



## External Examination Invigilators' (EIs) Beliefs and Inference About Activities They Consider Important: Implication for Examination Policy

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### ABSTRACT

The aim of this small-scale grounded approach qualitative study was to examine the beliefs of selected external examination invigilators (EIs) and infer the kinds of activities they consider important. The importance of this study rested in the fact that there is a paucity of research which examines the role of EIs at secondary, further and higher education levels. Therefore, it aids in filling a literary gap and gives them a 'voice' in the research literature. Study participants were five EIs, working in a London secondary school. Purposeful convenience or opportunity sampling was used in their selection. Informal interviews and participant observation were the research methods used. The findings revealed the fact that beliefs of the EIs guide how they rated their role and that maintaining examination intangibles and procedures is of high importance. Implication of the findings are discussed.

**Keywords:** External Examination Invigilator; Exam Invigilation; Belief; Role; Proctor; Secondary Schools.

### Introduction

To aid in establishing the background and clarify for an international readership terms used in this paper, I commence by discussing the term invigilator, duties associated with the role and the philosophic framework which guides the study.

The words proctor (USA) or invigilator (UK) are assigned to people with the tasks of ensuring that examinations are carried out according to rules set by examination boards and or various schools and universities governing bodies. In this study, the word 'external' in the phrase, 'external examination invigilators' (EIs) is used to denote the fact that the participants were not directly employed by the institution in which they carried out their role but by various teaching agencies throughout London, England.

An analysis of various examination documents such as: Kings College London (2018); National Open College Network (2018); The Ridgeway School & Sixth Form College (2016); and Newcastle University (2015) reveal the fact that official duties of an invigilator include those to be performed before, during and after an examination. Examples of duties to be performed before an examination may include:

- Setting up examination venues by laying out stationery, equipment and examination papers.
- Preparing envelopes in which to place completed examination papers.

Examples of duties to be performed during an examination may include:

- Directing candidates to their seats and advising them about possessions permitted in examination venues.
- Ensuring that candidates do not talk once inside the examination venue.
- Dealing with queries raised by candidates and dealing with examination irregularities.
- Checking attendance during examinations.
- Recording details of early leavers and collecting their examination papers.
- Escorting candidates from the examination venue during the examinations as required, and supervising candidates whilst outside the examination venue.

Examples of duties to be performed after an examination may include:

- Collecting and collating examination papers at the end of the examination.
- Supervising candidates leaving examination venues, ensuring that they do not remove equipment or stationery from the venue.
- Ensuring that candidates leave venues in an orderly and quiet manner.

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Further analysis of the sources cited above also reveals that examination procedures are more frequently featured in examination policy documents than the intangibles of the examination process. These terms are defined and discussed later in this paper. Further, the duties of the examination invigilator listed here are many and if they are not carried out in an efficient and effective manner they could have adverse effects on candidates successfully completing an examination.

The analysis of these and other sources also reveals that the duties of the invigilator are similar at all levels of the education sector i.e. secondary through to Higher Education (HE). While this is the case, the context in which they work may be different not just in terms to size, geographical location and educational levels i.e., FE and HE, but also in regard to procedures. For example, one context may require candidates to leave the room orderly and in a quiet manner directed by invigilators and another may not see candidates exiting the room at the end of an examination session as requiring much attention. These occurrence suggests that invigilators need to be flexible in order to function effectively in different contexts.

The idea which acts as a philosophic framework for this small-scale grounded approach qualitative study and which is of interest to me (Minott, 2009, 2010 and 2012) is – beliefs act as a guide to behaviour. Borg (2001) defines a belief as a proposition which is held either unconsciously or consciously. The individual accepts it as true and it serves as a guide to thought and behaviour. Further discussion of this philosophic framework occurs later in the discussion section of this paper.

Having said these, the importance of this study rests in the fact that firstly, it provides evidence which further supports the idea that beliefs guide behaviour. Secondly, it aids in filling a seeming literary gap, thus giving external examination invigilators (EEIs) a 'voice' in the research literature.

The seeming gap and muted 'voice' of EEIs in the research literature can be seen in the fact that a search of various databases (ERIC, JSTOR, British Educational Index (BEI) and the Australian Council for Education Research) using combinations of the search terms – exam, examination, invigilation, invigilator(s) – returned a total of 110,473 'hits'. None addressed facets of the EEIs role and none included data emerging from research with actual EEIs. There is, however, a growing body of work on issues and ideas linked to computer-related examination invigilation for example (James, 2016; Shepherd, 2010; Lilley, Meere, & Barker, 2016). This occurrence suggests that EEIs as a group – along with their activities – may be understudied. The thoughts of Mohamad Kahar and Kendall (2014) help to support this claim when they stated, in their opinion various aspects of the invigilators' involvement in the examination process (such as their scheduling) has been overlooked by the scientific research community.

### Research aim and questions

In light of the foregoing considerations, the aim of this small-scale grounded approach qualitative study is to examine the beliefs of selected EEIs and infer the kinds of activities they consider of importance and, by so doing aid in filling a literary gap, thus giving them a 'voice' in the research literature. Given this aim, the following research questions were developed:

1. To what extent do participants' beliefs guide their behaviour as invigilators?
2. What aspects of the invigilation process do participants consider important?

### Participants and selection

The participants in this study were five EEIs – three males and two females – who had between 3-5 years invigilation experienced. They worked through a number of London-based teaching agencies and carried out external examination invigilation in a London secondary school.

Purposeful convenience or opportunity sampling was used in the selection of the participants who were considered 'information-rich'. Guba and Lincoln (1998) state that 'information-rich participants' are able to provide insight into the issue of importance to any study. An examination of the findings in this paper and the responses of the participants will reveal that they provided relevant and unique perspectives on the research issue.

### Ethics

The participants willingly agreed to participate in the study, provided their names and that of the institution in which they were presently working and teaching agencies by which they are employed remained anonymous. This was agreed, and (as will be shown later) they were referred to as invigilator 1-5 and no mention of the school in which they were invigilating or agencies for which they worked is made in this paper. They were also aware that they were being observed.

### Data Collection

Over the course of a week – and at a time during the school day considered convenient by each – participants were asked individually, 'On a scale of 1-10, 1 being lowest and 10 highest, how important is the external examination invigilators' role? They

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were then invited to elaborate on their choice. Their responses were then written down. They were also told the length of their elaboration was left to them. All however choose to be brief in their comments and their comments are cited largely in full in this paper.

**Participant Observation**

In addition to informal interviews, participant observation was also used as a data collection method.

Over the course of a week four examination sessions were observed and notes written down immediately after each session. The objective was to record specific actions. For example, did they respond promptly to students requests, helped in the preparation of the examination room and in the collection and collating of examination papers? As will be shown later in this paper, the observation notes and participants' responses to the question asked, revealed the selected EEl)s beliefs about their role, from which inferences about the kinds of activities they considered most important were made.

**Method and analysis**

This study does not stick slavishly to the procedure advocated by originators of the grounded theory approach to research (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1978), but follow their general principles (Robson, 2007). LaRossa, (2005) made the point that the grounded theory approach is designed to be changed, moulded and used appropriately for each individual's need and there is not a prescribe set of rules to follow.

Therefore, for this study, I analysed the responses to the research question using a content analysis process. To focus the analysis, I placed together in files answers to the questions according to participants. By reading and rereading the responses and using my own judgment and experience to make sense of the answers, I categorised the responses. Categories were mainly words and phrases which I thought condensed and expressed the essence of the given responses.

For example, responses include words such as integrity, fairness and impartiality. Based on these, I invented the category 'examination intangibles'. Responses also include phrases such as 'time keeping', 'keeping order' and 'taking students on toilet breaks' from which I invented the category of 'examination procedures'. These categories were used to reveal the selected EEl)s' beliefs about their role and activities they considered most important.

As indicated in the foregoing discussion, participant observation as a research method was also used in the triangulation process. Bush (2002) in Briggs, Coleman and Morrison state triangulation (the use of two or more data collection methods) helps to cross checking data to establish their soundness, which in turn facilitate accuracy in research conclusions drawn. In this study, observation data was used to support claims made.

**The presentation of findings**

**I The importance of EEl)s' role**

**Table 1.** External examination invigilators' role and responsibilities rating

Invigilators	Rate
1	9-10
2	10
3	9-10
4	10
5	10

All EEl)s rated their role at either, 9-10 or 10, indicating they believed it to be of great importance. While this was the case, the analysis of their responses revealed the fact that they believed their role was to either maintain examination intangibles and/or examination procedures.

## 2 Maintaining examination intangibles

Three participants in this study believed their role as EEIs was to maintain examination intangibles. This meant that activities in which they engaged must be seen as ensuring 'fairness' and 'impartiality' at all times, and that the integrity of the examination process is maintained. Here are two quotes in support of these findings.

- This is important because there is the need to at least give the perception of impartiality in the process and an invigilator will give the perception that a fair examination process is being employed (Invigilator 1).
- We are important because we maintain the integrity of the examination process (Invigilator 2).

One invigilator, however, believes that the examination invigilators' role and physical presence signals to students the importance of the examination.

- Our role is important, that is why we are here. If we use teachers, students might not take the exam seriously because they are familiar with their teachers and are accustomed to them. But with the external invigilator, this gives importance to the examination in the minds of the students (Invigilator 3).

## 3 Maintaining examination procedures

Ensuring that examination procedures are maintained and followed is the belief highlighted in the response of two invigilators. This belief results in importance being placed on activities such as: reducing talking among students during the examination, keeping time, reminding students of time left in the examination, addressing cheating or attempts at cheating, and taking students on toilet breaks.

- The invigilator is important because the students have a tendency to talk and so there is the need to have the EEIs to keep order (Invigilator 4).
- Invigilators are important as time keepers, reminding their 'wards' of remaining time at various points during an actual examination, keeping order, spotting and addressing cheating or attempts at cheating and taking students on toilet breaks (Invigilator 5).

## Discussion

### I The importance of EEIs' role and their beliefs

The belief of the participating EEIs about the importance of their role resulted in the action of rating the role highly, i.e., 9-10 and 10, as indicated in Table 1 above.

This is so, because as already stated in the foregoing discussion, belief acts as a guide to behaviour (Borg, 2001). The power of beliefs to guide action is now a widely discussed phenomenon. For example, Hoffman (2015) made the point that what people believe about themselves guides what they accomplished. So important are beliefs that they determine what is done, how it is done and how people see their accomplishment in relation to the rest of the world. These thoughts of Hoffman are echoed in Thomas (2012), who is also of the opinion that beliefs are created or shaped from various experiences, encounters and mishaps, and behaviour is a reflection of what one believes.

Observation of the actions of the EEIs in this study reveals activities such as prompt responses to students' requests, being on time for the start of examinations, helping to collate and distribute examination papers, setting up examination rooms and greeting students as they entered examination rooms. All these actions were carried out in a careful and professional manner with great attention to details. While these activities were observed in the context of a secondary school they are also expected of EEIs in FE and HE (Kings College London, 2018; Newcastle University, 2015).

If the statements of Borg (2001), Hoffman (2015) and Thomas (2012) are correct, then it is safe to conclude that these observed actions of the EEIs were based on their beliefs about the importance of their role in the examination process.

The belief of the EEIs in this study in that their role is of high importance is also supported by the literature and changes in teachers' roles and responsibilities. For example, since 2005 in the United Kingdom, the EEIs role and activities have been indispensably linked to schools via policy changes. Changes which extricate teachers from engaging in certain examination invigilation activities (School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Document, 2005). A similar scenario seem to be occurring in the FE and HE sector where lecturers no longer invigilate major examinations, but external invigilators are utilised.

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These changes not only indispensably linked EEIs to schools, but increased the need for them thus a greater importance being placed on their role by school managers, head teachers or principals and those responsible for students' examinations in FE and HE. Increased EEIs manuals, policies and training exercises are also offshoots of changes to teachers' and lecturers' direct involvement in the examination invigilation process. These aid in increasing the visibility of EEIs in various institutions thus also contributing to their role importance.

The high importance placed on the EEIs role is also seen in the fact that it is viewed as critical to the efficient and effective running of an examination system (The Workforce Agreement Monitoring Group, 2005; National Union of Teachers, 2006). This idea of the critical nature of the EEIs role to the efficient and effective running of an examination is strongly supported by the study's EEIs in their muse over the importance of their role.

### 2 Maintaining examination intangibles

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Words such as 'fairness', 'impartiality' and integrity have long been associated with examinations at all levels of the education sector i.e., secondary through HE, and those who are involved are expected to be in possession of, and exude such qualities (Vlaardingerbroek, Shehab and Alameh 2011; Wikipedia 2016; The Ridgeway School Examination Policy 2016.). The thoughts expressed by the writer of the Wikipedia page (2016) helps to cement the point that EEIs are appointed to a position of trust; therefore, should possess appropriate qualities, such as integrity and vigilance.

While these words – fairness, impartiality, integrity – may seem as mere concepts, they however, formed part of the beliefs of the EEIs in this study and were important in shaping their actions (Thomas, 2012). For, as observed, EEIs were quick to bring to the attention of the lead invigilator any students breaking examination rules and to also engage in actions, such as standing between desks of students whom they suspected of cheating or saw looking at each other's papers, but doing so in what they [the students] thought to be a covert manner.

These actions observed – I may assume – were done to keep the examination fair; i.e., ensuring that the same rules were applied to all students. Interestingly, this is an expectation at all levels of the education sector (Bouville, 2008, Liverpool Hope University, 2014). In the observed scenario above, the EEIs actions prevented a student from breaking the examination rule – copying the answers from another student – thus gaining an advantage over others.

As invigilator 1 states:

*The use of EEIs will give the perception that a fair examination process is being employed. (Invigilator 1)*

But these actions could also be viewed as efforts to maintain the integrity of the examination process, i.e., to ensure that the examination process and procedures are followed in accordance with pre-existing rules and regulations. In this respect, Invigilator 2 made the point,

*We are important because we maintain the integrity of the examination process. (Invigilator 2)*

One invigilator, however, took this idea further. He believed that the EEIs' role and physical presence signals to students the importance of the examination.

*Our role is important, that is why we are here. If we use teachers, students might not take the exam seriously because they are familiar with their teacher and are accustomed to them. But with the external invigilator, this gives importance to the examination in the minds of the students. (Invigilator 3)*

There is no literature to corroborate this finding. This may not come as a surprise given the fact that – as indicated in the foregoing discussion – there is a paucity of research which addresses the external examination invigilators and/or facets of their role. I can only speculate – once again – that this may not be an area of interests for researchers, hence the deafening silence in the literature.

### 3 Maintaining examination procedures

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Ensuring that examination procedures are maintained and followed is the belief highlighted in the responses of two invigilators. This belief resulted in importance being placed on activities such as: reducing talking among students during the examination; keeping time; reminding students of time left in the examination; addressing cheating or attempts at cheating; and taking students on toilet breaks.

The bulk of the literature addressing some aspect of examination invigilation occurring in secondary through to HE, focuses on procedures of invigilation. While searches for various keywords and phrases related to examination invigilation on a university library database returned one or no hits, Google searches using the terms examination invigilation and guidelines, policy, guide, procedure, regulations returned over 100,000 'hits' per term searched. Search of the term 'examination invigilation procedure' returned 176,000 'hits', 'examination invigilation guidelines' returned one 'hit' on the university library database and 108,000 'hits' on Google and 'examination guide' returned 115,000 'hits'.

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It is safe to conclude that the barrage of online literature, numerous examination manuals which focus throughout the education sectors on examination procedures, and changes in teachers' involvement in examination in the UK helped to influence the participating EEIs in considering the maintenance of the examination procedure to be of high importance. Thomas (2012) made the point that beliefs are created or shaped from various experiences and encounters.

The conclusion drawn here regarding the importance placed on maintaining examination procedures is also supported by the following quotations.

*The invigilator is important because the students have a tendency to talk and so there is the need to have the EEI to keep order.* (Invigilator 4)

*Invigilators are important as time keepers, reminding their 'wards' of remaining time at various points during an actual examination; keeping order, spotting and addressing cheating or attempt at cheating and taking students on toilet breaks.* (Invigilator 5)

Having presented and discussed the findings, what are the implications of the results of this small study for examination policy in the education sector?

### Implications for examination policy

Firstly, the findings of this study point to the fact that for the EEIs, their beliefs guided behaviour and the view that maintaining both examination intangibles and examination procedures are of high importance. This occurrence therefore reinforces the need to continue to highlight both examination intangibles and procedures in examination policies at all levels of the education sector, secondary through to HE. At present, there seems to be a preponderance of written phrases and sections in policy documents on the 'how to' or procedures of examinations and the role of EEIs in enabling procedures. There are however a small number with written phrases or sections highlighting the importance of the examination intangibles. For example, out of 48,400 examination policy documents retrieved from internet searches, only 6,200 include the following words: fairness, integrity and impartiality. This 6,200 amounts to approximate 12% of the 48,400 documents which is small, as indicated above.

Secondly, creators of examination invigilation policies for secondary through to HE institutions should seize the opportunity to harvest the thoughts of invigilators through both formal and informal means, and use these to improve examination policies and procedures. This is very important because invigilators are on the 'frontline' hence they have first-hand experience of procedures that are working and those that are not. This is an opportunity that if fully utilised, could result in greater improvements in the planning, implementation and evaluation of the examination invigilation processes and procedures.

Thirdly, at the ideological level, I can infer from Calderhead (1992) that it may be prudent for creators of examination invigilation policies to reflect on own beliefs and how these guide their construction of invigilation procedures. And, by doing so, develop a well thought out and clearly articulated view of the examination invigilation process.

### Study limitation

The main limitations of this study rest in the fact that it was conducted with a small sample of EEIs, a total of five, working in a single secondary school in London, thereby limiting the possible generalisation of the findings.

### Conclusion

The aim of this small-scale grounded approach qualitative study was to examine the beliefs of selected EEIs and infer the kinds of activities they consider of importance and, by so doing, aid in filling a literary gap, thus giving EEIs a voice in the research literature. A high point of this study is the fact that it provides evidence that EEIs' beliefs guide how they rated their role. They also believed maintaining examination intangibles and/or procedures to be of high importance and these helped direct their observed behaviour and activities. The results of the study also reinforce the continued need to include – in examination policy documents throughout the education sector i.e., specifically, secondary through to HE – written phrases and sections which highlight both examination intangibles and procedures, harvest the thoughts of invigilators using these to influence examination invigilation policies and at the ideological level, encourage the creators of examination invigilation policies to reflect on own beliefs and how these guide their construction of invigilation procedures.

### Avenue for future work

While facets of the role of external examination invigilators remain understudied, the results of this study point to the opportunity to examine at all levels of the education sector the impact (if any) of the examination invigilator's role and physical presence on students' impression of the importance of examinations.



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Biography

Dr. Mark A. Minott has research interests in the areas of teacher education, music education, reflective teaching and the arts in education. His work can be found in journals such as: *Reflective Practice: International and Multidisciplinary Perspectives* (UK); *Journal of Music, Technology and Education* (UK); *Professional Development in Education* (UK); *Canadian Journal of Education*; *International Journal of Music Education* (USA); *Teacher Education and Practice* (USA); *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*; *Journal of the University College of the Cayman Islands*; *Journal of Research on Christian Education* (USA) and *Teacher Education Advancement Network Journal* (UK). Mark is also the author of several books: *A Reflective Approach to Teaching Practicum Debriefing: Reflective teaching and...*; *Reflective Teaching: Properties, Tool, Benefits and Support*; *Reflection and Reflective Teaching: A Case study of four seasoned teachers in the Cayman Islands*; and *Cayman Islands Church School: To what extent Do Churches in the Cayman Islands influence Their Associated Schools?*

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