



Research Article

Social Factors behind Academic Dishonesty as Perceived by the Postgraduate Students

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Abstract

This study was conducted to explore the social factors behind the academic dishonesty and consequences faced by the post-graduate students at University of Agriculture Faisalabad. Total 105 students were selected using random sampling technique from the Faculty of Social Sciences. The data were collected through reliable and validated questionnaire and collected data were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Results indicated that sense of competition, social rejection, social justice, illiterate background of the students, social insecurity, inferiority complex, societal pressure, low self-worth were the prominent social factors causing academic dishonesty among students. Loss of opportunity, loss of future, facing discrimination, low self-esteem, loss of respect and public insecurity were the prominent consequences being faced by the students committing academic dishonesties. Apart from the disciplinary action, there is also a need of awareness and counselling campaigns among students to refrain from the academic dishonesty.

Keywords: Academic dishonesty, Integrity, Consequences, Social factor, Discrimination

Introduction

The higher education system has been gradually undermined by academic dishonesty, which is a complex behaviour influenced by various situational, contextual, and individual factors. Academic dishonesty involves intentional actions that impede the pursuit of knowledge and lead to misrepresentation of academic materials. This includes taking credit for work that is not one's own, such as papers, lab reports, quizzes, exams, and other academic assignments, as well as fabricating data, records, or tampering with university documents (UNESCO, 2004).

Academic dishonesty may be caused by factors that commonly impact a person's educational and economic status. Academic dishonesty involves unhealthy and illegal practices that are often used to obtain good grades in exams or to pass exams (Cazan and Icob, 2014). Such dishonest behaviour undermines fair and compassionate social values and norms. While academic misconduct may result in higher grades, it can also lead to moral failure in other areas of life (Cowel and Smith, 2015).



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William (2015) suggests that a major motive behind academic dishonesty is the desire to achieve higher marks and gain power over others. This behavior may stem from jealousy towards others' talents, abilities, work styles, or social skills. Dishonest students may seek to control and outdo others, and their misconduct can lead to corrupt behavior. Such practices erode the values of fairness and compassion among students. Additionally, some individuals may resort to academic dishonesty to divert attention from negative aspects of their position in society. Others who are easily provoked or unable to handle challenging situations may resort to cheating as a means of dominating others through illegal means, as noted by Gregon et al. (2016).

According to Colnerud and Rosander (2009) academic dishonesty has become prevalent among students in the modern era, causing harm to social norms and moral values in society. This behaviour leads to inappropriate actions that are not conducive to maintaining a respectful educational environment. As a result, it is important to address and eliminate the habit of academic dishonesty among students, as it affects not only their own academic performance but also the social norms of society. The study will investigate the factors that contribute to ill-mannered behaviour and promote academic dishonesty, which has a direct impact on students' academic success not only during their educational session but also in their future educational endeavours.

Methodology

The proposed study aimed to identify how often academically dishonest activities occur among university graduate students. There are total 10 public recognized universities in Faisalabad. Out of these, University of Agriculture Faisalabad is selected purposively. University of Agriculture Faisalabad have 7 different faculties. Out of these 7 faculties one faculty i.e. Faculty of Social Sciences was selected purposively. From the selected faculty Institute of Agricultural Extension, Education and Rural Development was selected for the research at Random. All the students enrolled in the 2nd semester of M. Phill Education in Institute were considered as the population of research. Total population of the study was 144 students (M. Phil Education 2nd semester 'Section A' 124 students and M. Phil Education 2nd semester 'Section B' 20 students). Sample size was drawn through proportionate sampling technique and respondents will be selected through simple random sampling technique. The sample size was 105 using online available software i.e; www.surveysystem.com (M. Phil Education 2nd semester 'Section A' 90 students and M. Phil Education 2nd semester 'Section B' 15 students) by taking the confidence interval 5% and confidence level 95%. The data were collected through questionnaire keeping in view the objectives of the study. Collected data were analyzed by using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

Results and Discussion

Social factors

This section explains about the perceptions of students about the social factors which were leading students towards academic dishonesty. Five point Likert scale (1= Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Undecided, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly Agree) was used to record perceptions, whereas results were reported on the basis of mean values. Data in this regard are given in Table 1.

Table 1. Perception of respondents regarding social factors as the circumstance which lead them to academic dishonesty.

Social factors	Mean	Std. Deviation	Rank Order
Sense of competition	3.52	1.161	1.
Social rejection	3.48	1.136	2.
Social justice	3.46	1.144	3.
Illiterate background	3.43	1.255	4.
Social insecurity	3.41	1.183	5.
Inferiority complex	3.40	1.124	6.
Societal pressure	3.25	1.152	7.
Low self-worth in society	3.24	1.238	8.

Table 1 shows the perception of respondents regarding social factors as the circumstance which lead them to academic dishonesty. Sense of competition was the foremost social factor (mean value: 3.52) leading students towards academic dishonesty. The response of students was rated between undecided and agree but tending toward agree on the scale. Social rejection was 2nd leading social factor (mean value: 3.48) rated between undecided and agree but tending towards agree. Social justice with a mean value of 3.46, was ranked 3rd factor leading towards academic dishonesty. The illiterate background of the students was ranked fourth with a mean value of 3.43 and rated between undecided and agree tending towards agree. Social insecurity was 5th ranked factor with a mean value of 3.41 rated between undecided and agree but tended toward agree. Inferiority complex ranked 6th having mean value 3.40 was rated between undecided and agree tending towards agree. Societal pressure (mean value: 3.25) and low self-worth (mean value: 3.24) were ranked 7th and 8th whereas the responses were rated between undecided and agree but inclined towards agree in both cases. Findings are supported with those of Miller et al. (2017) as they found that personal performance, social comparison, social competition and success pressure were key elements driving students towards academic dishonesty. In another study, Galloway (2012) reported that students were forced to cheat because of social pressure, extensive workload and school culture.

Perceived Consequences

This section explained the different consequences of academic dishonesty as perceived by the students. It was assumed that academic dishonesty was negatively related with the social norms of society. Responses were recorded on five-point Likert scale 1= Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Undecided, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly Agree. Data is given in this regard in Table 2.

Table 2 shows that the consequences of academic dishonesty and loss of opportunity was ranked 1st with a mean value of 3.83 and rated between undecided and agree inclined toward agree. Loss of future, 2nd ranked factors obtained mean value 3.76 and rated between undecided and agree but more inclined toward agree. Discrimination or biasness with the mean value of 3.65 was ranked 3rd and rated between undecided or agree but more tending toward agree. Low self-esteem with 3.63 mean value was 4th ranked and tending toward agree on five-point scale. Loss of respect was ranked 5th with 3.60 mean value rated between undecided or agree but inclined toward agree. Public insecurity got

6th rank with 3.53 mean value rated between undecided or agree but tending toward agree. Legal consequences got 7th ranking order 3.37 mean value lies between undecided or agree. Findings are endorsed with the findings from couple of studies. Carrel (2007) found that the students found guilty of academic cheating, society lost trust in this particular student. Moreover, the students who are academically dishonest, are found involved in unethical activities like crime, theft and fraud (Colnerud and Rosander, 2009). In another study, Nonis and Swift (2011) found that engagement in academic dishonesty led to immoral activities among students.

Table 2. Perceived consequences of academic dishonesty.

Perceived consequences	Mean	Std. Deviation	Rank Order
Loss of opportunity	3.83	1.057	1.
Loss of future	3.76	0.904	2.
Discrimination or biasness	3.65	0.875	3.
Low self-esteem	3.63	1.048	4.
Loss of respect	3.60	1.156	5.
Public insecurity	3.53	0.981	6.
Legal consequences	3.37	1.076	7.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study concludes that students inclination towards academic dishonesty was associated with the social factors, which had adverse impacts on the students in different ways. Social system, social rejection, sense of competition among students were the key reasons leading students towards dishonesty. It was argued that dishonesty was denting the personality, character and academic development of students, moreover the ratio of involvement in immoral activities was likely to increase. Therefore, there is dire need of students counselling to refrain them from the academic dishonesty in the universities.

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