

Experimental Investigation Of Cheating Behavior And Qualitative Analysis Of Antecedents Of Academic Dishonesty Among School Students

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Abstract:

Education allows an individual to acquire skills and prepare for living in the world. School is an educational institute that provides space for students to learn from teachers, and learning is evaluated through exams. Dishonesty in academics decreases the quality of education, which has become common in schools. This paper explored the prevalence of cheating behavior among school students through experimental investigation and the antecedents that instigate cheating through qualitative analysis. Findings indicate that cheating behavior is prevalent among the sample of 152 from rural and urban schools with 25% and 28%, respectively. Qualitative analysis was done to explore the antecedents of academic dishonesty in a sample of 140 students. Results showed that parental expectations, peer influence, achievement motivation, neutralization attitude, and Behavioral problems are the most salient reasons for academic dishonesty among school students.

Keywords: cheating behavior, academic dishonesty, school students, Factors.

Introduction:

There has been a progressive increase in the prevalence of academic dishonesty from the past (McCabe, 2005; Davies et al., 2009; Dee& Jacob, 2012). In the present scenario, it is almost impossible not to find news about academic dishonesty in a newspaper or on television (Mazar et al., 2008). It became a strenuous task for the government to conduct exams, whether it might be subject evaluation exams for school students or entrance exams for jobs. The appalling incidents like hundreds of parents climbing over walls to provide cheat sheets for helping their 10th-grade children to copy in an exam (Tewary, 2016), leakage of answer sheets

(e.g., Parashar, 2021; Shelke, 2021), allowing the child to copy in the exam by taking money (Anam, 2018), IPS officer using technology to crack civil service exam for IAS (Buddi, 2017) and 180000 students boycotting the exam for keeping strict rules against copying in exams (Team, 2018; Anshuman, 2018; Team, 2020) are few examples that prove academic dishonesty as one of the 'to be addressed' issue in school climate.

Cheating behavior in academic settings is a form of dishonesty act opted by students to improve their exam conditions compared to what was intended to be an immoral means, i.e., cheating to obtain an incorrect assessment. Cheating

behavior is one of the forms of academic dishonesty, whereas other forms include plagiarism, fabrication, bunking of classes, not following academic norms, and coping assignments (Bashir & Bala, 2018). Students' cheating behavior affects an individual and the development of a country (O'Dubhslainé, 2006) because the development of a country's economy depends mainly on the educational sector (Ozturk, 2008). Cheating in academic institutions decreases the quality of education, leading to a decrease in the country's growth. Cheating behavior starts at grade level and continues into work-life if not addressed timely (Rujoiu & Rujoiu, 2014).

Cizek (1999), in his research, found that over one-third of students in elementary school engaged in academic cheating. The prevalence range of cheating behavior depends on the type of academic dishonesty. Like in research conducted by Babu et al. (2011) on 166 medical students, it has been found that the prevalence percentages of academic dishonesty is 75%, 49%, 74%, 2%, 5%, 81%, 45% for proxy attendance, copying from others books, cheating in exams, getting question paper before exam, manipulating teachers, getting unauthorized technical help and getting prior information regarding exam respectively. Some studies showed that 70-80% of academic dishonesty in high school (e.g., Schab, 1991; Davis & Ludvigson, 1995; Chapman et al., 2004; Jeergal et al., 2015). There exists a wide range of prevalence rates of academic dishonesty, but most studies reported above 60% of academic dishonesty among students from either high school or college (Whitley, 1998; Cizek, 1999; Miller et al., 2011; Patnayakuni, 2018; Patnayakuni & Sundaram, 2021). Therefore, reports indicate that academic dishonesty exists and should be addressed, for which we must explore what intuitively academic dishonesty and how it is perceived. As reasons vary from culture to culture and place to place, it is essential to explore and analyze reasons that play as contributing factors to the sustainability of academic dishonesty in educational institutes like schools and colleges (Magnus et al., 2002).

Many researchers found a significant relationship between academic dishonesty with demographic

factors like cultural beliefs, economic conditions, and gender (Newstead et al., 1996; Whitley et al., 1999). Some other researchers have argued that rural-urban differences exist. Furthermore, play a vital role in elucidating human behavior (Napier, 1973), while others articulated no significant difference (Asiyai, 2019; Chinyere & Chukwuma, 2017). Hope & Bierman (1998) and Asiyai (2019) stated that children from urban settings might be at increased risk of child behavior problems at school relative to rural children the development. Literature shows a considerable amount of research on contextual factors, but rural versus urban communities' potential effects have remained largely unexplored on patterns of disruptive child behavior problems (Hope & Bierman, 1998). This study tried to assess the difference in cheating behavior in a rural and urban setting where the urban school is in a well-developed city with adequate infrastructural facilities, and the rural school is in a village. In order to keep other factors like syllabus, administration, and qualification of teachers constant, both the schools are government-based.

A huge number of researchers explored the influencing factors of academic dishonesty and found a significant relationship with situational factors. The factors include situational factors like the role of parents and role of peers (Kezar & Bernstein-Sierra, 2015; McCabe et al., 2001; McCabe et al., 2002; Megehee & Spake, 2008; Ma et al., 2013; Maring et al., 2018; Patnayakuni & Sundaram, 2021), predominant values of the society or culture (Magnus et al., 2002; McCabe et al., 2008; Payan et al., 2010; Ma et al., 2013), lack of effort in teaching methods by the teachers (Patnayakuni & Sundaram, 2021) and curriculum issues (Henning et al., 2013), commercialized educational institutes like schools and universities (Kezar & Bernstein-Sierra, 2015; Patnayakuni & Sundaram, 2021). Moreover, Individual factors like lack of professionalism, poor time management skills or time pressure, desire to increase marks (Newstead et al., 1996), fear of failure, emotional issues, and understanding issues by the child (Henning et al., 2013). Educational researchers and social psychologists developed and tested several theories and models explaining why students

involve in academic dishonesty. Since academic dishonesty is one of the forms of deviant behaviors and can lead to other forms of risky behaviors (Blankenship & Whitley, 2000), many researchers used theories and models from criminal psychology. Examples include Agnew's strain theory (1992), Social practice theory (Reckwitz, 2002; Starovoytova et al., 2016), and the Fraud triangle (Cressey, 1973).

In this research, the themes obtained from the list of codes from the qualitative analysis and their associated extracts well fit into one of such models proposed by Hawkins et al. (1992). The model provided a framework for understanding the risk and protective factors for teens who are habituated or involved in risky behaviors like the use of drugs, alcohol, tobacco, and violence. The characteristics or variables that escalate the chance of an individual developing risky behaviors or antisocial disorders are called risk factors (Rutter & Garmezy, 1983; Hawkins et al., 1992; Mrazek & Haggerty, 1994). At the same time, the characteristics or variables that aid in directly reducing or controlling the influence of risk factors on antisocial or deviant behaviors are called protective factors. (Fraser 1997; Luthar & Zigler, 1991; Rutter 1987; Werner & Smith 1992).

In their research, Hawkins et al. (1992) provided a few risk factors like family domain risk factors, peer/individual domain risk factors, community domain risk factors, and school domain risk factors. The community and school domain risk factors include variables like academic failure, improper syllabus structure, and lack of commitment to the school. Family domain risk factors include variables like dysfunctional families with poor family management, including unclear expectations from each other or favorable parental attitudes towards deviant behaviors like drug use, poor parenting skills in the monitoring of behavior or improper parenting styles, inappropriate rewards for positive behavior, and discrepant punishment methods for undesirable behavior. Peer/individual domain risk factors include favorable attitudes towards deviant behaviors, peer involvement and rewards for these behaviors, impulsiveness, and peer rejection encourage deviant behaviors.

Therefore the present study is done twofold: part 1 is to find the prevalence of cheating behavior in rural and urban schools and to study whether any differences exist between the two settings. Furthermore, part 2 explores the contributing factors influencing school students to commit academic dishonesty. This research makes a significant contribution to the field because there is almost no research on academic dishonesty in Andhra Pradesh.

Objectives:

1. To assess the prevalence of cheating behavior among school students.
2. To assess the difference between rural and urban school students.
3. To explore factors influencing academic dishonesty.

Method:

Sample:

The experiment was conducted on a sample of 152 members from 9th and 10th-grade students of age 12-15 years, out of which 93 were from rural Government school and 59 were from an urban Government school. Later, the antecedents of academic dishonesty among students a sample of 140 students from 3 different schools were explored through an open-ended question. They are asked to write, "In your opinion, what makes a student cheat in exams (explained academic dishonesty)."

Experimental procedure:

Cheating can happen in many ways, like copying exams, using cheat sheets, trying to get preliminary information regarding questions from the teacher, and manipulating marks. Initially, in order to know the prevalence of cheating behavior, an experiment is designed by the researcher that is similar to Mazar et al. (2008) designed paradigm, called the matrix task to examine dishonest behavior, where they have given ten matrix math problems to solve, and participants are given the opportunity to cheat by overstating their actual performance. The present experiment is similar but was redesigned according to the Indian context and fit the school

climate. So the experiment setup was designed, and all other forms of cheating are constant. The only option made available to the student is cheating by manipulating marks by overstating them. Prior permission was taken from the schools for the experiment, and the teachers explained the procedure and settings. The students were informed that the test is a surprise test that was planned by the school to see their capability and will be added to the midterm exam. The teachers were asked to be volunteers. The standard of the questionnaire is equal to testing the knowledge of 3- 4th-grade students, like "The month of has 28 days in a year". "The day that comes before Tuesday.....". "Annie gave you 4 watermelons, then John gave you 3 more. So how many watermelons do you have now.....". The students were seated far from each other to avoid copying from others' sheets. Even the teachers explained about the experiment 1 hour before the experiment to avoid leakage of questions and intention of the exam.

After the seating arrangement was made, the students were given exam instructions before giving question papers. It was taken care that samples from both rural and urban got the exact instructions. They are given colored pens to answer the paper. The students were instructed that the exam time is 5 min and that they should drop the pen when the invigilator instructs them to drop it immediately without delay to avoid being disqualified from the exam. After 5 minutes, they were provided with answers, and the sample was allowed to correct with the pens provided by the experimenter. The sample was instructed to count the number of correctly answered questions, and a reward was announced for the top five high scorers. They were instructed to give one mark each for each correct answer, and the total number of questions that were answered correctly is an actual score X in this paper. Then the papers were collected, and the experimenter, with other co-researchers' help, made sure that students were looking at the papers and intentionally spilled coffee on them. The sample was told that the papers were badly dipped in the coffee, so the score is not clearly visible, and there is not enough time to wait for the clearance or to re-conduct the exam. Then

immediately, the answer sheets were torn off in front of them and disposed into a waste bin, making them believe that the experimenter would not have any evidence of their answer sheets. Then they were asked to write down the number of correctly answered questions mentioned as Y in this paper. The trick here is that the papers are torn in such a way that they can be reattached when required.

Analysis:

Measure/indicator of cheating behavior is the difference in X and Y. The difference Y-X gives us the difference between the number of questions that were actually answered correctly and the number of questions they have mentioned to be correct to the experimenter, which projects cheating behavior. If the difference is zero, it means the student gave actual marks, and if the difference is 1 or above, that indicates that the student has overstated the marks. And qualitative analysis is done based upon the thematic networks technique approach to thematic analysis (Attride-Stirling, 2001). In this method, the data obtained is coded based on the issues discussed, and basic themes are identified from the codes. Later global themes are developed from basic themes obtained from codes.

Results:

The results from the experiment indicated that about 25% of rural and 28% of urban school students are involved in academic dishonesty, with a mean score of 1.44 and 0.84, respectively. When mean scores are compared, the t value obtained is 1.572 ($P = 0.118 > 0.05$), indicating no significant difference between rural and urban school student cheating behavior.

The set of texts obtained from the open-ended questions is analyzed through thematic analysis suggests that parental expectations, peer influence, achievement motivation, neutralization attitude, and Behavioral problems are found to be the most salient reasons for school students involved in academic dishonesty in school settings.

Discussions:

Academic dishonesty has become common in educational settings among students. Previous research showed a significant difference in the prevalence of academic dishonesty between rural and urban areas. Asiyai (2019), Chinyere and Chukwuma (2017), and Whawo (2015), in their research on rural and urban students, showed that examination malpractice was common among students. However, these research findings suggest no significant difference between rural or urban settings. Moreover, the result obtained in this research, i.e., 26-28% of school students involved in cheating behavior, is supported by the research done by Cizek (1999) in his research among high school students estimated the prevalence of academic dishonesty is one-third of total students. The experimental result showed that the students tend to cheat if there is an opportunity to, which is similar to the result obtained by Whitley (1998). Compared with the result of other research by Schab (1991) and Davis & Ludvigson (1995), which showed 70% academic dishonesty, the result obtained showed less prevalence. Similar experiments were done by the researcher on undergraduate college students, where the cheating behavior is 70% (Patnayakuni, 2018) and self-reported academic dishonesty is 94% (Patnayakuni & Sundaram, 2021). Even though the samples of the two studies are different, from the results obtained from the two pieces of research and support from previous literature reviews, it can be inferred that student cheating progresses gradually from elementary school to high school and into the profession (Nonis & Swift, 2001, Druică et al., 2019). Therefore, this analysis strongly suggests that addressing academic dishonesty in the schooling stage is necessary as it can decrease the intensity of academic fraud in higher education.

From the analysis of qualitative data collected through open-ended questions, the themes that emerged are similar to the risk factor model developed by Hawkins et al. (1998) and Lipsey and Derzon (1998).

Individual domain: Students mentioned that their peers or they do academic dishonesty in order "to get high marks" and "to get pass marks," indicating competitiveness (Evans & Craig, 1990; Simkin & McLeod, 2009; Smith et al.,

2012) among students can be an intrinsic motivation for the students to cheat. Few students mentioned a lack of interest in studies, for example, "Not interested in the syllabus" and "not interested in studies." Still, they have to get marks, so they do academic dishonesty (Smith et al., 2012). Personal incompetence was one of the reasons mentioned by the students, which was projected from answers like "lack of capability," "fear of failure," and "lack of self-confidence." When a student does not have related skills yet wants to or is pressured to excel in, he would be searching for shortcuts to obtain the same (Henning et al., 2013). Another theme that emerged is the rationalizing of the act. The students felt no wrong in academic dishonesty if they have a reason to do so. They have given statements like "because they have to work," "school encourages academic dishonesty," "it is okay if everyone does it," and "nothing wrong if we have a reason." A neutralization attitude is being developed in the students as they have to avoid cognitive dissonance raised by the behavior (Smith et al., 2012; Meng et al., 2014).

Peer domain: Another point from the analysis is peer influence or pressure (Maring et al., 2018). According to Devereux (1970), the peer influence on individuals increases with age. The individuals mentioned points like conformity, unfairness, to maintain status, and social isolation was protruded as different forms of influence, which were supported by research conducted by (Briggs et al., 2013). In a few cases, they get motivated extrinsically "to maintain status among the community" and "peers."

Parental domain: Most of the sample wrote that getting high marks in the exam is a must for them to get accepted by their parents. Parents generally keep high expectations of success from their children (Raghavan, 2015). They put immense pressure on their children in different ways (Maring et al., 2018), like punishing, mocking, or insulting in the presence of others. The students mentioned that they "fear that their parents might punish them if they score less," "because they rate them before others," and "Compare with my neighbor." Parents tend to compare with others and judge them based on their marks. In order to avoid these negative reinforcements, they tend to

cheat in exams, which was supported by previous research stating that high demands from parents and self-desire to outshine others in school are vital motivations for student cheating (McCabe et al., 1999; Maring et al., 2018; Simkin & McLeod, 2009; Simkin & McLeod, 2009).

College or community domain: Getting involved in academic dishonesty is not only due to an individual's fault. The sample provided other reasons like teachers' incapability, for example, "teacher irregularity," "bias towards students," "to get high marks," "to meet social standards," "environment of study," and "neighbors pressure." They mentioned that the teachers are not regular in taking classes, and students are forced to write exams without proper education. Similarly, when a teacher shows bias towards a child or a group of children for various reasons like the child's performance, impression, or influence, it is acting like a strain that makes them accept the act of academic dishonesty as justifiable. Because they have to meet the expectations or standards kept by the society (Simkin & McLeod, 2009; Simkin & McLeod, 2009). They also pointed out that neighbors' interest in their academic scores also pressurizes them as they think they have maintained the family's pride.

Behavioral issues mentioned by the students might be a major concern as they should be addressed individually. They have mentioned that they do academic dishonesty by giving fake reasons like "health problems," "loss of a family member," and "family issue," which are given in order to avoid completing an assignment, bunking classes, and exams (Nelson et al., 2013). Absenteeism is also mentioned as a major reason for academic dishonesty as they miss classes, and later on, they cannot follow up on the syllabus and look for shortcuts to achieve their destiny. Another vital point raised by them is prior cheating. They explained that they get "habituated." When they have cheated previously and did not get any negative reinforcement or counseling, and in turn, they are benefitted by scoring high marks, then they might repeat the task, which can be supported by conditioning theories (Miller et al., 2011; Reckwitz, 2002; Starovoytova et al., 2016). Other reasons

mentioned are poor time management (Henning et al., 2013), the student becoming lazy (Schab, 1991) to study, and being inattentive in class which should be addressed individually.

Conclusion:

When an opportunity is provided, about 26 to 28% of students get involved in cheating behavior. The results here showed that tackling the issue of academic dishonesty must be the immediate task of the academic stakeholders, including teachers, academic administrators, students, and parents. The qualitative analysis result provides clues to embark upon as to where to start and lead the interventions or strategies to discourage cheating behavior in schools. The domains of risk factors include Individual, Peer, Parents, college/school or college, and behavioral issues, which are not very different from previous research. Further research is suggested to increase training methods and therapies that can be made available to academic stakeholders who play a vital role in obtaining the expected evolution in the academic setting.

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