

Academic Dishonesty among Higher Education Students in Pakistan

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Abstract

This study examines 'academic dishonesty' among a sample of 243 students from business universities. Academic dishonest behavior of students was measured on four dimensions of academic dishonesty: cheating in tests, cheating in assignments and plagiarism. It was found that a considerably small number of students reported their engagement in academic dishonest behavior, such as passing answers to others, cheating in preparing assignments, working with others on 'individual assignments', and providing forbidden help to others. Very few students have reported that they often use reference material without truly reading it and provide forbidden help to other students in exams. There was hardly any reported academic dishonest behavior prevalence among the students. It is interesting to note that significant difference was found between male and female students' dishonest behavior. Universities should consider more extensive trainings for students in which it is explained to them the seriousness of cheating. Given the results indicated that students who view cheating behaviors as more wrong are less likely to cheat, universities should make an effort to increase students' opinions of wrongfulness.

Keywords: Academic dishonesty, higher education, cheating behavior, plagiarism

Introduction

Academic dishonesty has been identified as a common problem faced by universities around the world, no matter how diversified from an ethnic or religious lens. This prevalent issue is leading towards undesirable consequences for students, the education system, as well as society as a whole (Baran & Jonason, 2020). Academic dishonesty is defined by Webster's Dictionary as the "intentional participation in deceptive practices regarding one's academic work or the work of another" (Webster, 2000, p. 4). In this context, academic dishonesty is the behaviour of individuals to get involved in activities such as copying or providing help to others, using unauthorized material, and avoiding the prescribed assessment process in an academic context.

Any kind of dishonest behaviour in general destroys the academic system, and it can be very severe if these graduates tend to practice the same at their workplaces. Nonis and Swift (2001) have studied academic

dishonest behaviour of students and found that those who had previously engaged in such behaviour in academics were also found engaged in dishonest behaviour at their workplace. Sims (1993) observed a strong correlation among unethical behaviour at the workplace and dishonesty in academics. The academic practices of students represent a set of behaviours which have important implications for business practices. Jordan (2001) reported that those students who had greater intention of getting good grades or good academic reputation were found engaged in dishonest behaviour comparatively more than those who had a strong desire to learn.

Academic dishonesty among business students is a potential threat to the functioning of a fair society. It has been noticed that business students are more involved in these activities as compared to students in other faculties. As noted by Allmon, Page and Rpberts (2000), the behaviour of students regarding cheating in exams significantly mirrors their behaviour in business activities. Baird (1980) examined cheating behaviour of 200 college students and reported that business school students cheat in tests more as compared to other disciplines, such as education and liberal arts. These business school students were found more engaged in cheating behaviour as well as less likely to disapprove of their cheating behaviour.

These activities may result in a variety of social issues and corporate scandals (Aslam & Mian, 2011). Among the major business scandals all over the world, Waste Management (1998), Enron (2001), WorldCom (2002), Tyco (2002), HealthSouth (2003), Freddie Mac (2003), American International Group (AIG) (2005), Lehman Brothers (2008), Bernie Madoff (2008), Satyam (2009), and the General Electric scandal (2018) are the ones that have been greatly publicized. In Pakistan, we have notorious examples of the Axt company (Pakistan) and Bank of Credit and Commerce International (BCCI), to name a few. These scandals cost billions of dollars to the community and had a serious negative effect on the global economy, and especially on Pakistan.

Flanigan (2002) termed the number of scandals in an otherwise healthy economy as a cancer for moral behaviour and good corporate governance. The removal of this illness for the restoration of economic health is highly desirable. Academic dishonesty is likely to cause future scandals resulting from dishonest behaviour in practical life when these students enter the job market as business professionals. Finn and Frone (2004) argued that cheating practices in academics are a common and persistent problem among the students at all levels.

Academic dishonesty has also been widely observed among the students of higher education, and such dishonesty often leads students toward dishonest practices in their daily lives as well. To avoid such scandals and the resultant economic loss, it is necessary to inquire into the level of academic dishonest behaviour, to find effective measures to reduce the tendency toward such behaviour to be carried forward to workplaces. Academic dishonesty in business education students' points to violation of ethics by the students, who are expected to be future leaders for running the businesses (Guo, 2011). Strict punitive actions and zero tolerance can be a way to prevent students from committing dishonest behaviour. The internal feelings of students about academic dishonesty are not as strong compared to their concern for being caught and punished for their dishonesty (Vandehey, Diekhoff & LaBeff, 2007).

The rapid increase in academic and corporate dishonesty provides motivation to examine the dishonest behaviour intention of future leaders and other participants in the workforce, which is to be provided by higher education institutes and universities. Charles and Thomas (2007) emphasized that the future leaders must be treated in a way that their likelihood of engaging in unethical behaviour may be reduced, so that they are committed to a higher degree of ethical behaviour. Christine and James (2008) examined academic behaviour of students and found that academic major (specialization) of the students significantly influences

the students' choice to engage in academic dishonesty practices. Goshal (2005) suggested that students of MBA must be taught an ethics course that has the potential to reduce their future unethical behaviour and help them to develop a sense of moral responsibility.

To assess the phenomenon, many researchers such as Sims (1993), Nonis and Swift (2001), Jordan (2001), Allamon et al., (2000), Flanigan (2002); Lupton, Chapman and Weiss (2000); Lupton and Chaqman (2002), Hodges (2017), Winardi and Azalea (2017), Firdaus and Solicha (2018), Bashir and Bala (2018), and Amir (2019) have studied the most problematic issue of academic dishonesty among the students of higher education. These studies provide evidence about various dishonest behaviours of students during the course of acquiring their higher education. Based on the review of literature, this study aims to investigate the academic dishonest behaviour of students from four dimensions (cheating on test, cheating on paper and work assignment, plagiarism, and other general dishonest behaviour); and also to assess the psychometric properties of measures used for academic dishonesty. In addition, this research will identify the most frequent types of academic dishonest practices among businesses students, as well as the differences between male and female students' dishonest behaviour.

Literature Review

Academic dishonesty is a serious problem identified not only in Pakistan but all over the world. This dishonest behavior is observed at all academic levels irrespective of the various fields of study (Finn & Frone, 2004). Such academic dishonest behaviour can be dangerous if it is carried forward to professional life. The dishonest behaviour can take many shapes including: cheating in exams, cheating on assignments and plagiarising others' work.

Cheating in exams

Jordan (2001) discussed two types of students and their behavior with respect to cheating in the examinations. Those students who get more motivation by good grades are more intended to cheat in examination as compared to those who are motivated internally by the desire to learn. Allmon et al. (2000, p. 421), quoted that "the salience and intensity of classroom or job demands are so great that individuals' reflective ethical positions are snowed under". Daniel, Blount and Ferrell (1991) commented that time constraints, the nature of a subject, and the level of difficulty affect the decision to cheat in exams. The students with more pressing time constraints and difficult subjects are often found with an intent to cheat in the examinations. In addition, Spiller and Crown (1995) reported that there were twenty four (24) studies conducted, which identified that college students were more engaged in academic dishonest practices such as changing answers of self-graded tests than other forms of academic dishonesty. Moreover, Whitely and Kost (1999) found that students were more engaged in passive kind of cheating by helping other students as compared to active type of cheating, which comprises cheating by their own selves.

Batool, Abbas and Naeemi (2011) highlight that cheating behaviour will be more prevalent among those who have a higher urge to cheat and do not prepare well for the exam. As a result of lack of preparation, they ultimately use cheating as the only option to pass the exams. Moreover, Hensley, Kirkpatrick and Burgoon (2013) documented that 57% of the students cheated in the exam in last 6 months, which shows that students are continuously engaged in such activities throughout their academic life. With the increase in cheating, students' ranking becomes more problematic, because it is difficult to differentiate between an average and a good student. In modern universities, where students have access to smartphones and the Internet, the practice of cheating becomes even easier and the number of cheating cases tend to increase (Jena, 2020). In the current research, dishonest behaviour of students in Pakistan needs to be examined and necessary action prescribed in order to prevent our future leaders from carrying such behaviors to their workplaces.

Cheating on assignments

Another way of academic dishonesty is through cheating on assignments. This is also an area where students employ a number of innovative ways in order to cheat the teacher and the system. In this type of academic dishonesty, students often work together on individual assignments. Brimble and Stevenson-Clarke (2005) highlighted that 53% of the students in a study that they prepared individual projects by working with their fellows. In McCabe (2005) it has been noted that students are involved in cheating on written assignments by copying from the assignments of their class fellows (Freiburger, Romain, Randol, & Marcum, 2017; Alexander & Willis, 2020).

In Taiwan, giving prohibited help to others on their assignments is the most common dishonest behavior among students (Lin & Wen, 2007). Ma, McCabe and Liu (2013) and Salleh, Alias, Hamid and Yusoff (2013) also found that most often students work on an assignment with others when teacher required individual work to assess their performance. In addition, Freiburger et al. (2017) stated that another common mode of dishonesty is the submission of assignment of another student with their name on it. Moreover, some students copy from the previous assignments submitted by senior students with little or no modification (Abdulghani et al., 2018). This type of cheating is common among the students and they consider it as normal practice of their student life. In current research scenario, it is necessary to assess the level of dishonest behavior of higher education students from perspective of cheating on assignment.

Plagiarism

The institutional concept of plagiarism is considered a form of academic dishonesty (McCabe & Pavela, 2000). Plagiarism, by definition, is the partial or total appropriation of another individual's work, theft of words and script, or literal theft (Turkish Language Association, 1988). In the academic world, plagiarism is "the deliberate adoption or reproduction of ideas, words, or statements of another person as one's own without acknowledgement" (Pavela 1978, p.78). Rakovski and Levy (2007) mentioned that plagiarism is considered a more serious form of dishonest act as compared to collaborating on homework.

Students often use the work of others, copy and paste in order to finish their assignments and papers. Baker (2008) found that around 33% of the papers of undergraduate and 20% of graduate students were copied from web sources. In cases where students had access to online sources they tend to use material from others without giving proper citation or mentioning the sources. Martin, Rao, and Sloan (2009) found that students with high scores on integrity and responsibility indicators were surprisingly found to be significantly more likely to engage in plagiarism than students with lower scores for integrity and responsibility. Thus, a strong sense of personal ethics did not prevent students from cheating. In order to curb this practice, teachers should adopt a "zero tolerance" approach towards cheating and plagiarism in their academic system (Wilson & Ippolito, 2008). It can be inferred that students are used to adding material in their work without acknowledging the contribution of the original authors; this practice has negative implications for academic integrity. In their practical lives, students may also avoid giving due credit to their coworkers or subordinates, which hinders the way of progress for their self and others. In this scenario, it is of utmost importance to assess the level of plagiarism among the future leaders to take some corrective measure to reduce this behavior at academic level and not allow it to become a pervasive practice at the workplace.

Difference between genders

In the disussion related to cheating, gender plays an important role. Ford and Richardson (1994) reviewed extensive literature on academic dishonesty and identified gender as a major determinant of academic dishonesty. Borkowski and Ugars (1998) also reviewed the studies related to business students and their ethical behavior and identified gender as the most frequently observed independent variable of ethical behavior consideration.

Jordan (2001) reported that female students often reported their unethical behavior and academic dishonesty more clearly as compared to male students. Ford and Richardson (1994) reviewed fourteen studies, which investigated the effect of gender and reported unethical behavior by students; they noticed that among these studies, seven studies significantly found a positive relationship between gender and reported unethical behavior and seven studies showed no such relationship.

On the other hand, from a psychological point of view, cheating is considered a threat, because it invokes the fear of being caught, but most students treat it as a thrilling factor too. Among the genders, the nature of risk taking and inclination towards thrilling things, males are more likely to involve in cheating behavior as compared to females, who are perceived to be more careful and cautious (Batool, Abbas & Naeemi, 2011). Whitley, Nelson and Jones (1999) assessed the gender differences in academic dishonesty and found that male students have more positive attitudes towards cheating.

Diego (2017) also supported the notion that male students are more prone to cheating as compared to their female counterparts; in most of the studies it has been reported that males are more likely to cheat than females (Hensley et al., 2013; Lau & Haug, 2011; McKibban, 2013; Nonis & Swift, 2001; Salleh et al., 2013). In addition to that there are some studies in which results are mixed in nature; for instance, Malone (2006) reported that on some academic dishonest acts, male and female students have differences while they behave similarly in most of the other types of dishonesty issues. In the review of literature, this phenomenon is discussed widely, but remains inconclusive (Amua-Sekyi, 2016). This study also intended to assess the difference between male and female students to provide some recent evidence based on the data from a culturally diverse sample of male and female students.

Data and Methodology

Data was collected through self-administered paper based questionnaires as well as online survey forms. Convenient sampling technique was used for sample selection. A total of 400 questionnaires were distributed among the students; out of these about 350 questionnaires were filled by students of different business institutes/universities. After deleting the unqualified responses, 243 were found to be complete and useful for further analysis. The questionnaire comprised two sections: section one contained questions about perception of the students about four dimensions of academic dishonesty; and section two contained questions related to the demographics of students. There were 17 items which were used in the studies of Sims (1993), Pincus and Shnelkin (2003) and Chang (1995). This study also contained items adapted from the study of Lin and Wen (2007). These items were measured on a five-point Likert scale, which is most appropriate and popular scale for measuring attitudes and perceptions. The questionnaire was reviewed by experts of higher education and, after suggested modifications, it was distributed among the students. Students were asked about their attitude toward acceptance of and engagement in academic dishonest behavior. Questionnaires were filled by the students with the cooperation of subject teachers. For the stability of outcomes, reliability analysis using Cronbach's alpha was done; the results ($\alpha=0.81$) for 17 items indicated a high degree of consistency and reliability (Hair et al., 2009).

Results

There were 243 students surveyed, and all of them belonged to HEC recognized institutes/ universities. Among the respondents, eighty two percent students were from public institutes/ universities, and the rest belonged to private institutions. In terms of gender, the sample comprised 63% male and 37% females students. The greater majority of students belonged to the age group of 18-27 years (67%), whereas those in the 28-32 year age bracket were about 16.5%, 33-37 (15.8%) and 38 and above were 0.8%. Among the respondents 39.1% students had a CGPA 3.5 and 35.4% students secured CGPA 3.00; whereas 7% had CGPA less than 3 and only 0.8% students with CGPA 4 out of 4. The summarized figures of resulted demographics characters of students are shown in Table-1.

Table 1
Demographic Information of Respondents

Demographics	Frequency	Percentage
HEC approved University		
Yes	243	100%
No	0	0
University Status		
Public	200	82%
Private	43	18%
Gender		
Male	153	63%
Female	90	37%
Age		
18-22	40	16.5%
23-27	123	50%
28-32	40	16.5%
33-37	38	15.8%
38 and above	2	0.8%
CGPA		
Less than 3.0	17	7.0%
3.0	86	35.4%
3.5	95	39.1%
4.0	2	0.8%

Most frequent type of academic dishonest practices among the business students

In response to the statement (Q1) "I cheat in preparing assignments", sixty eight percent of the respondents disagree, twenty percent of the respondents agree with the statement, while twelve percent were uncertain. The mean value (2.2016) shows that the responses were between disagree and uncertain but more inclined towards disagree. Against (Q2), ninety three percent respondents disagree with the statement "I copy from other students in test/examinations", and two percent agree with this statement. The mean value (1.3909) against (Q2) also shows the inclination of respondents toward strongly disagree. While responding to the statement "I usually pass answers to other students" (Q3), sixty eight percent respondents disagree with this statement and twenty percent disagree. The mean value of the statement in Q3 (2.1523), falls between disagree and neutral but more inclined toward disagree.

In response to (Q4), ninety three percent respondents disagree with the statement "I use prohibited crib notes in examinations" and five percent agree with the statement. The mean value (1.3909) against (Q4) also shows the inclination of respondents toward strongly disagree. In response to the statement "I obtain the examination questions illegally" against (Q5), ninety one percent respondents disagree with the statement and four percent disagree. The mean value of the statement in (Q5), (1.4156), falls between disagree and strongly disagree but more inclined toward strongly disagree.

In response to the statement in (Q6), "I use unauthorized electronic equipment in examinations", ninety two percent respondents disagree, five percent respondents agree with the statement, and three percent respondents show their response as uncertain. The mean value (1.4897) shows that the responses were between disagree and strongly disagree but more inclined towards strongly disagree. In response to (Q7), eighty eight percent respondents disagree with the statement "I used to cheat in test/examinations" and six

percent agree with the statement. The mean value (1.5350) against (Q7) also shows the inclinations of respondents towards disagree.

In response to (Q8), sixty eight percent respondents disagree with the statement “I usually copy others’ assignments and work to prepare assignments” and twenty percent agree with the statement. The mean value (2.1276) against (Q8) falls between disagree and uncertain but more inclined towards strongly disagree. In response to the statement “I work on assignments with others even asked for individual work” (Q9), forty six percent respondents disagree with the statement while thirty nine percent disagree. The mean value of the statement in (Q9), (2.7449), falls between disagree and uncertain but more inclined towards uncertain as indicated in Table 2.

Table 2
Academic Dishonest Behavior of students

Questions (Q)	Statement	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Mean	SD
1	I cheat in preparing assignments	28%	4%	68%	2.2016	1.2483
2	I copy from other students in test/examinations	02%	05%	93%	1.3909	0.6676
3	I usually pass answers to other students.	20%	12%	68%	2.1523	1.2084
4	I use prohibited crib notes in examinations	5%	2%	93%	1.3909	0.7869
5	I obtain the examination questions illegally	4%	5%	91%	1.4156	0.7741
6	I use unauthorized electronic equipments in examinations	5%	3%	92%	1.4897	0.8831
7	I use to cheat in test/examinations	6%	6%	88%	1.5350	0.9056
8	I usually copy others’ assignments and work to prepare assignment	20%	2%	68%	2.1276	1.1731
9	I work on assignments with others even asked for individual work	39%	19%	46%	2.7449	1.2924
10	I give forbidden help to others in their assignments	32%	10%	58%	2.4938	1.3028
11	I do less work in group projects	14%	7%	79%	1.9383	1.1854
12	I fabricate a bibliography	8%	23%	69%	2.0329	1.0199
13	I copy materials without footnoting them	18%	12%	69%	2.2140	1.0849
14	I use reference materials without truly reading them	23%	10%	67%	2.3086	1.1675
15	I try to falsify grade scores	13%	13%	73%	1.9630	1.0922
16	I change test or assignment answers after given grade score	7%	2%	90%	1.5226	0.8875
17	I cheat my friends in preparation of examinations	11%	4%	85%	1.6584	1.0298

In response to the statement in (Q10), “I give forbidden help to others in their assignments”, fifty eight percent respondents disagreed, thirty two percent respondents agree with the statement and ten percent respondents show their response as they were uncertain. The mean value (2.4938) shows that the responses were between disagree and uncertain but more inclined towards disagree. In response to (Q11), seventy nine

percent respondents disagreed with the statement “I do less work in group projects” and fourteen percent agree with the statement. The mean value (1.9383) against (Q11) shows inclinations of respondents towards disagree.

In response to (Q12), sixty nine percent respondents disagree with the statement “I fabricate a bibliography” and eight percent agree with this statement. The mean value (2.0329) against (Q12) falls between disagree and uncertain but more inclined towards disagree. In response to the statement “I copy materials without footnoting them” against (Q13), sixty nine percent respondents disagree with the statement and eighteen percent disagree. The mean value of the statement in (Q13), (2.2140), falls between disagree and uncertain but more inclined towards disagree.

In response to the statement in (Q14), “I use reference materials without truly reading them”, sixty seven percent respondents disagreed, while twenty three percent respondents agree with the statement. The mean value (2.3086) shows that the responses were between disagree and uncertain but more inclined towards disagree. In response to (Q15), seventy three percent respondents disagreed with the statement “I try to falsify grade scores” and thirteen percent agree with this statement. The mean value (1.9630) against (Q15) shows the inclination of respondents towards disagree.

In response to (Q16), ninety percent respondents disagreed with the statement “I change test or assignment answers after given grade score” and seven percent agree with the statement. The mean value (1.5226) against (Q16) falls between strongly disagree and uncertain but inclined towards disagree. In response to the statement “I cheat my friends in preparation of examination” against (Q17), eighty five percent respondents disagreed with the statement and eleven percent disagreed. The mean value of the statement in (Q17), (1.6584), falls between strongly disagree and disagree but more inclined towards disagree. The details are given in Table 2.

Gender and dishonest behavior of the students

Independent sample t-test was used to determine difference in the responses of male and female students about academic dishonesty practices. The analysis results showed a significant difference in the statements (Q2, Q3, Q4, Q6, Q7, Q8, Q9, Q10, Q11, Q14, Q15, Q16, Q18, Q19 and Q20) as shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Difference between male and female academic dishonest behavior

	Statement	Mean	Standard Deviation	t	Sig.
1	I cheat in preparing assignments.	2.1961 2.2111	1.22506 1.29384	0.008	0.928
2	I copy from other students in test/examinations.	1.4575 1.2778	.71623 .56145	4.161	0.042
3	I usually pass answers to other students.	2.3203 1.8667	1.22825 1.12380	8.223	0.005
4	I use prohibited crib notes in examinations	1.4706 1.2556	.87403 .59134	4.289	0.039
5	I obtain the examination questions illegally.	1.4575 1.3444	.73437 .83681	1.210	0.272
6	I use unauthorized electronic equipments in examinations.	1.6078 1.2889	.97492 .65762	7.594	0.006
7	I use to cheat in test/examinations.	1.7124 1.2333	1.01743 .56190	16.903	0.000

8	I usually copy others' assignments and work to prepare assignment.	2.2810 1.8667	1.18354 1.11375	7.253	0.008
9	I work on assignments with others even asked for individual work.	2.8562 2.5556	1.31499 1.23717	3.093	0.080
10	I give forbidden help to others in their assignments.	2.6536 2.2222	1.32447 1.22500	6.350	0.012
11	I do less work in group projects.	2.0915 1.6778	1.24794 1.02582	7.076	0.008
12	I fabricate a bibliography.	2.1046 1.9111	1.00762 1.03473	2.048	0.154
13	I copy materials without footnoting them.	2.2941 2.0778	1.08144 1.08335	2.265	0.134
14	I use reference materials without truly reading them.	2.4379 2.0889	1.16320 1.14798	5.151	0.024
15	I try to falsify grade scores.	2.0654 1.7889	1.10426 1.05463	3.671	0.057
16	I change test or assignment answers after given grade score.	1.6928 1.2333	1.00185 .54153	16.138	0.000
17	I cheat my friends in preparation of examinations.	1.7386 1.5222	1.08683 .91465	2.516	0.114

While, no significant difference in the responses to the statements in (Q1, Q5, Q12, and Q13 & Q17) between male and female students' academic dishonest behavior. The details of the results are given in Table 3. Based on the above analysis, in response to majority of the questions asked related to dishonest behavior, there exist a significant difference between male and female respondents. These results are in line with the work of Batool et al. (2011), Diego (2017), Hensley et al. (2013), McKibban, (2013) and Salleh et al. (2013). This can be asserted that academic dishonest behavior for male and female respondents is different.

Conclusion

The results of the survey indicate that there was very low self-reported academic dishonest behavior among business students. It was found that only a few of the respondents admitted having engaged in academic dishonest behavior, such as passing answers to others, cheating in preparing assignments, working with others on supposedly 'individual' assignments, and providing forbidden help to others. There were a few students who reported that they use reference material without truly reading it and provide forbidden help to other students in exams. It was also found that there is a significant difference between male and female cheating behavior. Results showed that no significant difference exists between academic dishonest behavior of public and private university students.

Practical Implications

Based on the results of the analysis, it is evident that the cheating trend among students can be controlled by preparing relevant questions that require mental exercise and encourage systematic thinking process. The policy towards copying in exams and assignments should be strict and clearly communicated to the students. Heavy penalties should be imposed to decrease the rate of cheating, and zero tolerance towards dishonest behavior should be in practice. In addition to that, extensive training should be arranged for the students to develop a sense of "what is right and wrong". This sense of viewing academic dishonest behavior negatively will reduce the likelihood of students engaging in such activities. Their moral training is necessary to realize the seriousness of cheating and its subsequent impact on their academic and future work life.

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