

Cheating Behaviours in School: The Need for Value Reorientation

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Abstract

Cheating behaviour in school is an endemic behavioural disorder that has become more prevalent in education system that is supposed to be a platform for acquiring skills, knowledge and character. This has become topical issue among education stakeholders and a very contending subject in research. This paper looked at the detailed treatment of concept inherent in cheating behaviour in school, the need for value re-orientation. It also focuses on the patterns, factors contributing, consequences and curbing academic cheating behaviours among secondary school students. It further laid emphasis on value re-orientation, academic cheating behaviour and national development. It was recommended that counsellors and teachers should be trained on the required principles of value re-orientation. This will enable them to effectively implement these interventions with students and provide ongoing support. Also, stakeholders should create a positive school climate that values academic integrity, encourages ethical behaviour and school policies, practices and disciplinary measures should be aligned with promoting integrity rather than solely focusing on punishment.

Keywords: Cheating behaviour, counselling, secondary school, value reorientation

INTRODUCTION

Cheating in the examinations is an endemic social disorder that has become more prevalent in education system that supposed to be a platform for acquiring skills, knowledge and character. Cheating behaviour among students is a topical issue among education stakeholders and a very contentious subject in research. Many researchers (such as Al-Qaisy, 2008; Diego, 2017; Dejene, 2021) have been carried out on academic cheating behaviour to understand different parameters (such as plagiarism, knowledge of academic cheating, factors responsible for it, methods of cheating, strategies to curb the menace, its prevalence and its demographic disparities) associated with the cheating behaviour; yet the depth of researches still remain inexhaustible.

Davis, Drinan and Gallant (2009) described academic cheating behaviour as deceiving or depriving another through fraud, deception, tricking or misleading to succeed or perform well in one's educational pursuits. It was described by Rana and Ajmal (2013) as an attempt by a student to pass someone else's academic work as his/her own. Cheating includes imitating someone else's writing or other work dishonestly through activities or behaviours intended to earn the best grade on examinations (Wahyudiati, 2015). Therefore, any dishonesty or inappropriate behaviour manifested during an examination in violation of the set rules and regulations is a cheating

behaviour, for example, asking for and receiving test answers from peers, copying homework or other assignments, using illegal materials while taking the test, writing on a wall, desk, palms, dozing off during the test, using crib sheets, plagiarizing word for word, and claiming ownership of a task completed by someone else are some common cheating behaviours (McCabe, 2009; Power, 2009).

The use of crib sheets, coded communication, writing on the body, collaboration on individual assignments, presenting information without citing a source, fabricating data and allowing someone to copy in an examination use of smart phones are other forms of cheating behaviours. Other instances of academic cheating behaviour identified by Michaut (2013) include lying, using or displaying notes or other information devices inappropriate to the required test conditions, taking or receiving copies of an examination without the instructor's permission, and discussing at any time of an examination or test, unless such discussion is specifically authorized by the examiner.

In the context of a rapidly evolving society, the inculcation of fundamental social values such as honesty, integrity, and diligence is indispensable for fostering a morally responsible and productive citizenry. These values constitute the cornerstone of ethical and sustainable societal development. Nevertheless, the increasing incidence of academic dishonesty and related cheating behaviours in Nigeria presents a significant challenge to the cultivation and internalization of these principles among adolescents and young adults. The deteriorating situation necessitates immediate steps towards national direction.

Academic Cheating Behaviours

Cheating is defined as any attempt to provide or receive assistance in a formal academic exercise (such as an examination) without proper acknowledgement. Cheating refers to the unauthorized use of data, items, tools, sources, or methods to complete academic tasks. For instance, copying is forbidden and is therefore regarded as cheating during an examination that each student should finish independently (NIU, 2022). A student is deemed to be assisting or aiding cheating if they permit another student to copy from their work. Deception, fraud, or dishonesty in an academic assignment is all considered forms of cheating. It involves the attempt to employ materials that are unauthorized or inappropriate for a given academic task, the actual use of such prohibited resources, or assisting others in their use. (Walden University, 2022).

The following forms of cheating in examination are itemized from Eckstein, (2003) study: Leaking out of question papers, sneaking into examination room, foreign materials to aid

cheating, using of impersonators for the weak students, coping from a close or nearby student and assistance given by invigilator to aid cheating. However, the above examination misconducts are not exhaustive; bribery, theft, and tampering with records are all too common, and while these types of fraud and cheating in examinations can be found in both developed and developing countries, action plans to combat them are not universally available and frequently ineffective.

Academic cheating is classified as using sources other than those approved by the instructor while writing papers, producing reports, solving problems, or completing other assignments, acquisition of examinations or other academic materials belonged to a member of the university faculty or staff without permission, involvement in any actions that have been expressly forbidden by a teacher in the curriculum or during class discussion, attempting to or really copying from others when taking a test or working on a project and sharing test-related information with a partner.

Factors Responsible for Cheating Behaviour in Examination

Cheating behaviour is caused by a variety of objective and subjective factors. Attitudes and persons, circumstances, objectives and competitive impulses of academic participants are all subjective reasons of cheating. They also involve a lack of understanding of the rules and customs that define what is acceptable, doubtful, or even illegal. The pressures that society places on individuals are among the objective factors. Variations in the definition of appropriate conduct, the absence of clear standards for its preservation and enforcement, and weaknesses in the systems designed to detect and address violations are influenced by family dynamics, external factors, and the broader societal demand for skilled and professional workers. (Eckstein, 2003).

According to Hartanto (2012), there are internal and external factors causing academic cheating behaviour. Low self-efficacy, poor academic performance, poor time management and procrastinating behaviours are some examples of internal causes. The external factors that lead to academic cheating behaviour, include peer pressure, parental pressure, unclear school rules and teachers' inaction toward students who engage in cheating behaviour. Diego (2017) students who cheated on tests did so out of a desire to help others, another factor identified as motivating cheating is peer pressure. Dejene (2021) also discovered that most students have a higher tolerance for the majority of academic dishonesty, which was demonstrated by their lower assessments of the seriousness of the actions. The main justifications given by students for

engaging in academic cheating were found to be the lower likelihood of getting caught and the lack of harsh penalty (Dejene, 2021).

Some personal attributes that may be responsible for academic cheating behaviour are self-efficacy, procrastination and locus of control. High academic self-efficacy people manage challenging situations, solve issues patiently, perform well in school and in the workplace, and have confidence in their abilities to succeed (Korkmaz, 2011). Self-efficacy and academic cheating had a negative association (Nora & Zhang, 2010).

Another important component in students' academic dishonesty is locus of control. Bvumbwe (2016) recognised locus of control as a personality trait that helps to explain traits and behaviour. According to Van den Brande, De Witte, Vander Elst, and Godderis (2016), locus of control has also been described as a coping resource that promotes specific coping techniques.

Procrastination is also one of the factors responsible for students' academic cheating behaviour. Procrastination is the habit of students who frequently put off doing their homework and prefer to engage in activities outside of class. Students who procrastinate on their assignments are more likely to cheat by copying answers from friends or pasting content from the internet.

The findings by Smith, Burnett and Wesser (2017) showed that observed behaviours that do not appear to have consequences serve as motivating factors for cheating behaviours among college students examined. Eastman, Bradely and Reisenwitz (2008) reported that cheating on examinations is caused by beliefs about cheating; if students do not harbour negatives about cheating on examinations, they are likely to be involved in cheating. A student who does not perceive certain cheating behaviours as being unethical is more likely to cheat.

Consequences of Cheating Behaviour in Examination

According to Transparency International (2015), among the well-discussed effects of cheating behaviour are as follows: Students who cheat may receive grade-related penalties, he/she may be suspended or even expelled from the school, may face disciplinary action and its school record may hinder his/her future opportunities, as well as a reduction in the integrity of the school being found wanting of cheating offence. Dimpka (2011) also expressed the following as the consequences of cheating behaviour; poor quality of education; low morals of students; inability of students to perform relevant tasks; delayed absorption of graduates into labour market; and inability of graduates to communicate effectively.

It has been demonstrated that cheating tends to raise emotions of incompetence, poor academic planning and conscientiousness, lack of good study habits and low skill acquisition (Badejo &

Gandonu, 2010). Among students of various age groups, genders and educational settings, propensity to academic cheating behaviour is a significant precursor and predictor of actual engagement in examination misconduct (Barabanell, Farennes, Tramontano, Fida, Ghezzi, Paciello& Long, 2018). It carries the inherent risk of encouraging students to cheat on examinations, which can be disastrous for schools, students, teachers and the country. Sadly, certain strategies such as expulsions, orientations, suspensions and counselling employed in schools to reduce tendencies for academic cheating behaviour do not seem to be very successful. Therefore, value re-orientation programmes need to be taken into consideration if the menace of academic cheating misbehaviour is to be curbed.

Academic Cheating Behaviour and Value Reorientation

The concept of value carries multiple interpretations, including the worth of an item in monetary terms or its exchangeability for other goods, its usefulness or significance, adherence to moral or professional standards, guiding principles of behaviour, or even numerical and quantitative representations. From a sociological standpoint, a value is understood as a belief that something is good or desirable, serving to define what is important, meaningful, and worth pursuing in life. In this sense, values function as broad guidelines for human action. Conversely, the idea of re-orientation is best understood by first clarifying the meaning of orientation. Orientation refers to the process or state of positioning oneself, whether by directing interest or attention toward a person, object, or situation, or by adapting to one's surroundings and circumstances. It also encompasses the act of establishing one's stance in relation to specific ideals or contexts. Building on these definitions, re-orientation can be conceptualized as the process of redirecting or realigning one's focus, attitudes, or actions in response to new realities, expectations, or challenges.

e-orientation refers to the process of providing a renewed orientation or training when the initial or existing orientation is found to be flawed, misleading, outdated, or responsible for certain setbacks or challenges. To re-orient is to give information, ideas, knowledge, and experience a new spin with the goal of replacing earlier information, ideas, knowledge, or experience concerning concerns, values, or even institutions of a group, people, or society. Re-orientation can only take place where there is existing orientation or awareness about aspects of life of a people.

Value re-orientation can be described as a conscious and deliberate effort to provide a renewed orientation through which new strategies are employed to inform, educate, create awareness, and

sensitize individuals, groups, or the wider society. The aim is to foster a deliberate shift in attitudes toward embracing new values or modifying existing ones. This process necessitates some level of adjustment within a people's value system. Values represent the collective beliefs shared by a group and constitute an integral aspect of their culture, shaping both their way of life and existence. They embody the principles, actions, expectations, and phenomena that individuals consider important, thereby serving as vital cultural instruments. Although values are often deeply rooted and resistant to change due to their gradual development over time, they remain amenable to transformation when society consciously desires such change. Within the Nigerian context, value re-orientation is particularly crucial for addressing the challenges posed by a deteriorating and flawed value system.

Societal values function as fundamental principles that guide individual behaviour, shape interpersonal interactions, and influence collective actions. Core values such as honesty, truthfulness, and diligence foster integrity, accountability, and a strong work ethic. Instilling these ideals in younger generations equips them with the capacity to confront challenges, make ethically sound decisions, and contribute meaningfully to societal development.

However, academic misconduct—manifesting in forms such as impersonation, examination leakages, and result falsification—has become increasingly prevalent within Nigeria's educational system. Such practices not only compromise the credibility and integrity of academic institutions but also weaken the moral foundation of the nation. Reliance on dishonest strategies for academic achievement undermines honesty, truth, and hard work, thereby contributing to the erosion of ethical standards in society.

Everyone continues to decry this cankerworm in the Nigerian education system and all measures put in place to stop it remains almost ineffective, if not totally ineffective. Reason being that examination malpractice(s) at all levels of the Nigerian educational system is nothing but a reflection of the decay in the value system of the Nigerian society.

Majority of us (Nigerians) subscribe to the Machiavellian maxim: the end justifies the means (Onwunyi, 2019). The implication of this is that the society does not want to know how an individual achieves success. The important thing is the success. In Nigeria, how you got parallel A's does not matter, what matters is that you have/get a good result. The popular pidgin slang, "any way na way", explains this better.

Given the warped value system, academic cheating behaviours has eaten deep into the education system of Nigeria to the extent that it can no longer be totally defeated because a considerable

number of students, parents, school owners and principals, teachers and even external examination supervisors in the country see nothing wrong with it. This is to imply that cheating in school is a manifestation of societal wrongs and corruption. Students cheat from primary to tertiary institutions to go from one level of study to another, much as politicians use election fraud to gain enviable political power. Development of any nation relies solely on its human resources, and human resources are refined to be productive through education, hence eradicating cheating behaviours in school which destroys human resources development should be taken as a full-scale war.

Since education is the bedrock of every society, sincere and concerted efforts should be made to eliminate this deadly vice from the society, by all stakeholders and well-meaning Nigerians. A successful war against academic cheating behaviours will serve to inject a new lease of life and restore confidence in Nigerian educational system.

Measures to be taken towards cheating behaviour in school

Cheating behaviour must be prevented. One of the functions of counsellors is to prevent the occurrence of bad behaviour, including to prevent the occurrence of cheating behaviour. The prevention of the unethical behaviours requires multiple strategies: promoting a culture of academic integrity at all levels of education, which includes preventing burnout, focusing on learning, integrating ethics throughout the curriculum, teaching peer review, and providing academic development”. School counsellor may consider advocating the introduction of an examination ethics club and through the club activities, useful information would be disseminated to all student and staff of institutions. School counsellor could even go further by collaboration with the examination ethics club to arrange debates in the media to create public awareness about virtues of examination ethics. The school counsellor by the virtue of his/her training is well equipped to guides students towards achieving optimal behaviour during the conduct of examination. By effective communication between counsellors and students, counsellor and teacher, counsellor and the principals, and school counsellor and significant others: giving impromptu talks to individuals and groups of students on the expected behaviour before and during examination; delivering lectures on how to study effectively and prepare for examinations; formulating and adopting a personal reading time table; organizing talks, exam ethics and sanction to all students at the beginning of every time and a week before the examination; informing teachers/invigilators on the expected behaviour during examination; and

encouraging subject teachers to refer students who need academic counselling to the counsellors in good time.

Stephens and Wangaards recommended specific strategies for reducing different types of dishonesty

- Reducing homework cheating
- Reducing in class test cheating
- clearly communicate expectations
- Establish and communicate cheating policies and encourage students to abide by those policies
- Establishing a classroom honour code
- Be supportive when dealing with students, this promotes respect, which students will reciprocate by not cheating
- Be fair
- When possible, reduce pressure by not grading students on a strict curve
- Focus on learning, not on grades
- Encourage the development of good character
- Provide deterrents to cheating
- Remove opportunities to cheat
- Assign interesting and not trivial assignments
- Replace incompetent or apathetic teaching assistant

CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that academic cheating behaviours is a common phenomenon among secondary school students and this exists in various forms such as copying others assignment, carrying chips in an examination, impersonating someone to do an examination, among several others. The causes and consequences of academic cheating behaviours are enormous and some of them had been highlighted in this current literature reviewed. The causes of academic cheating behaviour include lack of understanding of the rules and customs that define what is acceptable, doubtful, or even illegal; societal pressure on individuals; family and other external sources; lack of rules to maintain and enforce it and deficiencies in the mechanisms for detecting and dealing with infractions; poor beliefs system about cheating; and perception that it has no implication. Also, academic cheating behaviour could lead to poor quality of education; low morals of

students; inability of students to perform relevant tasks; delayed absorption of graduates into labour market, among others.

Academic cheating in Nigeria's education system is a significant issue, as many students, parents, school owners, principals, teachers, and external examination supervisors see it as a form of societal wrongs and corruption. Cheating is seen as a way for students to advance to postsecondary schools, like electoral fraud for political power. Eliminating dishonest practices in schools can help improve human resources and national development.

Finally, examination ethics are crucial in schools to prevent cheating and promote academic integrity. Counsellors should play a crucial role in preventing negative conduct, focusing on learning, integrating ethics into the curriculum, teaching peer review, and providing academic development. They may also promote the development of an examination ethics club, distributing information to students and faculty, and collaborating with the club and other stakeholders to raise public awareness about examination ethics and promote national development.

SUGGESTIONS

1. School counsellors and the authority of secondary schools should consider integrating value re-orientation into the school counselling programmes and interventions. By adopting these interventions to address school problems, students can receive consistent messages about the importance of academic integrity and develop the necessary skills to manage academic challenges in an ethical manner.
2. Counsellors and teachers should be trained on the required principles of value re-orientation. This will enable them to effectively implement these interventions with students and provide ongoing support. Training programmes can focus on enhancing their knowledge, skills and competencies in addressing cheating behaviour, promoting self-efficacy and national development.
3. Collaboration between counsellors, parents and educators is essential. Schools should create platforms or initiatives that facilitate regular communication and collaboration among these stakeholders. This collaboration can help reinforce the interventions and ensure relevant messages are delivered to students about academic integrity.
4. Counsellors should assess the specific needs, strengths and challenges of each student; accordingly, recognizing that each student is unique and may require individualized

interventions. This personalized approach can enhance the effectiveness of the interventions and maximize the outcomes for each student.

5. Counsellors should implement long-term follow-up measures to assess the maintenance of reduced proneness to cheating behaviour and increased self-efficacy. This can involve periodic check-ins, booster sessions or tracking academic performance and behaviour over an extended period. Long-term follow-up can help identify any potential relapse or need for additional support.
6. The stakeholders should create a positive school climate that values academic integrity, encourages ethical behaviour. School policies, practices and disciplinary measures should be aligned with promoting integrity rather than solely focusing on punishment. Encouraging a supportive and nurturing environment can contribute to reducing the likelihood of cheating behaviour.

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