriving competent people from gaining admissions and jobs, recruiting ill-baked persons for various works and thus decreasing economic output. The CBT/L system, when well managed with proper re-orientation of the people's minds and attitudes, will help curtail the examination malpractice menace.

It is recommended that the approach to combat examination malpractice, before, during and after the examination should be holistic and with the involvement of all stakeholders.

Before The Examination

Effective orientation is needed for students, tutors, examination officers and invigilators, aided with guided document on malpractices; and sharing knowledge on new examination threats with Examination Boards, for examination security. Also effective creative and innovative teaching, using field dependent sources of information, and set questions that are more of the thinking-oriented or applied type should be adopted, especially with the tertiary candidates. This will make students learn to understand and apply appropriately. ICT devices should be used to track and apprehend perpetrators with fraudulent examination acts. This will scare persons in such acts and reduce the incidents of hijacking activities. Institutions and their examinations bodies could create certified question-bank for each course without further moderation, until the syllabi is revised. This and appropriate labeling of examination materials, effective planning are important measures to be taken for examinations.

During the Examination

Invigilators need to be adequate (1:50 candidates), firm and fair, and keen in their vigilance; Installed cameras are good aids, but the change of candidates' attitude to examinations is even better. Adequate spacing / sitting arrangement is necessary to discourage cheating. Unannounced visits of examination officers to examinations halls do have an impact. Proper packing and labeling of parceled examination scripts is vital, for easy identification.

After the Examination

On-time collection of examination answered scripts by examiners, for marking, to prevent the possibility of replacing ill-answered scripts with new well answered ones. Accurate assessment of examinations, proper scrutiny and compilation of the results, by examiners and the examination body will entice students to study hard. Effective verification of marked examination scripts should be done to all examined courses and in all semesters. This will help the tutor identify their mistakes and work to improve their out-put.

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