

Guilty in Whose Eyes? Student-Teachers' Perspectives on Cheating on Examinations

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Abstract

The study explored student- teachers' views on cheating during examinations. A mixed method approach which involved a survey and focus group interviews was employed. Nine hundred undergraduate education students from a public university and three colleges of education in Ghana were surveyed. Focus group interviews were held with six students from each institution selected. A total of 942 students participated in the study. The findings indicate that fear of failure seem to be the main motivation for cheating; students perceived cheating acts treated as minor offences as 'helping' peers; the severity of the punishment applied if students are caught cheating negatively influence their propensity to cheat; students' perception of ethical values does not determine the level of prevalence of cheating; peer loyalty or fellow feeling is dominant; and students perceive a correspondence between social corruption and cheating. It is recommended that the risk of detection should be increased and the penalty for the 'less serious offences' reconsidered. If students perceive cheating within the context of their social experience, the overall quality of student experience needs to be considered if the likelihood of cheating is to be minimised. It is suggested that more attention needs to be paid to institutionalizing academic integrity instead of managing cheating.

Keywords: Examination, cheating, student-teachers

1. Introduction

Student cheating has long been a matter of concern for stakeholders in education. Cheating is considered to be the act of getting something by dishonest or fraudulent means or by deception. In higher education, cheating is synonymous with academic dishonesty. It can be described in terms of a series of practices that can be defined as illegal, unethical or against the regulations of the institution (Smyth, Davis & Kroncke, 2009; Bisping, Patron & Roskelley, 2008). It includes overt copying from another student, the use of prohibited crib sheet (unauthorised notes used on test) in the examination hall, having fore knowledge of examination questions, and impersonation (McCabe, Butterfield & Trevino, 2006). Cheating on examination involves taking an unfair advantage that results in a misrepresentation of a student's ability and grasp of knowledge. Consequently, Becker, Connolly, Lentz, & Morrison (2006) characterised cheating as academic fraud which may lead to poor quality education.

Some causes of cheating identified in the literature include the desire to pass examination at all cost, limited time for academic work, inadequate coverage of course content, poor preparation towards examinations, peer pressure, teaching to the test, and poor learner self concept. Teixeira & Rocha (2010) and Devlin & Gray (2007) contend that a critical determinant of the propensity to cheat are the students' perceived 'benefits', in terms of the higher grade they expect to obtain in a given examination if they copy successfully. The findings of Teixeira & Rocha's (2010) study suggest that cheating-favourable environments, proxied by the frequency with which students observe the act of cheating, familiarity with someone who cheats regularly and students' opinion regarding cheating stand out as conditioning factors in the development of cheating acts. They also found that the severity of the punishment applied if students are caught cheating negatively influence their propensity to cheat. Crittenden, Hanna, & Peterson's (2009) study of 115 institutions located in 36 countries showed a correspondence between students' perceptions of cheating and social corruption. Lambert, Ellen & Taylor (2006) identified the form of assessment as being a contributing factor in the incidence of cheating, suggesting that staff who used predictable and unimaginative assessment techniques which require students to regurgitate information, were more likely to find their students engaging in dishonest practice. This resonates with Baxter-Magolda's (1999) epistemological perspective (what counts as knowledge) that point to an "undergraduate education that is delivered ineffectively, requires passive rather than active learning, and does not meaningfully engage students in learning" (p. 12). He notes that a pursuit of active learning in and outside of the classroom generates respect for the process of learning and, in turn, reinforces academic integrity. By implication, the dominant teaching method reflects an underlying message that may speak louder than specific academic integrity policies and procedures. McCabe (1999) observes that institutions may have clear written statements, policies or procedures dealing with academic dishonesty. However, a definition which merely lists prohibited behaviours is more open to abuse than one that identifies values and behaviours to be promoted.

Other researchers have acknowledged the influence of a shift in the purpose of higher education as an

institution, the widening participation agenda and the changing role of tertiary institutions (see Morley, Leach, Lussier, Lihamba, Mwaipopo, Forde & Egbenya, 2010; Morley, 2007). The move towards mass participation with a broader range of ability among students suggest that university graduates are not an elite minority anymore as contemporary trends towards a greater percentage of the population attending tertiary education may mean that less able students are studying who may need to resort to dishonest means to achieve. Cheating may thus be seen as acceptable or at least condoned (Lambert, Ellen & Taylor (2006). However, as Awoniyi & Fletcher (2014) point out, examinations are summative assessment events usually designed to help make a (final) judgement about a learner's achievement on a programme, and potential subsequent achievement, certify achievement and award a qualification, help make decisions about entry to other learning programmes, provide information that will help others make selection decisions and provide formal evidence of a learner's competence. If an assessment does not measure what it is designed to measure, then its use is misleading. Cheating on examination therefore devalues awards. This notwithstanding, various international studies suggest a high prevalence rate among college and university students. McCabe (2005) reports that 60% of university students in the United States of America cheated at least once during their academic career. Similar prevalence can be observed among South Korean students (Park, Park & Jang, 2013), Chinese students (Ma, McCabe & Liu, 2013), Hungarian students (Orosz, Farkas & Roland-Lévy, 2013), and Western European students (Teixeira & Rocha, 2010). New Zealand students (De Lambert, Ellen & Taylor, 2006), Taiwan students (Lambert, Hogan & Barton, 2003), Singapore students (Lin & Wen, 2007). Likewise, in Canada, the United Kingdom, and Australia, 53%, 60%, and 81% of college students surveyed admitted to engaging in some form of academic misconduct (Hughes, & McCabe, 2006). Gender difference in cheating is still inconclusive. While in some studies females students were found to cheat significantly less than male students (Smyth & Davis, 2004; Rocha & Teixeira, 2005), others did not find significant gender differences (Roig & Caso, 2005; Hrabak, Vujaklija, Vodopivec, Hren, Marusic & Marusic, 2004).

2. Context and Purpose of Study

The University of Cape Coast trains teachers/tutors for secondary schools and colleges of education. The Colleges of Education train teachers for the basic schools (primary to junior high schools). The university, through its Institute of Education has oversight responsibility of colleges of education in Ghana. Apart from its key role as an examining body, the university supervises examinations and certifies graduates from the various colleges. The university has a student handbook with written statements, policies or procedures dealing with academic dishonesty practices which list penalties for cheating behaviours (University of Cape Coast, 2012). These apply to both regular students of the university and students of the colleges of education under the university. It is assumed that students will read the handbook and know what does and what does not constitute acceptable behaviour. This, notwithstanding, hardly any examination ends with no reported case of cheating on examinations. The difference between penalties for these two groups of students is that the university names and shames its students who cheat by posting their pictures, names, programmes of study, halls of residence, their offence and punishment on notice boards across the university campus as a deterrence while the penalties are applied to students in the colleges of education without further incidence

Despite growing concern about the pervasiveness of cheating on examination, investigation into its prevalence and motivation have been limited, with most of the reports on the problem being handled administratively which leaves out the interpretation of issues raised based on known social research principles. This study seeks to explore student-teachers' perspectives on cheating on examination. Understanding students' perspectives on cheating can significantly help academics in their efforts to communicate appropriate norms. Research questions that direct the study are:

1. Why do student-teachers cheat during examination?
2. What are the cheating behaviours of students-teachers during examinations?
3. What is the attitude of student-teachers towards cheating during examinations?

3. Method

A mixed method approach was adopted in this study. The use of quantitative and qualitative approaches in combination provides a better understanding of research problems than either approach alone (Creswell & Clark, 2007). A survey was conducted to ascertain why students cheat, their cheating behaviours and their attitudes towards cheating during examinations. A descriptive survey allows access to thoughts, opinions, and attitudes of the population from which the sample is drawn (Shaughnessy, Zechmeister & Jeanne, 2011; Gall, Gall & Borg, 2007). Focus group interviews with students allowed horizontal interaction over vertical interaction (Kamberellis & Dimitriadis, 2005), encouraging participants to talk freely about their experiences of cheating and to allow their perspectives to unfold. Through discussions participants' shared, compared, clarified, extended and reviewed their understanding in the process of co-constructing knowledge (Cousin, 2009). Focus groups were guided by semi-structured interview schedules. The interviews were structured to the extent that each group of

interviewees was asked the same questions, and interviewed under the same conditions. They were semi-structured to the extent that the researcher was free to probe and explore in depth participants' responses to each of the questions. Group discussions on average lasted approximately 30 minutes. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained, especially since confessions of cheating were not uncommon.

3.1. Sample

The population for the study was student-teachers. This includes education students at the University of Cape Coast pursuing a four year degree programme, students in colleges of education pursuing a three year diploma in basic education programme and students on the Untrained Teachers Diploma in Basic Education (UTDBE) programme affiliated to the colleges of education selected. There are 38 public colleges of education in Ghana made up of 8 female colleges, one male college and 29 mixed colleges. The male college was purposively sampled and one female college and a mixed college were sampled using the simple random technique. The UTDBE students are mainly West African Secondary School Examination (WASSCE) or General Certificate of Education "Ordinary" (GCE O) level holders. They have been recruited by the Ghana Education Service through the district education offices to take up teaching appointments in the rural and deprived districts of the country where trained teachers decline to go to due to deplorable living conditions. The untrained teachers are affiliated to the colleges of education where they undergo a four year professional training programme during basic school holidays. This affords them the opportunity to simultaneously teach and upgrade themselves. They are awarded Diploma in Basic Education Certificates by the University of Cape Coast upon completion of their training programme. Teacher trainees were chosen for study because they will take up teaching positions in basic schools upon graduation. The impact they are going to have on pupils/students can have consequences on society.

A total of 900 second year student-teachers from the three categories of students were purposively sampled. Second year students were chosen because unlike the first years, they have been through a year of examinations in the institutions, and they are not pressured like the third year students who were either working on projects or practising teaching in secondary or basic schools. Three hundred teacher trainees were randomly selected from each category of students. Classes with the highest number of enrolled students were targeted. Contacts were made with lecturers/tutors in the university and selected colleges for their assistance. Students were approached at the end of a regularly scheduled lecture and the questionnaires were administered in the classroom. Participation was voluntary and respondents' identities remain anonymous.

3.2. Instrument

A questionnaire was used to collect quantitative data from participants. Section A sought information on the demographics of the participants. Sections B, C and D used a Likert-type scale format (Strongly agree, Agree, Uncertain, Disagree and Strongly disagree) to generate responses on why teacher trainees cheat during examinations, their cheating behaviours and their attitudes towards cheating. Responses were scored 1 to 5, with the highest value reflecting "strongly agree", thus higher scores indicate that respondents felt the item was indicative of cheating.

3.3. Analysis

Statistical Package for Service Solution (SPSS) version 20 was used to analyse the quantitative data. The constant comparative method of data analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was used to analyse qualitative data. Data generated was triangulated to allow for refinement of interpretations and solidification of findings.

4. Results and Discussions

The data on participants indicates that the majority, 52.6% ($n=473$), were male students and 47.4% ($n=427$), were females students as shown in Table 1:

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Demographic	Subscale	No.	%
Gender	Male	473	52.6
	Female	427	47.4
	Total	900	100
Institution	University of Cape Coast	300	33.3
	Colleges of Education	300	33.3
	UTDBE	300	33.3
	Total	900	100

Participants were equally distributed ($n=300$) from the three categories of student-teachers. The findings are discussed in line with the research questions.

4.1. Why teacher trainees cheat during examination

An examination of the motivations for cheating by students showed that although there are other mitigating factors why students cheat, fear of failure is the most frequent motivation cited by respondents ($n=733$, $M= 4.1$, $SD= 1.2$). This is consistent with Teixeira and Rocha's (2010) and Devlin & Gray's (2007) findings that cheating to pass an examination or to get a better grade is a significant incentive to cheat. It could also be as Lambert et al. (2006) speculate, university students are not an elite minority anymore, and have to do wrong to get ahead. This finding may also point to an academic environment in which the rewards for cheating (e.g. passing the course) are not counterbalanced by the enforcement of appropriate penalties when caught (e.g. failing the course) (Teixeira & Rocha, 2010). While most students agree that cheating is unethical, a substantial proportion cheat on exams ($n=656$, $M= 2.1$, $SD= 1.3$) as seen in Table 2.

Table 2: Students' Response on why they Cheat

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Don't know		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Mean	SD
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%		
	Students cheat because they want to pass examinations	122	13.6	566	62.9	1	.1	135	15	76		
Students cheat because they are not prepared for the examinations	126	14	322	35.8	1	.1	135	15	76	8.4	3.0	1.3
Students cheat because it is acceptable to cheat	50	5.6	120	13.3	74	8.2	216	24	440	48.9	2.1	1.3
Students cheat because of fear of failure	393	43.7	340	37.8	0	0	125	13.9	42	4.7	4.1	1.2
Students cheat because their workload is high and they cannot cope	16	18.7	300	33.3	75	8.3	85	9.4	272	30.2	3.0	1.5
Students cheat because of lack of preparedness	62	6.9	549	61	112	12.4	174	19.3	3	.3	3.5	.9

Mean of means = 3.2

4.2. Cheating behaviours of students

Students use several techniques to cheat during examinations as seen in Table 3. In descending order, the majority ($n=733$, $M=4.1$, $SD=1.2$), use non-verbal language (sign language/gestures) to communicate during examinations; or whisper answers to someone during exams ($n=384$, $M= 3.0$, $SD= 1.1$); or position their answer booklet in a way that allow someone to copy their answers ($n=321$, $M= 3.0$, $SD= 1.3$); or 'giraffe'(stretching of neck to look over someone's answers) during exams ($n=321$, $M= 3.5$, $SD= 0.9$); and copy from crib or unauthorised notes ($n=291$, $M= 3.0$, $SD= 1.1$). Ironically, the majority of respondents ($n=766$, $M= 1.9$, $SD= 1.4$) disagreed they cheated during exams (see Table 3). Perhaps, because apart from copying from crib notes which results in the cancellation of one's paper, the penalty for transgression for the other cheating acts is a caution. Cheating is taken to be excusable where penalties are seen to be of marginal importance (Teixeira & Rocha, 2010).

Table 3: Cheating Behaviours of Students

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Don't know		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Mean	SD
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%		
	I used unauthorized notes during a quiz/ examination	47	5.2	244	27.1	76	8.4	319	35.4	214		
I copied from someone during a quiz/ examination	124	13.8	272	30.2	11	1.2	223	24.8	270	30	2.7	1.4
I gave answers to someone	125	13.9	259	28.8	153	17	174	19.3	189	21	3.0	1.1
I allowed someone to copy my answers during examination	122	13.6	199	22.1	90	10	286	31.8	203	22.6	3.0	1.3
I communicated during examinations	46	5.1	48	5.3	40	4.4	328	36.4	438	48.7	1.9	1.4
I giraffed during examinations	122	13.6	199	22.1	90	10	286	31.8	203	22.6	3.0	1.3
I used sign language during examinations	393	43.7	340	37.8	0	0	125	13.9	42	4.7	4.1	1.2
Someone wrote my assignment for me	46	5.1	48	5.3	40	4.4	328	36.4	438	48.7	1.9	1.4
I copied all or part of someone's work	75	8.3	191	21.2	40	4.4	348	38.7	246	27.3	2.5	1.0

Mean of means= 2.7

Table 4: Students' Attitude towards Cheating

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Don't Know		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Mean	SD
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%		
I would cheat if the examination questions are too difficult	197	21.9	168	18.7	65	7.2	157	17.4	313	34.8	2.8	1.6
I would cheat to obtain a higher grade	151	16.8	140	15.6	0	0	296	32.9	313	34.8	2.5	1.5
I would cheat to avoid getting a poor grade of fail	155	17.2	161	17.9	2	.2	272	30.2	310	34.4	2.6	1.5
I would cheat so I don't disappoint my family	151	16.8	175	19.4	2	.2	300	33.3	272	30.2	2.6	1.5
I would cheat if others in my class cheat	74	8.2	218	24.2	51	5.7	208	23.1	349	38.8	2.4	1.4
I would cheat if my lecturer doesn't teach well	227	25.2	153	17	4	.4	204	22.7	312	34.7	2.7	2.1
I would cheat if there is too much work	113	12.6	189	21	78	8.7	206	22.9	314	34.9	2.5	1.5
I would engage in sexual relationship with a lecturer for marks	115	12.8	230	25.6	82	9.1	127	14.1	346	38.4	2.6	1.5
I would give the lecturer gifts/money in exchange for marks	74	8.2	100	11.1	74	8.2	223	24.8	429	47.7	2.1	1.3
I would engage in sexual relationship with a lecturer for marks	122	13.6	65	7.2	1	.1	199	22.1	513	57	1.9	1.4
It is wrong to cheat even if the course material is difficult	309	34.3	425	47.2	1	.1	52	5.8	113	12.6	3.9	1.3
It is wrong to cheat even if the lecturer gives too much work	379	42.1	304	33.8	3	.3	100	11.1	114	12.7	3.8	1.4
It is wrong to cheat even if I am in danger of failing	305	33.9	208	23.1	5	.6	219	24.3	163	18.1	3.3	1.6
It is wrong to cheat no matter the circumstances	384	42.7	348	38.7	6	.7	78	8.7	84	9.3	3.9	1.2

Mean of means=2.8

4.3. Students' attitude towards cheating

The majority ($n=734$, $M=3.9$, $SD= 1.3$) of respondents agree that it is wrong to cheat even if the course material is difficult; similarly, most respondents ($n=683$, $M= 3.8$, $SD= 1.4$) agree that it is wrong to cheat even if he/she is in danger of failing the exams, and the majority agree that it is wrong to cheat no matter the circumstances ($n=732$, $M= 3.9$, $SD= 1.2$). A little over half of the respondents ($n= 470$, $M=2.8$, $SD= 1.6$) disagree that they will cheat if the examination questions are too difficult (see Table 4 above). These responses run contrary to students' assertion that fear of failure is the most frequent motivation to cheat and indicates ethical positions that see cheating negatively, yet suggest that the perception of ethical values does not determine the level of prevalence of cheating. Respondents' ethical values and actions are therefore completely in tension. Thus we hypothesise that the programme of study of student-teachers does not influence why they cheat, their cheating behaviours and attitude towards cheating during exams. To test the hypotheses, a separate one-way between-groups analysis of variance was conducted to explore the impact of programme of study on why student- teachers cheat, their cheating behaviours and their attitude towards cheating as shown in Table 5.

Table 5: ANOVA results

		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean ²	F	Sig.
Why students cheat	Between Groups	1.156	2	.578	1.763	.172
	Within Groups	293.938	897	.328		
	Total	295.094	899			
Cheating behaviours	Between Groups	1.519	2	.760	.864	.422
	Within Groups	789.024	897	.880		
	Total	790.544	899			
Attitude towards cheating	Between Groups	.091	2	.046	.241	.786
	Within Groups	169.676	897	.189		
	Total	169.768	899			

There was no statistically significant differences between scores of the three groups on why students cheat [$F(2, 897) = 1.76, p = .172$], their cheating behaviours [$F(2, 897) = 0.86, p = .42$], and their attitude towards cheating [$F(2, 897) = 0.24, p = .79$]. Due to the non-statistically significant differences there was no need for a post-hoc comparison. Therefore we accept the hypothesis that programme of study of student-teachers does not influence why they cheat, their cheating behaviours and attitude towards cheating during examination. The prevailing non-significant relationship between gender and cheating over the last few years might suggest a convergence in role requirements among male and female students in educational settings. Thus we hypothesise that gender of student-teachers does not influence why they cheat, their cheating behaviours and attitude towards

cheating during exams. A separate independent sample t-test was conducted and the results are shown in Table 6.

Table 6: Descriptive statistics for T-test

	Gender	N	Mean	SD
Why students cheat	Male	473	3.3499	.30497
	Female	427	3.0445	.73521
Cheating behaviours	Male	473	2.5998	.92253
	Female	427	2.2951	.92944
Attitude towards cheating	Male	473	3.0010	.38936
	Female	427	2.9841	.47999

The results indicate differences in the means of male and female students on why they cheat ($M= 3.35$, $M=3.05$), their cheating behaviours ($M= 2.60$, $M=2.30$) and their attitude towards cheating ($M= 3.0$, $M=2.98$). Further analysis was conducted to test for statistical significant difference as shown in Table 7.

Table 7: Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				
		F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig.	Mean Diff.	Std. Error Diff.
Why students cheat	Equal variances assumed	386	.000	8.3	898	.000	.3054	.0368
	Equal variances not assumed			7.9	556	.000	.3054	.0382
Cheating behaviour	Equal variances assumed	4.24	.040	4.9	898	.000	.3047	.0618
	Equal variances not assumed			4.9	887	.000	.3047	.0618
Attitude towards cheating	Equal variances assumed	50.0	.000	.58	898	.561	.0168	.0290
	Equal variances not assumed			.57	820	.565	.0168	.0293

The results indicate that there was statistically significant differences in scores for male students ($M= 3.35$, $SD=0.30$) and female students [$M=3.05$, $SD=0.74$; $t(556) = 7.9$, $p = .001$] on why they cheat. Again, there was statistically significant differences in scores for male students ($M= 2.60$, $SD=0.92$) and female students [$M=2.30$, $SD=0.93$; $t(887) = 4.9$, $p = .001$] on their cheating behaviours. However, there was no statistically significant differences in scores for male students ($M= 3.0$, $SD=0.39$) and female students [$M=2.98$, $SD=0.48$; $t(820) = 0.54$, $p = .565$] on their attitude towards cheating. Therefore we fail to accept the hypothesis that gender does not influence why students cheat and their cheating behaviours during examinations. However we accept the hypothesis that gender does not influence students' attitude towards cheating during examinations. While the quantitative data gave a bird's eye view of what may actually be happening, focus groups interviews presented explanations of students' views.

4.4. Findings from Focus Group Interviews

In interviews, student-participants from all categories explained that almost all students cheat, "we have to pass the exam ... we can't afford to fail". This confirms findings from the quantitative data that the fear of failure is the main reason why students cheat. Participants from the colleges of education explained why failure should be avoided:

"failure in one paper means a student becomes an external candidate ... if you can't pass while in school, how can you pass when you are learning from home?"

For the UTDBE students failure in an exam poses a great challenge because;

"passing exams isn't easy ... the nature of our programme, combining work with schooling.. if you fail, the chances of making it is slim so you try to go through the first time"

Similarly, participants from the university were worried about having to trail a paper which they noted is burdensome and affects one's performance:

"If you fail a paper, that means in most cases you are weak ... you carry it over and add to your load the next year and may end up not doing well because of the load and difficulty in making time to attend lectures for the paper you failed ... it does not help most of the time."

Responses from all categories of students show they agree on the idea that failure is inconvenient and must be avoided at all cost even if that means cheating on exams. However, this runs contrary to responses of 78% of participants on the quantitative item who noted that it is wrong to cheat no matter the circumstances. Participants from the colleges of education threw light on students' interpretation of cheating as such:

“sometimes you just need a pushnot because you haven't learned but because you memorised and forgot and time is short so you ask for help ... sometimes too you don't understand the terminology and need help to understand ... we help one another.”

Some students seem to consider cheating as part of the standard management of tertiary learning. Students from all focus groups argued that:

“... everyone cheats in one way or the other ... it is in human nature to cheat especially, on exams ... even policemen cheat, judges cheat and priests too cheat ... human beings are potentially dishonest and students are no exception”

Context emerged as a very important factor in influencing the decision to cheat. Students have grown up in a society where distinctions between right and wrong have become blurred and where unethical behaviour by high-profile leaders is somewhat expected. Students therefore see cheating as a symptom of some general malaise as in Crittenden et al.'s (2009) study. The critical issue here is that today's student-teachers are likely to be teachers of tomorrow and, as such, their beliefs, practices and perceptions of what comprises ethical behaviour, whether accurate or not, will influence the actions they take once they enter the world of work. This may impact negatively on their pupils who see them as role models.

Students acknowledged that there are rules and regulations governing examinations so one has to be careful. The UTDBE group explained how: “there are risks but you have to take a chance”. For this category of students, failure in the exams could cost one his/her job and jeopardise one's future. The desperation was clear. However, a male student from one of the colleges of education was despondent and explained how his attitude towards cheating is an individual thing:

“I would rather pass the exam on my own steam and earn my certificate than cheat ... I have made this clear and warned my colleagues not to communicate with me during exams because I won't mind them.”

His confidence and resolve to stand alone if necessary was convincing. On cheating behaviours, respondents in various groups explained that non-verbal communication is the *modus operandi*. This corroborates findings from the quantitative data. In various ways, respondents were of the view that:

“... if you use sign language how can the invigilator prove that you are communicating ... when I talk the invigilator can accuse me of cheating but when I move my fingers, talk or whisper to myself who am I talking to?”

Various categories of students pointed a finger at the penalties for transgression and noted that non-verbal communication would have attracted punishment if it is considered cheating. If students do not think non-verbal communication during exams is a serious offence because they get off with a caution, this could contribute to a greater incidence of such cheating acts. Some students may interpret such acts as more tolerated and therefore worth the risk. This sustains the inconsequentiality of the sanctions expected by students when caught engaging in non-verbal communication and supports Teixeira and Rocha's (2010) finding that the severity of the punishment applied if students are caught cheating negatively influence their propensity to cheat. Respondents however frown on bringing in the answers on crib notes which they described as premeditated and serious and as such the penalty is severe (a fail and repetition of the course involved). While respondents from the university are wary of copying from crib notes for fear of being caught, those from the colleges of education, especially the UTDBE group would take a chance. Fourteen out of 18 participants in the UTDBE category who participated in group interviews said they have copied from crib notes and know people who have done same and were not found out, a suggestion that cheating is affected by the level of supervision. Seven out of 18 participants from the colleges of education have copied from crib notes and have not been caught and five out of the seven who copied from crib notes have seen others copy from crib notes without being caught. Participants from the university registered negative responses in both cases, perhaps because of the naming and shaming of offenders. However, positioning answer booklets so someone can copy from them or 'giraffing' to check on someone's multiple choice answers was familiar practice described by all students as 'helping' peers or oneself. All participants contend that it is difficult to cheat when writing essays because it is more difficult to communicate without being audible. The essay component of examinations, therefore poses a challenge because it is not easily amenable to cheating, corroborating Lambert et al.'s (2006) assertion that the form of assessment is a contributing factor in the incidence of cheating.

Students' attitude to cheating presented a push and pull situation, full of contradictions. All students agree it is wrong to cheat, yet the majority reported that non-verbal communication during examinations is

common practice. A female student from a college of education explained that “cheating on examination is wrong but if you take the moral aspect out it’s okay”. Cheating is a definite moral issue and students seem to recognise the ethical/moral issues involved. They therefore experience conflicts as indicated in the quantitative data which show the majority (81%) indicating they will cheat to avoid failure yet 88% were nearly saint-like in declaring cheating wrong no matter the circumstance. This notwithstanding, all participants were adamant they will not report someone they see cheating on examinations because: “I don’t know the situation the person is in”. Students seem to recognize the great pressure that all students face and empathize with those who cheat as a coping mechanism. Peer loyalty or fellow feeling dominates as students act as fellow sufferers in examinations. Other reasons why students will not report offenders are: “It is wrong to betray somebody”; “because if I get the opportunity I will get close to benefit”. Others fear reprisals from their colleagues outside the examination hall: “They will call you names ... even when you ignore their signals for help they call you names, how much more reporting someone?” Students expressed difficulty in reporting colleagues who cheat because if they report cheating, the ethics of peer loyalty will be contravened. They cannot reconcile friendship and loyalty with integrity or because they simply do not want to risk getting involved. They engage in collusion in order to maintain good working relationship with fellow students.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Although there are mitigating factors why students cheat, fear of failure seem to be the main motivation for cheating. Students do not consider cheating acts such as non verbal communication; positioning one’s answer booklet in a way that allows others to copy; and ‘giraffing’ as cheating. Rather, they see such acts as common misbehaviour among students to ‘help’ one another. It would seem that the marginal penalty for such transgressions reinforces students’ views. However, the use of crib notes is considered a premeditated and serious offence and the practice is comparatively low. Perhaps, because the penalty for copying from crib notes is a cancellation of the student’s paper for students in the colleges of education. Students from the university face a stiffer punishment of suspension for 2years and naming and shaming. This might account for the very low incidence of such cheating acts among this category of students. Although the majority of participants perceive copying from crib notes as unethical, they will not report offenders. This is because reporting cheating contravenes the ethics of peer loyalty. Students drew a correspondence between social corruption and cheating. This calls for a consideration of the overall student experience because without a basic commitment on the part of the student there is no moral constraint on cheating. While the qualitative data suggest that the UTDBE students were susceptible to cheating, the quantitative data indicate that the programme of study of student-teachers does not influence why they cheat, their cheating behaviours and attitude towards cheating. Gender does influence why students cheat and their cheating behaviours during examinations, but does not influence students’ attitude towards cheating during examinations.

While institutional policies as well as students’ personal situations play roles in cases of academic dishonesty, from the findings of the study student cheating is not simply an institutional problem but also about a societal system that is affected by and that supports dishonest behaviour. Responsibility for minimising the incidence of cheating falls on all stakeholders within a tertiary institution, most notably students, academic staff and management. Students must realise the value of their learning opportunity because the role of a student is to transfer the knowledge and skills they acquire through the privilege of tertiary study to the benefit of their future job roles. Qualifications gained through the practice of cheating provide the student with a lower range of knowledge and skills to apply for this purpose. It would seem that academic staff can do more by structuring assessments in such a way as to limit the opportunity for students to cheat. The re-use of assessment items and the depth of original thought that is required of students must all be considered. While it is important that institutions clearly outline definitions of actions and behaviours which constitute academic dishonesty, providing a clear statement of values and behaviours which are to be promoted is also necessary.

A number of studies in this area have specifically considered issues of prevention and deterrence. Some suggest vigilance during examinations; others believe the strongest deterrent is embarrassment. That is, naming and shaming offenders as applies to the university category in this study. These suggestions are generally consistent with the finding that those who cheat are usually less deterred by guilt and more deterred by fear of punishment. From the findings of this study, it seems that increasing the risk of detection and reconsidering the penalties for the ‘less serious offences’ would be helpful. If student cheating is acknowledged as corruption rather than as simple misbehaviour, that will generate strategies that are less about managing cheating and more about institutionalizing academic integrity. The study has gone some way in adding to existing knowledge of literature in the field of academic dishonesty from the perspective of the student. While the findings provide a greater understanding of how students perceive cheating, caution is needed in drawing strong conclusions due to the study’s exploratory nature.

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