

1 Academic Dishonesty: A Kenyan Medical School Experience

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5 **Abstract**

6 Background: Academic dishonesty, or cheating as commonly expressed, is an age-old practice
7 that is widespread across the whole world. The Kenyan experience is anecdotal with limited
8 studies, especially in medical schools. This study shares the experience of medical students
9 about this challenging vice. Objective: To determine the level and forms of academic
10 dishonesty in Moi University, School of Medicine. Design: Cross-sectional study using self
11 -administered questionnaire. Setting: The School of Medicine, Moi University, Eldoret -
12 Kenya. Subjects: One hundred and fifty-six students in the clinical (4th, 5th, and 6th)
13 years of study. Results: Eighty percent of the students were aware of academic dishonesty,
14 75

16 **Index terms—**

17 **1 I. Introduction**

18 Kenya, a worthy member of the global village, had its national attention drawn to academic dishonesty for the first
19 time in 1969 when the then minister for Education annulled the results of what was considered a stolen national
20 examination (1). The Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) in 2015 was so blatantly stolen that
21 there was a national outcry. Empirical studies on the extent of this vice in the country are, however, limited.

22 This paper examines the level and forms of academic dishonesty in a Kenyan medical school with the hope
23 that it will inform us on a pestering challenge that has existed for long.

25 **2 II. Material and Methods**

26 Medical students in the clinical (4th, 5th, and 6th) years of study filled a 20-item self-administered
27 questionnaire without disclosing their identities. The sought information was demographic data and the views
28 of the students on various aspects of academic dishonesty ranked in a Likert scale of six levels based on degree
29 of agreement or disagreement with stem statements.

30 Collected data was transcribed into a sheet and entered for analysis using Statistical Package for Social Sciences
31 (SPSS) version 21. Subjective data was presented in frequencies while discrete data was analyzed using measures
32 of dispersion and central tendencies with statistical significance at $p < 0.05$. The results appear in tabulated
33 figures, ratios and percentages.

34 **3 III. Results**

35 One hundred and fifty-six students responded to the self-administered questionnaire, giving a return rate of
36 91.2%. Their demographics are as shown in table 1 below: There was a male to female ratio of 1.3:1. The
37 age ranged from 21 to 34 years with a mean \pm standard deviation of 24.1 ± 1.8 years. Given the definition of
38 academic dishonesty as any form of misconduct that gives an undeserved advantage to the concerned student in
39 any academic exercise, 98.7% agreed with no statistically significant difference between the genders.

40 A total of 27 students (17.3%) had participated in academic dishonesty in their secondary schools. These were
41 26.2% of the 4th, 11.9% of the 5th and 17.0% of the 6th year students. Males were 3.2 times likely to have
42 been exposed to academic dishonesty as compared to the females ($p=0.002$).

6 RECOMMENDATION

43 Eighty percent of those who responded were aware of academic dishonesty in the medical school. There were
44 no statistically significant differences between them regarding gender, age or year of study.

45 The top three forms of dishonesty were signing for an absent friend, use of illegal notes and access to information
46 using electronic gadgets during examinations. The least prevalent were paying to have work done by others,
47 collusion with lecturers and fabrication of data. Twenty-one students (13.5%) claimed not only to be unaware
48 of academic dishonesty but also to have no idea of any form that may be in practice as seen in Table ?? below:
49 Table ??: Forms of Academic Dishonesty in the Medical School

50 The top three reasons why the students were academically dishonest were the desire to assist a comrade
51 (43.5%), the belief that everybody does it (37%) and inadequate preparations for examinations (12%). Those
52 who did not participate said it is because their conscience would not allow (60.9%), that they desired true marks
53 (29.7%) or feared the consequences if caught (4.7%).

54 4 IV. Discussion

55 There is consensus that academic dishonesty is any form of activity that leads to an undue advantage in the
56 form of falsified presence in monitored sessions, undeserved grades, unearned qualifications or impersonated
57 profession (2). An impressive 98.7% of the students could identify with this definition and suggests a uniformity
58 of perspective among the medical students on this whole topic. It is an age-old problem that is widespread across
59 the world and has been shown to occur in every type of educational setting from elementary to graduate schools
60 (3). In the late 19 th and early 20th centuries, cheating was widespread at college campuses in the United States
61 of America, and was not considered dishonorable among students (4). It has been thought that, like in the rest
62 of the world, this is a widespread practice and a matter of conscientious concern in Kenya especially with the
63 recent cheating in primary and secondary school examinations.

64 Eighty percent of the students were aware of academic dishonesty. It compares favorably with similar findings
65 in two different studies by Baird and Jendreck giving rates between 75% and 87% (5,6). These percentages may
66 point to the said universality of academic dishonesty irrespective of geographical regions. In this study, those
67 with prior exposure to the vice in secondary school were more likely to cheat, just as Davis and Ludvigson found
68 that the individuals who cheat during their university-level studies are likely to have also cheated earlier in their
69 studies and mature into other forms of dishonesty in life (7).

70 We established that academic dishonesty takes many forms and may even involve collusion with lecturers as
71 also found in studies by both Akaranga (1) and Gudo (8). While our study showed this to be among those with
72 least prevalence and did not establish the kind, these other studies unearthed a form of cooperation not readily
73 found in Western literature: the sex for marks scandals in Kenyan Universities in which female students are
74 awarded marks in exchange for sex with their lecturers. Academic dishonesty is understood to be morphing into
75 sophisticated forms with Seventy-five point six percent of the students had witnessed some academic dishonesty
76 in progress while 60.9% confessed to having participated at least once. Majority of those involved were males
77 (55%). The percentages of students who participated in academic dishonesty varied between the years of study
78 with 70.1% of the 5 th , 61.9% of the 4 th and 46.8% of the 6 th years confessing to the vice ($p=0.042$). Those
79 exposed to dishonesty in secondary school were more likely to cheat, but the difference was not statistically
80 significant, just as was the case with gender. A majority of those who took part in academic dishonesty (72.6%)
81 believed that their classmates too were involved in the activity. advancement in technology (9) as seen in our
82 study where among the leading methods is the use of electronic gadgets to cheat in examinations.

83 Our finding on the top three reasons why students engage in academic dishonesty seems to mirror similar
84 ones by Davis and colleagues who asserted that academic dishonesty has over the years become a way of life in
85 colleges with students feeling need to cheat because "everybody does it" (10). As pointed out by Bernardi et
86 al. (11), this study found that those engaged in dishonesty neutralize it by, among other things, appealing to a
87 sense of goodness like claiming to assist a comrade or thinking that nobody is worse off for the action. Those not
88 involved in academic dishonesty seemingly have a spiritual (their conscience not allowing it) or moral (desire for
89 true marks or fear of repercussions) basis for not doing it.

90 5 V. Conclusion

91 Academic dishonesty is prevalent with threequarters of the students having witnessed it in progress, varies
92 between years of study and a majority of those involved believe that their classmates are also into the practice.
93 The leading forms of academic dishonesty are signing a roll for absent classmates and cheating in examinations
94 using crib notes and digital access to information.

95 6 Recommendation

96 Mechanisms should be put in place at varying levels of management to contain or make it difficult for students
97 to engage in whatever form of academic dishonesty.

1

	Year of Study			
Age	4 th	5 th	6 th	Total
21-25	42	62	31	135
26-30	0	4	15	19
31-35	0	1	1	2
Total	42	67	47	156
Gender				
Male	23	36	28	87
Female	19	31	19	69
Total	42	67	47	156

Figure 1: Table 1 :

6 RECOMMENDATION

98 .1 Acknowledgment

99 We wish to acknowledge the bold move by the students involved in the study to offer an insight into an area that
100 many others prefer to hush it with the implicit and tacit support of institutions of higher learning.

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