

A Study of Pakistani Students' Perceptions about Academic Dishonesty at University Level

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ABSTRACT

Academic dishonesty may be seen as a deceitful endeavour to avoid academic rules, principles, practices, traditions, and values to gain illegal benefit. Academic dishonesty is a worldwide concern. The main aim of the study was to identify the views of Pakistani students towards academic corruption as well as to find out any differences in their perceptions towards academic dishonesty at the university level. It was quantitative research and a survey was conducted to investigate the academic dishonesty among students. An adopted questionnaire based on a 5-point Likert scale was used to collect the data from three hundred randomly selected respondents. Frequencies, percentages, Mean, Standard deviation, independent sample t-test, and One Way ANOVA were used to analyze the data. The results revealed that approximately half of the participants are, consciously or unconsciously, involved in the activities which may be termed as cheating. They also think that cheaters are considered to be smart people in the country. Moreover, students cheat as they desire to earn good grades in exams and it is in line with the general trend in society. Teachers may motivate their students to focus on learning rather than grades only. They may help their students overcome their fear of failure to reduce the practices of academic dishonesty.

Keywords: *Academic dishonesty, Educational Institutions.*

Introduction

Education is a way to tackle emerging issues of a society. Therefore, nation-states promise to provide education to their people. However, the quality of education has become a major concern across the world nowadays. Academic achievement is frequently utilized as an indicator of quality because it is measurable using standardized tests (Sida, 2000). This implies that the quality of education can be dictated by legitimate methods of measurement, e.g. tests/exams, assignments. Research in education determines the measurement strategies of academic achievement of the students as a key factor in guaranteeing quality. A learner's appraisal ought to be viewed as an unpredictable, multidimensional movement that requires arrangement, adjustment and strictness keeping in mind the end goal in order to guarantee quality results (Joughin & Macdonald, 2004). To ensure rigorous assessment, which may

enhance the quality of education, it may be argued that cheating must be seriously controlled in academic institutions. If there are exploitative practices, such as cheating during the exams, the quality of the education system will be questioned. Jones (2011) describes academic dishonesty as learners taking part in unscrupulous practices, for example, plagiarizing and deception. Academic dishonesty is a beguiling or deceitful endeavour to avoid rules, principles, practices, traditions, and standards to pick up an out-of-line advantage. Academic dishonesty is a worldwide concern. It becomes more serious at the higher education level as most of the institutions are facing this problem. As indicated by Johnson (2012), corrupt acts are dishonesty and immorality. It is now more dominant than any other time and necessary steps need to be taken by higher education institutions to teach learners about academic honesty (Gillespie, 2003). The existing literature on this issue reveals that the worldwide

level of scholarly untruthfulness is high and is increasing constantly. Eighty percent of the students may be involved in academically deceptive practices during exams which indicates a dire need to address this serious concern (see Morales, 2000). Moeck (2002) explained academic dishonesty as the misuse of scholarly materials by deception. This could incorporate seeking un-authorized help from another student's test amid an exam, plagiarizing by not referring to the writer, or harming hardware so that others may not be able to use it. He defined dishonesty as all self-seeking acts which are in opposition to the fair and impartial conveyance of advanced education. Academic cheating may incorporate literary theft, fraud, duping, doing wrong things skillfully as well as stealing academic ideas of others without their permission. Academic cheating can happen at either the institutional or individual level.

In institutional tricking, an educational institution may endeavour to enhance scores; may be to guarantee that its students do well. This may occur on transnational projects where the granting body is an outer specialist organization. However, the negative effect on quality will be critical if the granting body or the certifying body does not have a thorough quality confirmation framework to limit such practices. The intensity of the present demand of career marketplace at any cost has prompted moral issues and outrages, for example, producing reports, exchanging accreditations, beguiling and cheating in instructive settings. The circumstances should not permit if learners have of cheating because every other person does so, which could be alluded to like the idea of balance (Haines, Diekhoff, Labeff, & Clark, 1986) or the misguided judgment of two wrongs making a correct outcome (Davis, Drinan, Bertram, & Gallant, 2009). There are many physical and psychological elements that entice learners towards academic corruption

(Bedford, Gregg, & Clinton, 2011). Many a study has shown that demographic factors, especially age and gender, are associated with academic dishonesty (Ogilvie & Stewart, 2010; Tibbestts & Myers, 1999). The studies show that adolescent learners are more probable to be involved in corrupt academic practices than adult students (Baird, 1980; McCabe & Trevino, 1997; Franklin-Stokes & Newstead, 1995). Haines et al., (1986) also claim that adolescents are usually involved in the activities which lead to academic dishonesty more than adults as they are immature (in their age and personality) at this stage. Experienced and adult students are less likely to commit illegal academic activities. Similarly, the majority of the related surveys uncovered that male learners are involved in exploitative educational practices more frequently than females. The gender discrimination theory (Bussey & Bandura, 1999) gives a conceivable basis to this distinction. As indicated in theory, "women are allied to comply with the rules, though men are less committed with rules and disciplines in this regard".

Therefore, females are probably going to maintain a strategic distance from scholastic corruption, while males probably engage themselves in such conduct (Baird, 1980; McCabe & Trevino, 1997; Kuntz & Butler, 2014). Moreover, Layton (2005) stated that development of new strategies and methods of cheating requires a shared push to alleviate or check untrustworthy scholarly conduct, as devious behaviours not only divest teachers of appropriate techniques of teaching and assessment but also rob the students of desired learning opportunities in and outside the classroom. Since there are not enough studies conducted in this discipline in the local context, this study may fill the gap. The first aim was to explore the cheating methods in which the students are involved and the second was to recognize their excuses for academic corruption. There are different factors

related to cheating in academic settings. The studies, where data were collected secretly, discovered that countless students employ numerous scholastically unscrupulous tricks ranging from cheating in exams to composing copied assignments. Teachers are unable to control cheating in classrooms because they do not seek the reasons for cheating. An interesting reason for these practices includes students' desire to seek social and academic approval through decent evaluations and good grades. It is conceivable that learners become professional cheaters due to the pressure of performing well in their institutions. Therefore, the students with the best scholarly challenges are more likely to swindle (Robinson, Amburgey, Swank, & Faulkner, 2004).

The issue of scholarly fraudulent practices has been alluded to as one of the most despicable aspects of higher education (Josien & Broderick, 2013). Recent researches have uncovered this trend as ever-present (Brown & McInerney, 2008; Jones, 2011). Jones (2011) showed that 92% of the students examined knew about other students who were engaged in academic deception. The research, additionally, demonstrated that 52.1% of the students said that scholarly deceitfulness is simply a minor issue at their university. Jones' (2011) study showed that adolescent students are not mature, thus, they are engaged in academic corruption frequently. He also stated that single students engaged in the activities of academic dishonesty were more in number than married students. When the danger of penalty was lower, more female students were likely to cheat than male students; the higher danger of penalty or punishment brought down the chances of cheating by female students. The students who did not have good marks were more engaged in academic dishonesty than those who have good marks (Josien & Broderick, 2013). Petress (2003) described that students who are caught in the act of academic

corruption made lame excuses; everybody is doing it, and it is not a major issue. There may be many factors of academic dishonesty in educational institutions.

Research Objectives

The objectives of the study were to:

1. Identify the perceptions of students towards academic dishonesty at the university level in Pakistan.
2. Find out the difference in the perceptions of students towards academic dishonesty based on the demographic variables of gender, age, semester, faculty, department, student position.

The matter of academic dishonesty may have a negative influence on the reputation of an institution. Learners who do not involve themselves in such illegal activities feel unpleasant by observing other students cheat without being punished. Policies are also not available clearly in many contexts. There is an acute need of establishing policies, rules and standards in educational institutions to overcome cheating. Educators are liable for dynamic in dealing with singular problems inside or to deliver it as per strategies and systems, which for the most part cause the guilty party to show up before a disciplinary board. This study attempted to explain to stakeholders, e.g. policymakers and teachers, about why academic dishonesty is so common in the institutions. Moreover, this study may enable those stakeholders to explore the cheating methods which are frequently used by the students and to make decisions which might minimize the occurrence of these practices. Therefore, it may help the managers of Pakistani academic institutions understand and sort out the reasons for academic dishonesty among their students.

Research Methodology

This study was quantitative in nature and a survey method was used to collect students' perceptions about academic dishonesty at the university level. Three

departments (Education, Psychology, and English) were selected randomly to select the sample from three universities of Lahore i.e. University of the Punjab, University of Education, and Kinnaird College University. A sample of 300 students was selected randomly from these universities.

A questionnaire was used to identify participants' opinions regarding academic dishonesty. This questionnaire was initially developed by Naghdipour and Emeagwali (2013). The questionnaire consisted of five-point Likert scale (strongly agree = 5 to strongly disagree = 1). It had four parts: the first part consisted of demographic variables of the respondents, the second part consisted of statements about different methods of academic cheating, the third part had the statements about contextual factors of academic dishonesty, the last part of the questionnaire consisted of psychological factors of academic dishonesty. The pilot testing was conducted to check the validity and consistency of the scale. Validity was ensured by the opinion of experts. Cronbach's Alpha value was calculated to ascertain the reliability of the questionnaire. The detail of the reliability test has been given below:

Table 2
Demographic Information of Students

Variables	Demographic	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	59	19.7
	Female	241	80.3
	Total	300	100.0
Age	16-20	143	47.7
	21-25	120	40.0
	26-30	37	12.3
Departments	Education	166	55.3
	Psychology	34	11.3
	English	100	33.3
Qualification	BS(Hon)	168	56.0
	MA/MSc	24	8.0
	M.Phil.	87	29.0
	PhD	21	7.0

Table shows the demographic information of selected students. The sample of the

Table 1
Reliability of the Scale

Cronbach's Alpha	No. of Items
0.941	37

There were 37 items in the questionnaire about academic dishonesty. The value of the reliability index was 0.941, which is statistically significant. Data were collected personally after seeking permission from the focal persons of each university. The questionnaires were distributed among the students after seeking their as well as their teachers' consent. The return rate of the questionnaires was 99 percent. After data collection, the data were entered into SPSS for analysis. The data were cleaned before applying different tests for analysis. In descriptive statistics, frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were obtained. In inferential statistics, independent sample t-test was used to see the difference between male and female students, and one-way ANOVA was used to find the difference among demographic variables.

Data Analysis

A detailed description of data analysis is as under:

study had different demographic characteristics (Gender, Age, Departments,

and Qualification). Total sample of the study was 300 students from three universities.

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics Mean and Standard Deviations of Cheating Methods

Statements	Mean	SD
After joining this university, have you ever, during tests/examination, took unfair help from others?	2.97	1.269
copied other students' scripts?	2.59	1.268
requested others to prepare class assignments for you?	2.49	1.370
paid anybody else for completing your tasks?	1.81	1.183
used internet material without proper citations?	2.87	1.235
used electronic devices/gadgets (e.g. cell phone) for copying?	1.74	1.116
used notes illegally?	1.98	1.212
took unauthorized help from seniors who had attempted the test previously?	2.70	1.330
lied for getting more time for task or assignment completion?	2.34	1.244
helped others in an unauthorized manner?	3.34	1.331
shared homework with fellows?	3.44	1.199
Knew about the penalties for cheating?	2.93	1.282

Students shared homework with other students has the highest mean score ($M=3.44$, $SD= 1.199$). It means students of higher educational institutions share homework with each other and this causes cheating because the students copy the academic material of others when students share their work. Helping students during exams has second highest mean score. It indicates that students take help from each other during examinations. This act encourages the cheating habit among

students. Seeking help from each other during exams may be seen a sign of fear of failure among students. According to them, taking help from others in test is a source of passing the exam. Cheating through mobile phones has the lowest mean score ($M = 1.74$, $SD = 1.116$) but, basically, this score is opposite to researchers' observation as teachers i.e. students commonly use mobile phones during tests, and they make lame excuses once caught.

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics Mean and Standard Deviations of Contextual Factors

Statements	Mean	SD
I cheat because...		
every student do so.	2.13	1.226
There is not enough time for studying.	2.06	1.136
teachers are lenient about it.	2.00	1.195
university has a relaxed policy about it.	1.84	1.095
lessons provided in the class are not easy to understand.	2.32	1.271
family gives me a free hand to do so.	1.84	1.137
teachers were also cheaters during their study period.	2.48	1.320
cheaters are considered smart people in the society.	2.84	1.385
It would buy me a certificate.	2.12	1.238
I may also allow my pupils to cheat if I become a teacher in future.	2.12	1.312

It was interesting to note that approximately half of participants said that cheaters are considered to be smart people in the country. However, a majority of

contextual factors/reasons for cheating (university practices, teachers' practices, enough time to study) are not found prominent in this study.

Table 5

Descriptive Statistics Mean and Standard Deviations of Psychological Factors

Statements	Mean	SD
I cheat because I....		
am afraid of failure.	2.33	1.235
think it would not hurt anyone.	2.20	1.250
don't like teachers.	1.76	1.101
think that grades are imperative even at the cost of learning.	2.36	1.273
think that lessons are meaningless.	2.19	1.410
want to continue with the scholarship granted to me already.	2.07	1.256
need the certificate of a program only.	1.96	1.186
think the lessons in the class are inappropriate for a good career.	1.99	1.136
want to seek a profitable job.	2.23	1.392
am under peer pressure to compete with them.	2.28	1.271
think everybody do so in the society.	2.72	1.370
think we cannot stop this.	2.35	1.265
feel good when I do so.	2.03	1.285
study and also cheat for getting maximum marks.	2.57	1.343
However,		
I feel bad when I get caught cheating.	3.16	1.462

Students agreed that they feel bad when they get caught cheating. This statement has the highest mean score ($M=3.16$, $SD=1.462$) in psychological factors. The need for degree and certificate has the lowest mean score and students do not participate in illegal academic activities just to obtain a certificate. They do not feel good when they cheat. Respondents believe that the university can stop students cheating.

Table 6

An Independent Sample t-test for Difference of Students Academic Dishonesty based on Gender

Variables	Gender	N	M	SD	t-value	df	Sig.
Cheating Methods	Male	59	30.39	8.915	-.855	298	0.393
	Female	241	31.41	8.004			
Contextual Factors	Male	59	21.53	8.347	-.230	298	0.818
	Female	241	21.80	8.053			
Psychological Factors	Male	59	33.12	13.390	-.712	298	0.477
	Female	241	34.45	12.730			

Overall, there was no significant difference related to academic dishonesty between male and female students. This implies that both males and females have similar tendencies related to their methods of cheating. Similarly, there may be no difference in the contextual and psychological factors causing their habits of cheating.

Table 7

One Way ANOVA for the Difference in the Mean Scores of Students based on their Age

Variables		SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Cheating Methods	Between Groups	1408.397	2	704.198	11.228	.001
	Within Groups	18626.790	297	62.716		
	Total	20035.187	299			
Contextual Factors	Between Groups	268.241	2	134.120	2.060	.129
	Within Groups	19338.996	297	65.114		
	Total	19607.237	299			
Psychological	Between Groups	638.379	2	319.190	1.945	.145

Factors	Within Groups	48737.167	297	164.098
	Total	49375.547	299	

Table shows that one-way ANOVA was used to explore the difference among the mean scores of cheating methods, contextual factors, and psychological factors through perceptions of university students. Perceptions were collected in three areas i.e. cheating methods: $F(2, 297) = 11.228, p = .001$; contextual factors: $F(2, 297) = 2.060, p = .129$; and

psychological factors: $F(2, 297) = 1.945, p = .145$. There was a significant difference in the result of cheating methods. However, there was no significant difference between other two areas on the basis of age. It means that students of different ages had different perceptions about cheating methods of academic dishonesty.

Table 8

One Way ANOVA for the Difference in the Mean Scores of Students based on university Affiliations

Variables		SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Cheating Methods	Between Groups	2792.927	2	1396.463	24.054	.000
	Within Groups	17242.260	297	58.055		
	Total	20035.187	299			
Contextual Factors	Between Groups	288.030	2	144.015	2.214	.111
	Within Groups	19319.207	297	65.048		
	Total	19607.237	299			
Psychological Factors	Between Groups	976.208	2	488.104	2.995	.052
	Within Groups	48399.339	297	162.961		
	Total	49375.547	299			

One-way analysis of variance was applied to explore the difference among the mean scores of cheating methods, contextual factors, and psychological factors through perceptions of different university students. Perceptions were obtained in three areas i.e. cheating methods: $F(2, 297) = 24.054, p = .000$; contextual factors: $F(2, 297) = 2.214, p = .111$; and

psychological factors: $F(2, 297) = 2.995, p = .052$. There was significant difference in the opinions of different university students about psychological factors. However, there was no significant difference based on other two areas (contextual and psychological factors) among the students of different universities.

Table 9

One Way Analysis for the Difference in the Mean Scores of Students based on Semesters

Variables		SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Cheating Methods	Between Groups	230.423	4	57.606	.858	.490
	Within Groups	19804.763	295	67.135		
	Total	20035.187	299			
Contextual Factors	Between Groups	240.494	4	60.124	.916	.455
	Within Groups	19366.742	295	65.650		
	Total	19607.237	299			
Psychological Factors	Between Groups	813.878	4	203.470	1.236	.296
	Within Groups	48561.668	295	164.616		
	Total	49375.547	299			

One-way analysis of variance was applied to explore the difference among the mean scores of cheating methods, contextual factors, and psychological factors through

perceptions of university students. There was no significant difference between the results of all three areas based on different semesters. It seems that students from

different semesters had no different perceptions regarding academic dishonesty

and its psychological and contextual causes.

Table 10

One Way Analysis for the Variance in the Mean Scores of Students based on their Departmental Affiliation

Variables		SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Cheating Methods	Between Groups	1904.585	2	952.293	15.600	.000
	Within Groups	18130.601	297	61.046		
	Total	20035.187	299			
Contextual Factors	Between Groups	361.359	2	180.679	2.788	.063
	Within Groups	19245.878	297	64.801		
	Total	19607.237	299			
Psychological Factors	Between Groups	935.122	2	467.561	2.867	.058
	Within Groups	48440.424	297	163.099		
	Total	49375.547	299			

Table displays that one-way ANOVA was used to explore the difference among the mean scores of cheating methods, contextual factors, and psychological factors through opinions of university students. About cheating methods, there

was a significant difference between the views of the students from different departments. Though, there was no significant difference between the other two areas based on departments.

Table 11

One Way ANOVA for the Variance in the Mean Scores of Students based on their Qualification Level

Variables		SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Cheating Methods	Between Groups	3365.531	3	1121.844	19.920	.000
	Within Groups	16669.655	296	56.316		
	Total	20035.187	299			
Contextual Factors	Between Groups	942.479	3	314.160	4.982	.002
	Within Groups	18664.758	296	63.057		
	Total	19607.237	299			
Psychological Factors	Between Groups	3967.552	3	1322.517	8.621	.000
	Within Groups	45407.994	296	153.405		
	Total	49375.547	299			

To check the mean difference among the scores of students who have different qualification levels, one-way analysis of variance was applied. There was a significant difference among the views of students regarding three sub-factors of academic dishonesty i.e. cheating methods, contextual factors, and psychological factors. It means that students from different qualification levels had different perceptions about academic dishonesty.

Discussion

The study lends substantial support to Brown and McInerney (2008) and Jones (2011) which uncovered that the trend of

academic corruption is ever-present. The current study proves that students are involved in academic cheating. The researchers, as professional teachers, have also observed, in their daily routine, that a lot of students are usually involved in cheating. Moreover, they consider academic deceitfulness as a minor issue at their university. Jones (2011) also found that adolescent students, being immature, engaged themselves in academic corruption more frequently. This study also shows a significant difference between the results of cheating methods based on the age of participants. Adolescents usually cheat more, and

adult students are less involved in academic illegal activities. They also cheat because universities have no strict policy on academic corruption. This thing develops confidence among students to cheat without any fear. The results of this study also show that students cheat during exams for the sake of good grades. This in line with the study of Josien and Broderick (2013). They explored that students who do not have good marks are engaged more in academic dishonesty than those who have good marks (Josien & Broderick, 2013). This cause of cheating leads us to think that most of the education systems in the world focus on grades or/and marks only. Therefore, students aim to get higher grades even through unfair means.

Conclusions

This study was directed to explore Pakistani students' perceptions of academic dishonesty. The study confirms that students cheat for the sake of good marks. Half of the participants said cheaters are considered smart people in the country and everybody body cheats in the society. Some individuals said they cheat because they do not have time to study. The results of the research indicated that contextual and psychological factors may effect students' involvement in cheating. Putting the concluding remarks that male and female university students' had same perceptions regarding academic dishonesty. There was a significant difference between cheating methods used by students in the exams based on their age and university respectively. The

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semester difference did not affect the perceptions of students. It was noted that there was a significant difference in all three areas, e.g. cheating methods, contextual factors, and psychological factors between university students based on their qualification. It is assumed that students cheat for academic benefit. They also do not feel hesitation while cheating because they know there are no strict rules and punishment criteria in universities. Academic corruption is a contagious disease in educational institutions. If higher authorities do not take it seriously, it will become more harmful for the future of academic institutions. Usually, students commit academic dishonesty as they are afraid of failure in the examination and want to get higher grades. Teachers may help their students to overcome their fear of failure. They should motivate and develop confidence among students. They may convince their students to focus more on learning than grades only. In addition, seminars and workshops, to warn students about academic dishonesty, may be organized in the institutions of higher education. Institutions may also arrange counselling sessions to encourage students to share their problems with faculty members regarding study and to help them overcome their psychological and contextual fears related to good grades. Finally, it is recommended that the policies of punishment regarding academic dishonesty may be implemented fairly and appropriately to discourage this act strictly.

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