

Common Cheating Behaviour Among Nigerian University Students: A Case Study of University of Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria

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Abstract

The present study investigates the frequency of occurrences of some twenty one cheating behaviours among Nigerian University students and the reasons offered by them for engaging in these untowards behaviours. Participants are one hundred and fifty undergraduates in 200 and 300 levels of the Social and Management Science Faculty of a Nigerian University. Cheating Behaviour Questionnaire (Newstead et al, 1996) an instrument which contained 21 cheating behaviours and 21 reasons for engaging or not engaging in each of the behaviours was administered. Data analysis include frequency counts, ranks and chi-square, data revealed that the four cheating behaviours, which fell within collaborative cheating, were claimed to be the most frequent. They are: (1) premeditated collusion between two or more students to communicate answers to each other during examinations (2) doing another students' coursework for them (3) allowing own coursework to be copied by another student and (4) agreement to mark each others work more generously than is merited. Analysis of data on reasons for engaging in these behaviours also revealed that the most frequently offered reason was "to help a friend", this suggests an altruistic reason.

The present findings were compared with Newstead's *et al* (1996) findings with a British sample. Implication of findings of the present study vis-a-vis controlling the incidence of academic cheating borders on the need to re-orient the ethical value of students from ethic of care to ethic of justice.

1. Introduction

By virtue of the Nigerian law, academic cheating is a criminal offence. Despite this legal fact, offenders abound in the nation's educational institutions at all levels unapprehended by the law enforcement agencies nor prosecuted in the ordinary court of law. Rather, educational institutions have devised extra-judicial means of punishing offenders without recourse to the law. This, however, has not acted as a strong deterrence, hence the reported high incidence of academic cheating in the nation's newspapers (Ekpu, 1991; Nigerian Compass, 2010; Daily Eagles, 2010; Nigerian Tribune, 2010; Nigerian Observer, 2011).

The literature on the influence of morality on academic cheating is not too clear and hopeful, while some studies have found significant relationship (e.g. Grimm, Kohlberg & White, 1968; Malinoski & Smith, 1985) others have not (e.g. Lemming, 1978). Grimm et al (1968) and Malinowski & Smith (1985) have reported significant negative relationship between scores on moral reasoning test and the occurrence of academic cheating. In a similar vein, Schwartz, Feldman Brown & Heingartner (1969) reported that fewer male University Freshman who were at higher level (level five and above) of Kohlbergian stages of moral development cheated less than those who were at lower levels (level 2 and 4) when opportunity to cheat was created.

Contrary-wise Leming (1978) found that the cheating behaviours of subjects in high and low levels of moral development did not differ in both low-threat-low supervision and high-threat-high supervision conditions. While few subjects in both levels of moral development cheated in high-risk condition, significantly higher numbers cheated under low-risk condition. This has made Barnett & Dalton (1981) to suggest that raising the moral reasoning level of students may not be enough to deter academic cheating behaviour.

Donelson, Forsyth & Berger (1982) lent credence to the above in their study of the effect of ethical ideology on moral behaviour. Using Forsyth's (1980) taxonomy of ethical ideology to categorise nineteen male and sixty-one female American College students and experimentally exposing them to temptation to cheat on a test administered in the laboratory, they found that the four ethical ideologies (absolutism, exceptionism, subjectivism and situationism) have no predictive power in distinguishing among individuals who would succumb to temptation to cheat. However, they

distinguished between subjects along the array of emotions that could be felt after succumbing to temptation to cheat. For example the exceptionists, reported increased negative self-perception while subjectivists reported increased fear of detection. This suggests that ethical ideology, although not predictive of academic cheating behaviours, nonetheless, is predictive of emotional after effect of cheating (Donelson et al, 1982).

Haines, Diekhoff & Clark (1986) have demonstrated mechanism that students who cheat in a classroom assessment employ to cope with the negative and unpleasant emotional after-effect of cheating. These neutralising coping mechanism that protect the cheats from the sanction of their conscience include denial of responsibility, blaming of situations, blaming of the devil and condemning those who condemn them.

One of the problems of controlling academic cheating is lack of unanimity of opinions about the constituent behaviours (Uhling & Howers, 1967); more often than not students and Faculty members differ (Barnett & Dalton, 1981). In Nigeria, emphasis has been on cheating that takes place during examinations while cheating in other important assessment activities are ignored.

Newstead, Franklyn-Stokes & Armstaed (1996) in their attempt to investigate individual differences in student cheating have come up with twenty one important cheating behaviours. They also came up with ten likely reasons that students might give for engaging in either of the behaviours and eleven reasons they might offer for not engaging in either of them. Equipped with these two lists and a list of fifteen reasons for taking up University degree, they sampled 943 students drawn from 19 academic discipline of a large English University. Subjects were asked to indicate which 21 cheating behaviours they had engaged in at least during the previous academic session. They were also instructed to check one reason of the 21 reasons that best informed their engaging or not engaging in a particular cheating behaviour. Newstead et al (1996) among other things found out that "paraphrasing material from another source without acknowledging the original author" was the most frequently occurring cheating behaviour among students followed by "Inventing data", "allowing own course work to be copied", "fabricating references" and "copying materials for course work from a book without a source" in that order. Most frequently occurring reasons for cheating behaviour among the sample were "time pressure", "cheating to increase marks" and "fear of failure" in that order. Least frequently occurring cheating behaviours were "attempting to obtain special consideration by offering or receiving favour through bribery, seduction and corruption" and "taking examination for someone else or having someone else to take an examination for you". Most frequently occurring reasons for not arise or was not applicable to my course". Newstead et al (1996) also found out that reasons for cheating were related to the nature of the particular academic cheating behaviour engaged in and that sex and age of subject were influencing factors.

It is on such basis of identifying reasons of engaging in academic cheating among Nigerian students that the present study is conceived. The study aims to find out using Nigerian sample whether similar pattern of occurrence of academic cheating behaviour will be observed with Newstead et al (1996) and whether similar reasons for cheating will be indicated. Apart from the cross-cultural implications of findings of the present study, knowledge of the reasons for academic cheating in Nigeria may equip us with specific moral strategies to use in curbing and controlling academic cheating.

2. Method

2.1 Subjects

One hundred and fifty undergraduates in 200 and 300 levels were drawn from a population of Social Science and Management Science Faculty of a Nigerian University, of which 83 were females while 67 were males.

2.2 Instrument

Two instrument were employed to gather data. First was the cheating Behaviour Questionnaire (Newstead et al, 1996) which was used to measure the frequency of occurrence of each type of cheating behaviour among students. The questionnaire contains 21 important cheating behaviours that students engage in both inside and outside examination but which *ipso facto* compromise the assessment process. The behaviours include paraphrasing, inventing data, impersonation, mishelving, copy book, allowing others to copy one's work, fabrication, altering data, overmarking, joint work, doing another student's course work for him/her, lying for extension, taking unauthorised material into exams, illicitly gaining advance information about the contents of an examination paper, impersonation among others. Factor analysis revealed that the questionnaire measured four important domains of academic cheating, Viz: Plagiarism/data, collaborative cheating, exams collusion, lying and exams non collaborative.

The second was a 21 item Reasons on Why Students may cheat or not cheat Questionnaire (Newstead et al, 1996). It contains ten important reasons for engaging in academic cheating and eleven reasons for not engaging in academic cheating.

2.3 Procedure

Research participants were requested to respond to the questionnaire on cheating behaviour. Subjects were required to indicate for each of the twenty-one behaviours in the Questionnaire the behaviours they had carried out at least once during the previous academic session. Following immediately after each behaviour are 10 probable reasons for engaging in the behaviour and eleven probable reasons for not of those twenty-one reasons that best influenced their engaging in the behaviour in question at the time behaviour was engaged in.

2.4 Data Analysis

Frequency counts of both cheating behaviours and reasons offered by research participant were made. Cheating behaviours were then ranked in the order of occurrence. Furthermore X² test of homogeneity was computed to find out whether there was a preponderance of occurrence of particular reasons for particular cheating behaviours. For the present paper however, reasons for not cheating were not analysed (SPSS was used to analyse the data).

3. Results

Data analysis revealed that the four most frequently occurring cheating behaviours among our sample of research participants fall within the factors that Newstead et al (1996) have described as collaborative cheating and exam collusion. This is shown in table 1. Also observed is that the pattern of frequency of occurrence of each of the 21 cheating behaviours among the respondents differ from that observed in Newstead's et al sample.

<Table 1 about here>

Analysis of reasons offered by the sample of students for the present study revealed that reasons given for engaging in each of the twenty-one cheating behaviours is a function of the type of cheating behaviour in question. Using the four frequently occurring cheating behaviour in the present study as examples, it was found that for engaging in "permeditated collusion to communicate answers to each other during an exam" two most frequently offered reasons were; "to help a friend" (28.8%) and "everybody does it" ((28.2%), $X^2(9)=122.3$ $P<.01$. for "doing another student course work for them" the two most frequently offered reasons were; "to help a friend" (58.7%) and "everybody does it" (10.3%), $X^2(9)=312.8$ $P<.01$ for "allowing own coursework to be copied by another student" the two most frequently reasons proffered were. "to help a friend" (58.7%) and "fear of failure" (10.3%), $X^2(9)=312.8$, $P<.01$. For allowing own coursework to be copied by another students the two most frequently proffered reasons were "to help a friend" (58.7%) and "fear of failure" (10.0%), $X^2(9)=29.24$, $P<.01$. Two most frequently offered reasons for engaging in overmarking each other's script were: "to increase mark" (35%) and "Fear of failure" (25.8%), $X^2(9)=116.5$, $P<.01$. This pattern is shown in Table 2.

<Table 2 about here>

4. Discussion

From the results it is observed that the type of cheating behaviours engaging in by Nigerian University students are quite different from those engaged in by British University Students. Most frequently occurring cheating behaviours among the Nigerian sample fall under the factors that Newstead et al (1996) have described as collaborative cheating and examination colluding. These include behaviours like writing somebody's coursework, colluding with others to communicate answers to one another, over marking one another's course work e.t.c. this is quite different from plagiarism and non-collaborative cheating characteristic of the British sample reported by Newstead et al (1996). Reasons for these differences may be attributable to differences in population, differences in cultural ethnic, differences in emphasis placed on examination as part of educational assessment. Observed pattern among the Nigerian sample does not suggest, however that in tackling problems of cheating in Nigerian other forms of cheating apart from the collaborative and collusion types should be ignored. To do so will be to ignore the obvious fact that while some of these cheating behaviour are low in ranks among the Nigerian sample higher percentage of this sample still engage in the than the percentage of British sample as reported by Newstead et al (1996). For example, while "taking an examination for someone else" (impersonating) ranks 21st among the British sample, only 1% of this sample reported involvement unlike the Nigerian sample that ranked it 20th with 20% of the sample involved. Similarly, while "copying another student's coursework without their knowledge" is ranked 21st by the Nigerian sample with 18% reporting involvement, it is ranked 16th by the British sample with only 6% reporting involvement. The long and short of this account is that cheating behaviour in whatever form is more rampant among the Nigerian University sample, only that collaborative and collusion cheating are the most frequent.

A corollary of the above is the reason given by our sample for involving in academic cheating. "To help a friend is the most frequently occurring reason offered, thus suggesting that Nigerian University students get involved in academic

cheating because of altruistic purpose. This may be so because of the ethic of care prevalent in the Nigerian culture. Altruistic ethic of care is repugnant to educational assessment purposes and goals. By implication, therefore, attacking academic cheating from the ethical strategic approach requires reorienting students from altruistic ethics to justice ethics in matters concerning educational assessment.

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Table 1. Frequency, percentages and ranks of students who reported in indulging in each type of cheating behavior

Newstead's Rank Order	Cheating behaviour	Fre.	%	Ranks in present study
1	Paraphrasing material without source acknowledgement.	95	63.6	5
2	Inventing data.	67	44.6	13
3	Permitting own coursework to be copied.	109	72.6	3
4	Fabricating of references/biographies.	75	50	8
5	Copying materials without source acknowledgement.	84	56	6
6	Altering data.	81	54	7
7	Copying another student's coursework with consent.	77	47.3	10
8	Mishelving library materials for easy access to self.	36	22	19
9	Collaborative generous marking of coursework.	97	64.6	4
10	Submitting joint work as an individual's.	24	49.3	9
11	Doing another Student's coursework for them.	116	77.3	2
12	Copying from another's in the exam without consent.	45	30	15
13	Medically Lying to secure extension of deadline.	70	46.6	11
14	Taking illicit materials into the exam.	35	23.3	18
15	Illicitly procurement of information on exam paper's content.	41	27.3	16
16	Copying another student's coursework without consent.	27	18	21
17	Submitting work from an outside source	68	45	12
18	Collusion with another students to communicate answers.	124	83	1
19	Lying medically for examiner's special considerations.	48	32	14
20	Corrupting to obtain special considerations.	39	26	17
21	Taking for another or another examination for one.	30	20	20

Table 2. Frequencies, percentage and x2 analysis of reasons for cheating

Cheating	To Behaviours help a Friend	Time Pressure	Extenuating Circumstances	Peer Pressure	to increase Mark	Monetary Reward	Fear of failure	Everybody does it	Laziness	Others	χ^2
Paraphrasing	8.5	41.5	5.3	3.2	10.6	0	2.1	22.3	4.3	2.1	132.5**
Inventing Data	1.5	41.9	23.9	8.9	11.9	4.5	14.9	11.9	4.5	3	28.8**
Allowing Copy	58.7	2.8	2.8	3.7	1.8	7.3	7.1	8.3	4.6	0	29.2**
Fabrication	5.3	12	12	2.7	12	0	22.7	25.3	2.7	5.2	49.3**
Copying book	0	17.8	3.8	0	20.2	0	16.6	29.8	7.1	4.7	82.2**
Altering Data	4.9	4.9	12.3	3.7	27.2	6.2	12.3	21	6.2	1.2	50.4**
Cpying work	1.4	21	5.6	7	14.1	1.4	35.2	4.2	8.4	1.4	75.1**
Mishelving	2.8	13.9	2.8	13.9	8.3	8.3	8.3	27.8	8.3	5.6	17.22**
Overmarking	13.4	2	7.2	5.2	35	3.1	25.8	5.2	3.1	0	46**
Joint Work	9.5	31.1	2.7	2.7	17.6	2.7	14.9	12.2	5.4	1.4	58.2**
Doing Work	58.6	7.76	3.4	3.4	8	5.2	5.2	10.3	3.4	1.7	312.8**
Copying Exam	6.7	6.7	0	6.7	24.4	0	33.3	6.7	13.3	2.2	48.7**
Lying for extention	2.85	8.57	17	4.3	4.3	1.4	12.9	27.1	20	2.8	48.7**
Cribs	2.86	5.7	2.86	2.86	25.7	0	28.6	5.7	25.7	0	42.9**
Advance info	2.4	0	2.4	2.4	27	22	19.5	17	5	2.4	37.6**
Copying illicitly	0	22.2	11.1	0	14.8	3.7	22.2	18.5	0	7.4	19.9**
Essay bank	5.9	4.4	2.9	16.2	17.6	13.2	20.6	8.8	8.8	1.5	26.7**
Collusion	28.2	9	6.4	4	6.4	8	14.5	28.2	8	1.6	122.3**
Lying for exam	0	6.25	23	6.25	12.5	0	16.6	15.6	10.4	8.3	23.58**
Bribery	2.6	18	12.8	10.2	18	2.6	23	12.8	0	0	24.3**
Impersonation	33.3	13.3	13.3	0	0	6.6	20	10	3.3	0	30.56**

df = 9, ** = p < .01