

Unriddling Academic Dishonesty through the Lens of Teacher and Student Perceptions

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Abstract

This study sought to explore contributory factors of academic dishonesty. Academic dishonesty is being practiced yet little research has been conducted on the subject. Subsequently, this study employed the qualitative approach for in-depth exploration of the factors of academic dishonesty. In this study, focus group discussions were conducted with two groups of participants; university students (N=12) and university teachers (N=08) of The Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Pakistan. Participants for this study were recruited through purposive sampling. Three research questions were asked to the participants: Q1) How is academic dishonesty described by students and teachers? Q2) What would be the possible types of academic dishonesty? and Q3) What are the pros and cons of academic dishonesty in the long run? Their responses were audio taped and the collected data were transcribed by following transcription steps provided by Humble (2015). For data analysis, NVivo (12) was utilized and factors were extracted. The prudent findings found that cheating, plagiarism, falsification and failure of system are identified as the most prominent factors. The findings of this study concluded that these factors significantly shape-up academic dishonesty in higher learning institutions. Findings of this study would help educationists to bring about reforms in the educational sector.

Keywords: Academic Dishonesty, Factors, Qualitative Exploration, University Students, Teacher Perspective

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1. INTRODUCTION

Academic dishonesty is debated as a predominant phenomenon of the day that grabs the attention of every educated and concerned person. It is considered to be a complex and prevalent problem spreading globally [Alleyne and Phillips (2011); Imran and Nordin (2013); Iberahim, Hussein, Samat, Noordin, and Daud (2013); McCabe and Trevino (1997); Nazir and Aslam (2010); Thomas (2017); Tadesse and Getachew (2010); Saidin and Isa (2013); Whitley (1998); Yang Huang and Chen (2013)]. It is thought that outcomes of academic dishonesty lead to corruption of nations. In the same vein, graduate and undergraduate students display a severe problem of misconduct in their workplaces. Dishonest students are more likely to repeat their misconduct in practical phases of life [Grimes (2004); Hardling, *et. al.* (2004); Lawson (2004); Rakovski and Levy (2007)]. Using helping material for cheating in exams, manipulation of the assignments, presenting fraudulent data, proxy attendances, false excuses to attain extension for projects are common methods of academic dishonesty adopted by majority of the students. The most conventional and common way of cheating during exams is by using helping material [Pullen, Ortloff, Casey, and Payne (2002); Danielsen, Simon and Pavlick (2006); Choi (2009)]. In order to devise ways to deal with academic dishonesty, educational organizations have opted various ways as a universal explanation of this phenomenon is absent (Eaton, 2017). The expected norms of academic institutes are interrupted by devious acts of corruption, scams, and wrongdoings in academic fields.

1.1 Causes of Academic Dishonesty

There could be several reasons for the academic dishonesty among students such as a pathological urge to cheat (Danielsen *et al.*, 2006). Moreover, Tjoanda, and Diptyana (2012) found that plagiarism is identical to psychological disorder of Kleptomania in which stealing is done in order to satisfy the urge of stealing rather than being benefitted by stealing. The moral value of students also plays a vital role in their attempts to cheat and subsequently the earned advantage strengthens the behaviour of cheating (Sattler, Graeff & Willen, 2013). Furthermore, teachers' biasness could be another reason for academic dishonesty. Teachers play an important role in influencing the students; hence, their if they are honest, they will nurture honest students (Debbie, 2009).

Moreover, demographic and personal factors also play important roles in academic dishonesty of students (McCabe, Trevin and Butterfield 1999). Carroll (2002) states that less cheating is seen to be done by adult students, women, and students with higher educational accomplishment. Students who participate in extracurricular activities are left with little time to

concentrate on studies. Therefore, they are more prone to cheating. Freshmen year students cheat more as compared to mature ones because of lack of experience (Smith, Davy, Rosenberg and Haight, 2009). Cheating behaviour is also encouraged by contextual factors rather than the background of the students. The research indicates that declaring a punishment for cheating before the test or creating distance between the students does not contribute in lessening the incidence of cheating (Kerkvliet and Sigmund, 1999; Yang, 2012). There is a correlation between academic cheating and goal orientation. More cheating attempts were found among students who preferred grades over mastery goals (Anderman and Midgley, 2004). Time management issues and to be surround by peers who are more prone to cheating make the individuals more dishonest academically (Power, Higgins and Kohlberg, 1989). No cheating behaviour is observed in students who are surrounded by peers with high moral values (McCabe and Trevino, 1993). Hence, peer pressure can work both ways, i.e., it may increase or decrease the likelihood of dishonest behaviours (McCabe, Trevino and Butterfield, 2002). There are certain ethical causes as well; students have become so much sensitized with cheating and dishonest behaviour that they do not regret cheating and feel no guilt. However, if little guilt is present then it is escaped by making false excuses and justifications. Students might declare academic dishonesty as a wrongdoing in social settings but do not object to commit it (Barnaby, 2004).

1.2 Outcomes of Academic Dishonesty

All educational systems are affected by academic dishonesty including students, teachers, and higher authorities. Smith *et al.* (2009) declared that if a student is prone to cheating in young age then he might do it in later years of life too [Nonis and Swift (2001); Wilmshurst and Peter (2013)]. Although the ethical standards and principles are very important to follow, but research reported that low level effort and work lead towards low level of learning skills and ethical misconduct (Colnerud and Rosander, 2009). The hardworking students may become discouraged and demotivated by academic dishonesty practiced by less competent students. The standard of knowledge and learning is also compromised when one steals the ideas of others (Tjoanda, and Diptyana, 2012). Through meta-analysis, Whitley and Keith-Spiegel (2002) stated that the leading causes of academic dishonesty were performance issues, academic and non-academic external pressures, biased professors, and lack of effort. A study conducted by Musau and Boibanda (2018) revealed that medical students who observed cheating and dishonest acts were more likely to depict dishonest acts in their student and practical life. Therefore, the leading factor of academic dishonesty was witnessing or seeing academic dishonesty in action.

A research conducted by Aaron and Simmons (2011) states that there was absence of major variances between teachers and student's dishonest acts or academic dishonesty according to their self-reports. While, major differences were observed in self-reported occurrences of unprincipled behaviour. According to Rujoiu and Rujoiu (2014), students who practice dishonest behaviours in their academic lives are likely to continue the same behaviour later in their workplace environments. Thus, such behaviour is deeply rooted in the attitudes of students, they tend to devalue the academic qualifications through their dishonest behaviour towards academic tasks in terms of falsifying information and cheating throughout their exams (Akakandelwa, Jain and Wamundila, 2013). Students who have low grades are usually observed to be cheating in exams and showing dishonest behaviour while submitting assignments or preparing for quizzes. They seek help from their colleagues for serving passing grades (Griebeler, 2017). In higher learning institutes such as universities, academic dishonesty is the most problematic and disturbing issue where several moral and ethical values are usually ignored [Akakandelwa, *et al.* (2013); Musau and Boibanda (2018)]. Students and teachers both adapt dishonest ways for getting academic better grades and passing the students for the requirement of degree (Tadesse and Getachew, 2010). Society encourages misleading means to resolve their evaluation through the high intensity ranks of students with good scores paving the way for an unqualified candidate with an incorrect grade quality (Lisle and Bowrin, 2011). According to a report by Kanat-Maymon, *et al.* (2015) students who are in state of any need, tend to cheat more and most of them do not even consider that academic dishonesty is related to unethical and unjustifiable behaviour (Nick and Llaguno, 2015).

In the past few decades, academic dishonesty is considered as a matter of great concern in higher education institutes of Pakistan (Nazir and Aslam, 2010). Several acts related to academic dishonesty have created a sense of threat for the workplace and business fields as well. A study conducted in 2017 by Quraishi and Aziz reported that in Pakistan, the reason of academic dishonesty could be the stress present in students to meet the expectation of parents by maintaining good grades and percentages, although there is scarcity of literature in Pakistan to identify the underlying factors that lead towards academic dishonesty among the students. Through the current study, the authors have designed to explore this phenomenon through the perception of students and teachers in higher learning institutes of Pakistan.

1.3 Overarching Objective of the Study

1. To explore the wholistic picture of academic dishonesty in the light of professional and academic learners of Pakistan.

1.4 Research Questions

1. How do you describe academic dishonesty?
2. What are the possible types/forms of academic dishonesty prevailing in Pakistan?
3. What are the pros and cons of academic dishonesty in the long run?

1.5 Rationale of the Study

It was aimed to assess the factors contributing towards academic dishonesty in students acquiring higher education in Pakistan. It has been assumed that academic dishonesty is becoming a wide ranging and global dilemma which should be discussed and fixed [Thomas (2017); Saidin and Isa (2013)]. Although the pre-existing literature enlightens us regarding different elements of academic dishonesty, however, the factors of academic dishonesty are yet to be explored. In Pakistan, a study addressed the academic dishonesty among students as the consequence of stress caused by parental expectation of acquiring good grades (Quraishi and Aziz, 2017). Still, the growing body of knowledge lacks the adequate literature related to academic dishonesty and its factors. In the light of significance and need of study, we sought to discover all the dynamics of academic dishonesty according to the viewpoint of both teachers and students of Pakistan.

2. MATERIAL AND METHOD

2.1 Research Design

The current study used a qualitative approach to find out the factors behind academic dishonesty. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted with two groups; students and teachers, for the collection of data. This method provides the collective idea and insights into how a given person, in a given context, makes sense of a given phenomenon.

2.2 Study Participant and Recruitment

In total, 12 students (currently enrolled) and 8 teachers (permanent faculty) were recruited through purposive sampling from The Islamia University of Bahawalpur. The participants were selected on the criteria of their self-claim that they have experienced academic dishonesty. Participants agreed to be a contributor towards the act of academic dishonesty. These participants willingly participated in FGDs. In order to facilitate the participants to feel unthreatened and unbiased, a warm and proficient relationship was established

between the participants and the researchers so that they share their viewpoint without any hesitation. They were provided with complete information regarding the selection and purpose of conducting the research. Two sessions of FGD were conducted to obtain data from students and teachers respectively. The information regarding the venue and timings of FGD was provided formally at the time of invitation. Both sessions of FGD were conducted in the Department of Applied Psychology at The Islamia University of Bahawalpur.

2.3 Ethical Considerations

All participants gave their written consent for participating in this research. The consent form provided to them comprised of the information regarding purpose, nature, risk, and benefits associated with the study. They were given the right to withdraw from research at any time. Participants were also ensured about the confidentiality and privacy of their identities and information they provided. Formal permissions were taken from the participants to record the FGDs and they were allowed to express their opinions without any intrusion. They were also acknowledged about the importance and significance of their worthy views and ideas for this study.

2.4 Data Transcription

After the collection of data, the responses of participants were transcribed by following the guidelines of Humble (2012). The audio recordings and field notes were compared for the clarity of responses and verbatim of participants were read carefully by an expert to avoid any biasness and ambiguity. The responses were translated and back-translated to acquire the accuracy and meaning for validity of data. The truthfulness and trustworthiness of data were ensured by following the guidelines of Trochim and Donnelly (2007).

2.5 Data Analysis

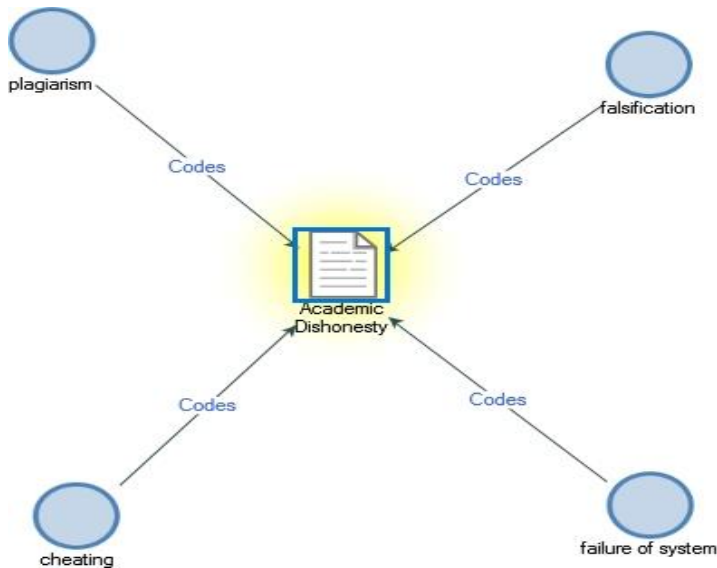
For data analysis, steps of thematic analysis presented by Braun and Clarke (2006) were followed. After reading and re-reading the data to get familiarity, the early impressions were considered and rough notes were extracted. From these impressions, initial codes were obtained. The initial codes were overlapping with each other; therefore, by identifying overlapping codes, broader and predominant preliminary themes were organized. The themes were descriptive and described the pattern in the data relevant to the research questions. The codes associated with more than one theme were reviewed and modified to get clarity of their relationship with research questions and were included in the most appropriate theme. After generating

the preliminary themes, they were reviewed and modified again to make better sense in support of data. At this stage, out of six preliminary themes, two were eliminated as they had a pattern similar to the rest of themes and four major themes were extracted which provided clear categories relating to the research questions. The final step was to refine and define each theme appropriately, making those relatable to the data provided by respondents.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

NVivo (12) was used to do thematic analysis of FGD data. Themes exploration analysis was conducted that yielded following themes. Figure 3.1, themes exploration diagram reflects all four emergent themes.

Figure 3.1. Theme Exploration Diagram



3.1 Themes

Cheating. Cheating is the one of the important factors of academic dishonesty that was found after the breakdown of data. The previous literature indicated that about two-thirds of the college pupils were involved in cheating at the turn of the 20th century (Stephens and Nicholson, 2008). Another study, conducted in the U.S. also supports the finding according to which at least 20 per cent students start to cheat in class as early as first grade (Bushway and Nash, 1977). Similarly, about 70% of high school students are involved in acts of cheating while, 56% of middle school students take part in cheating (Decoo,

2002). It was stated by one of the respondents from the student group that, *“Here, student remains free all the way, and one week before, they start studying. In this scenario cheating element is up, and students approach the teachers for guesses, this is the reason for academic dishonesty.”* (R1:S¹)

The figures of cheating around the globe are significantly high as cheating is or is considered as one of the chief factors in academic dishonesty. About 75% students studying in large public universities are involved in cheating, while the prevalence of cheating in those studying in small elite colleges is as low as 15–20 per cent (LaBeff, Clark, Haines, and Diekhoff, 1990). The data of higher education reflected that 56% of MBA students admitted cheating, along with 54% of graduate students in engineering, 48% and 45% in law (Pope, 2007).

In teacher group, one of the respondents stated; *“In semester system, students try to copy assignments, presentations. They also try to bribe on duty staff during exams, so they can cheat easily. I also came to know that there are some students who divide syllabus and then during exams or class test they help each other.”* (R1:T²)

While, a respondent from the student group mentioned cheating as; *“There are many other types, at small level, the cheating, if student do the cheating, as a result a student who not study and student who study gets equal grades. As a result, who studies loses, and who has not read the topic, has not study become equal. But we can say, who have studied the topic, has more benefit. Practical life is different from our ideas or if you only get the greats, then the people which are original, a man which is original in practice he will be very good at practical life”* (R1: S).

It was added by another participant from teacher group that; *“Students do not prepare for exams properly; they either ask their fellows to help them during exams via cheating. Students either copy assignments from their fellow students or get a cooked assignment from internet. Same thing goes for presentations. Most of the PPT files are downloaded from various websites. There is another trend among the students that they get their work done by a third person. Unfortunately, this “Third Person” is working like a third-party resource for the students who do not want to put their efforts in their thesis work. They give the asked amount of money and buy already prepared theses and submit these theses with their name and easily get away with it. You can name it contract cheating, paid work or whatever term comes to your mind but this phenomenon exists in our institutes”* (R1: T). It was further added by a respondent from teacher group; *“Pupil does cheat enormously in exams.*

¹ S= Students Group.

² T=Teachers Group.

Showing your content and looking (cheating) other's content, both are wrong, and it can be called academic dishonesty" (R8: T).

It was found that there are relatively less occurrences of cheating acts committed by girls, higher achievers, and by comparatively older students. Apart from this, more cheating acts are shown by students involved in extracurricular activities due to shortage of time to spend on studies (Macdonald and Carroll, 2002). The freshmen year students are more likely to cheat according to a study, may be due to lack of maturity and experience (Smith *et al.*, 2009).

Plagiarism. It is also found to be one of the leading factors of academic dishonesty. According to the new educational norms it is considered to be a major violation and is categorized as academic dishonesty. In journalism sectors, plagiarism is currently considered to be a type of academic dishonesty and an abuse of journalistic principles, subject to sanctions such as termination and other career damaging penalties (Penelope, 2000). *Plagiarism is now considered the most serious offense in academics and a crime. As one of the respondents from the teacher group emphasized this fact as; "Now in society, as we have been getting away from hard working and use short-cut, in the same way, there are students who try their best to avoid from hard work. They just want to pass in exams and get the degree. That's why, now you see the assignment that would be copy-paste. If you see a class of twenty students, all have changed their names and roll numbers on title page and rest of the content is same in assignments."* (R4: T)

There have been severe consequences of plagiarism for the initiates, therefore, it is emphasized that teachers may deal with this matter by helping students in learning in order to escape plagiarism. Rakovski and Levy (2007) summarized in their study that serious dishonest acts are to be involved in examination-related and plagiarism-related dishonest acts while, less serious dishonest acts include collaborating on homework and not contributing to group tasks. According to general prospects, they term such acts of pupils to be less severe [Kidwell, Wozniak and Laurel (2003); Nuss (1984)]. It was suggested by a respondent from the student group that: *"Plagiarism is a type of dishonesty, in which someone's idea is stolen. We can say, we pick the paragraph of an original other, as it is, and after change the words, we use that in our work. Means, credit does not go to original author, these results in plagiarism."* (R1: S).

Falsification. The idea refers to modifying facts by making untrue statements by the students to hide true data. Falsification was found to be a major factor of academic dishonesty. This type of wrongdoing is often ignored and termed as less severe and majority of the students commit it without any

regret or sense of guilt. Even honest students are also guilty of committing falsification (Guerrero, Anderson and Afifi, 2007). The question regarding falsification and academic dishonesty was answered by the respondent from the teacher group as; *“This is academic dishonesty that you are not taking lecture and you have marked the attendance.in addition to that, like we have science subject, there are practical’s linked with it, students are present in lab and they are physically available, and they have to work in form of group, one or two students work and rest do not work. I have not observed any benefits of that as such, that you are present and not working. Lack of interest is a reason that students do not get involve, they do not have much interest.”* (R5: T)

According to Trivers (2011) it is easy to mislead others and make them believe in one’s capabilities if the doer has bullishness, or more commonly self-deception because it eliminates the necessity for cautious deception (Von Hippel and Trivers, 2011). A respondent from the teacher group gave the viewpoint regarding falsification as; *“Yes, when students start their school and have good environment at home, they are not tempted for dishonesty, but in school and a class, there must be 30-40 students who would have training of dishonesty from their home. Because it is practiced at home and they acquire form parents or adopt from them. When kids interact, they do dishonesty and cheating; they take money from home and tell parents wrong fees. They are usually absent from school. After failing once or twice they keep parents under deceit that result is still awaited. They go somewhere else than school and tell at home that they went to school.”* (R4: T).

Failure of System. It is a comprehensive term that includes exploitation, wrongdoing, favouritism, etc. Failure of system was also a leading factor in academic dishonesty. It is found that if there is presence of more academic procrastination then it may lead to increased academic dishonesties that include making lame excuse, committing plagiarism, possessing forbidden means in examinations, having helping materials in exams, replicating someone else’s work and fabricating data (Kerkvliet and Sigmund, 1999). One of the respondents from the student group responded that academic dishonesty is due to failure of a system as; *“Overall system is responsible, when we talk about system, the system includes students, teachers, administrations, and its mixture of all such things, when we talk about system, it’s not a specific one thing”* (R1: S). About 21% of instructors overlooked a major occurrence of fraud. Cheating is never reported by about 40% of the teachers. Fifty-four percent complain about cheating occasionally while just mere six percent act on all academic dishonesty cases that may affect them in any manner. If teachers report the misconduct then very few among them actually penalize the students (McCabe, et al., 2002). A respondent from teacher group responded this as; *“Hence, we get recommendation of 10 or many people even if we snatch someone’s paper. And the result is that we have-to return the paper, and when we already know*

that we have- to return the paper after one hour, we avoid snatching the paper. If I snatch the paper, student goes to head or dean, and they ask to give students one chance. I think, all system should adopt a zero-tolerance policy. Exams invigilation should be by teachers and whenever invigilation will be done through support staff, students do not afraid off, students take them easy” (R4: T).

Another respondent from same group stated that; *“I would also like to raise a point regarding nepotism, those students whose relatives are working in the same institute where they come to get a degree. Such students don’t even bother to study. If a teacher tries to be honest with his job, their relatives ask the teacher that do not make their child to follow the rules. Hard working and brilliant students get discouraged when they witness that dishonest students are get everything” (R1: T).*

Similar findings were also observed in the verbatims of students who reported that *“the students who have some relatives working in their institutions gets the leniency from the teachers and other administrative staff. I witnessed favouritism and nepotism many times as well” (R4: S)* Teacher may think that it is not their job to guard students from academic dishonesty. In institutes, the disagreement that “they are teachers, not police officers” is usually heard. Most professors have economical approach according to which they think that if a pupil deceives in his educational career by fraud then he actually cheats himself out of the money he earned as they are responsible for paying for the learning. Due to fear of severe punishments or consequences, many professors are hesitant to report violations to the relevant authorities (Schneider, 1999).

4. CONCLUSION

This study concluded that in Pakistani context, academic dishonesty is practiced over and over in higher learning institutions. Students have concern to achieve their degree with good grades but they are usually less interested in hard work due to which they adopt alternative ways that may lead towards academic dishonesty. Our study indicated that cheating and plagiarism are the most practiced factors of academic dishonesty from the perspectives of students and teachers, whereas, they also perceive that failure of system and falsification are also other most common factors of academic dishonesty.

5. LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

The study has limited scope in perspective of teacher’s dishonesty towards academic and student’s evaluation. Therefore, future studies must

address terms of cultural element and differences for more insight and in-depth knowledge of academic dishonesty.

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