

**Nature and Motive for Academic Dishonesty among  
Postgraduate Students in Tanzanian Higher Learning  
Institutions**

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***Abstract***

*This study investigated the nature and motive behind academic dishonesty among postgraduate students in higher learning institutions in Tanzania. Data were collected through focus group discussions and interviews and were analysed by using the thematic approach. The results show that graduate students in Tanzania engage in academic dishonesty to fulfil personal motives, college-oriented motives, cultural motives, environment motives and economic motives. The study recommends that deliberate and collaborative efforts should be made by various education stakeholders such as Faculty members, postgraduate students and academic stakeholders to maintain academic integrity.*

**Keywords:** Academic Dishonesty, Motive, Postgraduate Students, Higher Learning Institutions, Tanzania

## **1.0 Introduction**

For a number of ages, higher learning institutions worldwide have been striving to maintain academic integrity. The aim is to ensure that the fundamental core values of fairness, honesty, trust, respect and responsibility among students are being attained. In this regard, graduate students are expected not to engage in academic cheating, lying, or stealing for the purpose of promoting credible intellectual inquiry and knowledge sharing (Babu, Joseph & Shamila, 2013; Leopold, 2016; Soroya, 2016). Though there is no consensus reached concerning the meaning of academic dishonesty, it suffices to say that academic dishonesty encompasses a collection of intentional but unacceptable behaviours that are against the set rules and regulations of academic institution (Nonis & Swift, 2001; Simon, 2013). It means that academic dishonesty involves behaviours or actions that are commonly to be academic cheating and become unacceptable by the higher learning institutions (Edgren & Walters, 2006). It is important to note that, this unethical behaviour can be done even by teachers or lecturers. A good example is when a teacher allows a student to pass examinations while such a student does not know how to write and read (Ndalichako, 2009).

Students learn dishonest behaviour from beginner level, and as a result, the past behaviour becomes the best predictor of future behaviour (Bali, 2015; McGregory, 2012; Munir, Ahmad & Shahzadi, 2014). Hence, academic dishonesty in form of plagiarism, fabrication and leakage of examinations has become a common phenomenon among students in universities and colleges (Nonis & Swift, 2001). Students in higher learning institutions use both traditional and modern ways of academic

cheating. These include the use of prohibited materials and utilising a proxy in any academic exercise (Adeyemi, 2010). Other academic cheating methods are writing on the hand, submitting a classmate's paper, collaborating on assignments and whispering answers (Chigozie, 2012; Francis & Haines, 2016). Others have been using mobile phones and other electronic gadgets, which are not easily seen in the examination rooms.

Several theories have been proposed to account for the motive behind postgraduate students' engagement in academic dishonesty in higher learning institutions. Bandura (2002) contends that a student learns to engage in practices of academic dishonesty or to refrain from such practices through interactions with others. This begins in the family, the behaviours and attitudes of their friends have a lot of influence. These influential groups supply the individual with normative definitions which classify the act of cheating as wrong or right, provide behavioural models of honesty or dishonesty and provide social reinforcement for restraint or commission of deviant acts (Akers, 2015). Furthermore, Dweck (1986) on the goal orientation theory explains that in the extrinsic goals, the students' goal is to obtain an extrinsic reward such as higher grades and thus, engages in academic dishonesty. Generally, the goal orientation theory focuses on the specific types of competence that students strive for in a given achievement setting (Midgley, 2012).

### **1.1 Reasons for Students' Academic Cheating in Higher Learning Institutions**

Research in various contexts supports the notion that students engage in academic dishonesty because of a number of reasons (Fontana, 2009; Hodges, 2017; Johnson, 2013; Robert, 2012). For instance, in Canada, a study by Jurdi, Hage and Chow (2011) revealed that peer influence and faculty lenient were among the factors that motivated students to engage in academic dishonest behaviour. Another study by Bakirov (2015), which was carried out in Ukraine demonstrated that 90% of the Ukrainian students engaged in academic dishonesty during their time at their university. The study further revealed that 78% of students passed examinations with some assistance, and 67% think that there were cases of getting higher grades for some services or money at their institutes and this was perceived as part of life among the students.

Similar findings were revealed by the study conducted by Akakandelwa, Jain and Wamundila (2015) on academic dishonesty among library and information science students in Botswana and Zambian universities. The study which was an attempt to investigate students' perceptions of academic dishonesty and the cheating methods used in a local university context revealed that students had a high knowledge of various forms of academic dishonesty that were widely practiced, but they were not adequately dealt with. The findings also revealed that students cheated due to fear of failing, poor preparation and poor time management. In Kenya, Starovoytova and Namango (2016) conducted a study on factors affecting cheating behaviour at an undergraduate engineering college. In that study, 65% of the respondents declared that cheating was, in

fact, a common phenomenon, and 70% of students acknowledged that they had used mobile phones to access answers during examinations. The study also established that cheating behaviour was motivated by unfair treatment by faculty members, attainment of higher grades and impact of cultural integrity.

A study conducted by Kasayira, Makore, Chipandamira, Maseko and Tuturu (2011) in Zimbabwe on the perceived reasons for the students engaging in academic dishonesty behaviours revealed that academic cheating was common among all sampled schools, with male students more involved. Students involved in the study identified reasons for engagement in academic dishonesty as to pass examinations, parents' influences and school influences. In Tanzania, Mtafya (2017) undertook a study on the contributions of internet access towards plagiarism in private universities. The findings revealed that students perceived plagiarism as a critical problem in their respective universities. The findings also showed that most students were aware that plagiarism is an academic dishonesty. However, they continued to plagiarise since their universities failed to control the practice manually and through plagiarism detection software such as *Turnitin*.

From the literature, it has been observed that there are varying views and findings as to why postgraduate students (Master's degree students) engaged in academic dishonesty in higher learning institutions. Since academic dishonesty is an ethical concern in higher learning institutions, this paper is intended to address about the nature and motive for academic dishonesty among postgraduate students in higher learning institutions. It is expected that understanding the nature, external and internal

motive behind this misbehaviour will enable education stakeholders, students and faculty members to come up with a holistic approach to stop the practice. Since little is known about academic dishonesty in higher learning institutions in Tanzania, this paper aims to fill the gap in the literature by addressing two key questions: How do university colleges and faculties facilitate postgraduate students' engagement in academic dishonesty in higher learning institutions? Why do postgraduate students engage in academic dishonesty.

## **2.0 Materials and Methods**

The study was designed to investigate the nature and motive for academic dishonesty among postgraduate students in higher learning institutions in Tanzania. Data were collected through focus group discussions and interviews. In-depth interview was chosen in order to gain an understanding of the feelings and experience of postgraduate students, heads of department and university quality assurance officers regarding the nature and motive for the postgraduate students' engagement in academic dishonesty in higher learning institutions. Through semi-structured interview, it was possible to study abstract factors such as attitude, feelings, emotions and reactions from the respondents. Moreover, focus group discussion was preferred because it brought together participants from diverse historical backgrounds to discuss an issue of common interest, which they had all experienced. Through focus group discussions, participants were able to debate issues before coming up with a conclusion in a way that could not be obtained using other tools of data collection.

Data for the study were collected from Dar es Salaam, Dodoma and Iringa regions. These regions were purposively selected because they have a good number of both private and public universities, which offer various degree programmes. The participants were drawn from four universities, namely: University A, B, C, and D. The participants were from two-degree programmes, which are education and social sciences. A total of 8 focus group discussions were conducted in four universities with ten participants in each. Also, a total of 4 interviews were conducted in four universities with four participants. The information from the focus group discussions and interviews were audio transcribed. The data were analysed using the thematic approach as proposed by Braun and Clarke (2013), whereby appropriate themes were identified, described and illustrated by the quotes of participants.

### **3.0 Results**

Several issues emerged from the focus group discussions and interviews regarding the nature and motive for academic dishonesty among postgraduate students in higher learning institutions. These are organised into six themes, which include presence of irresponsible university lecturers, poor research supervision, poor command of the English language, problem among postgraduate students, low self-esteem, postgraduate students' intimidation from lecturers and over whelming academic tasks assigned to postgraduate students as discussed below.

#### **3.1 Presence of Irresponsible University Lecturers**

This was among the factors that were mentioned in the focus group discussions and interviews. It was opined that most

students engage in academic dishonest behaviour because some of the lecturers, who were supposed to advise students about the consequences of this behaviour, did not bother to do so. The respondents explained that such lecturers did not talk to students about academic dishonesty in their classes, nor did they take any measures against students who were engaged in academic misconducts. The respondents gave the following explanations:

*Some of the part-time lecturers have no time to discuss with us about academic dishonesty. Since I started studying in this university, I have never heard anything about academic dishonesty from lecturers during classes or any other events. What they do is just to fulfil their teaching roles and giving assignments (FGD: Participant from University C).*

*I wonder why this happens to some lecturers. Although the policy states clearly about how to maintain academic integrity and calls for every lecturer to talk to his or her class about academic dishonesty, some of the lecturers do not adhere to this rule; as a result, academic malpractice takes place here at our university (FGD: Participant from University D).*

*Some of the part-time lecturers do not want to deal with postgraduate students who engage in academic dishonesty. Most of them expect university quality assurance officers or heads of department to deal with postgraduate students' academic dishonesty, which I think is wrong (Interview: HoD from University A).*



The foregoing findings indicate that some of the lecturers were irresponsible; as a result, academic dishonesty continues to exist in the universities. This is because they let academic dishonesty to prevail so long as they completed their roles of teaching. It was very important for the lecturers to know that apart from teaching, they were supposed to participate in guiding the post graduate students on maintaining moral academic standards.

### **3.2 Poor Research Supervision**

The second theme which appeared to have influenced postgraduate students' engagements in academic dishonesty in higher learning institutions was poor research supervision. The respondents explained that they engaged in academic dishonesty because some supervisors force them to change their research topics and work on different topics, which their supervisors are interested in. The postgraduate students complained that supervisors gave them new topics, which were not of their interests. As a result, since the students are not competent in the topic, they engage in academic misconduct by hiring some people to write the dissertation on their behalf. The respondents gave the following explanations:

*When the list of students and their supervisors was posted on the school notice board, the following day I made an appointment with my supervisor. Surprisingly, my supervisor decided to propose to me a new topic, which I was not interested in. She insisted that I submit a concept note within two weeks. Indeed, I was frustrated as I did not know where to start. Later on, I decided to hire someone to help (FGD: Participants from University B).*

*I liked my previous topic, which was qualitative study. But my supervisor forced me to use quantitative research approach. I was very poor in calculations and I was not comfortable with the supervisor's decisions. Because I wanted to graduate, I did not intend to complicate issues with my supervisor, who is one of the prominent experts in quantitative research. What I did was to hire a lecturer from another university in the city (FGD: Participant from University A).*

### **3.3 Poor Command of the English Language**

It was also revealed that most of the postgraduate students were unable to incorporate ideas from other sources into their works due to lack of proficiency in English. Most of them had a poor background in the English language. Some of the heads of department argued:

*Most of the postgraduate students, in this university, are poor in the English language. This problem seriously affects the postgraduate students' performance. They just copy materials from the internet and submit their assignments without proper citations and paraphrasing. This is an academic theft amounting to academic dishonesty, and should be prohibited by the academic institutions (HoD: Interviewed from University D).*

*Though some of us devote our time to talk to postgraduate students on how to do away with academic dishonesty, especially plagiarism, the issue still persists. The problem continues to exist because most of our postgraduate students are not proficient in English. They have been raised in Kiswahili speaking environments and even here at*

*the university they often conduct their discussions in Kiswahili (HoD: Interviewed from University A).*

### **3.4 Low Self-esteem among Postgraduate Students**

Low self-esteem among postgraduate students was the fourth reasons as to why they engage in academic dishonesty in higher learning institutions. It was reported that when postgraduate students felt that they could not handle academic challenges, they resorted to academic cheating in examinations and hiring other people to their assignments and dissertations. Some of the postgraduate students explained as follows:

*Writing a scholarly work needs a student to be perfect. When I hire another person to do a work for me, it means that I recognize myself that I am not good academically compared those whom I hire to write for my assignments and dissertation. Indeed, I need to appreciate my fellows who are academically better than I (FGD: Participant from University B).*

*During tests and examinations, I used to sit close to students who are doing well in class. This is because I believe that by sitting close to them, I can perform well unlike when I isolate myself. But sometimes when invigilators are very strict, I sit in isolation and perform well (FGD: Participants from University A).*

### **3.5 Academic Intimidation from Lecturers**

Academic intimidation from lecturers emerged as another reason that motivated postgraduate students' engagements in academic dishonesty in higher learning institutions. Majority of

therespondents informed that some lecturers and instructors deliberately made efforts to ensure that many students fail the course with no apparent reasons. Some postgraduate students who participated in the study disclosed that during the beginning of the semester some lecturers issue some intimidating statements to students, assuring them they will fail the course. This caused some postgraduate students to cheat as one of the respondents explained below:

*At the beginning of each academic semester, some junior lecturers used to come to class and promise us that they would ensure a half of the students fail and if possible, some of them must be discontinued. These academic intimidations make some of us engage into academic dishonest behaviours like hiring people to do take assignments to avoid being discontinued (FGD: Participant from University A).*

### **3.6 Overwhelming Academic Tasks Assigned to Postgraduate Students**

The findings from the study revealed that postgraduate students committed academic dishonesty because they were overwhelmed with other issues apart from academic issues. Because of having many tasks, they were not able to accomplish their academic demands and as a result, they hired people to do all academic assignments such as papers and take-home essays. The following statement was given by a postgraduate student during focus group discussion:

*I was given a lot of assignments by my lecturers. I had to visit the library frequently to read for those assignments. Some of the assignments consumed a*

*lot of time and since I had many of them, I failed to meet the deadlines for some of them. Therefore, I have to engage in contract cheating* (FGD: Participant from University A).

It is evident that postgraduate students committed academic dishonesty because they were overwhelmed academically. They failed to adjust themselves academically; as a result, they opted for dishonest ways of accomplishing their academic tasks.

#### **4.0 Discussion**

This study found that postgraduate students' involvement in academic dishonesty in higher learning institutions in Tanzania was influenced by different motives. One of the reasons for students to cheat is that some of the academic staff members are irresponsible. The findings indicated that postgraduate students used that loophole to practice academic dishonesty. To some degree, these findings are congruent and comparable with findings from study conducted by Coalter, Lim and Wanorie (2012). They found that apart from teaching, upholding the academic integrity of the higher learning institution is an important part of the lecturer's job. In this regard, as part of their job, lecturers are supposed to help students learn about maintaining academic integrity. Tippitt *et al.* (2009) opine that faculty members have a duty to discuss cheating with their classes and clearly delineate the penalties for such behaviour.

The second finding of this study is that postgraduate students needed clear guidance by their supervisors on how to write theses/ dissertations. This is very important because by doing so, students become familiar with the research topics and how

to develop such research topics with assistance from their supervisors. A study by Tracey (2017) suggests that lecturer's guidance on what topic of research a student should pursue should be carefully considered without infringement of the student's interests. Backary (2015) adds that it is important to guide a student in academic issues but without dictating his or her interest. This will help him/her to explore the world of academic until finds what quenches his/ her academic thirsty.

With regard to English language problem among graduate students, the results showed that the majority of students did engage in academic dishonesty, especially plagiarism, because of their inability to paraphrase and cite the sources from the texts. Similar findings are reported by Cleary (2012) who reports that one of the motives that forces students in higher learning institutions to plagiarise is the failure to understand how to deal with citations especially when they are not conversant with the English language. Similarly, Sibomana, Ndayambanje and Uwambayinema (2018) add that some students who are not familiar with the academic discourse, which is often in a foreign language, tend to write using the words of others.

With regard to low self-esteem among graduate students, the results showed that the majority of students lacked academic confidence in handling academic issues challenges. As such, they resorted to academic dishonesty such as contract cheating as a means for academic survival. Similar findings are reported by Razera, Verhagen, Pargman and Ramsberg (2010) who argue that students in higher learning institutions get involved in academic dishonesty because they find their academic works challenging and boring and they believe that

they cannot do well. Blachnio and Weremko (2011) add that individual student with low self-efficacy and less self-confident cheat more often than those with high self-efficacy.

The findings of this study revealed that lack of good communication between lecturers and students had a significant effect on students' academic conduct. It was found that lecturers intimidated their students instead of discussing with them on what constitutes academic dishonesty and the ways to avoid them. James (2015) notes that intimidating students to fail creates an opportunity for them to cheat either in exams or assignments. The findings also revealed that when students are overwhelmed with many academic tasks, they tend to cheat so as to meet deadlines. Similarly, Jones (2011) reports that sometimes postgraduate students do not have enough time to complete assignment or study for test because they are too busy with other activities. The findings suggest that the lack of clear academic vision and priorities was a catalyst for graduate students' engagement in academic dishonesty in higher learning institutions in Tanzania.

## **5.0 Conclusion and Recommendations**

Generally, academic dishonesty in the academic arena is a disturbing issue as it seriously affects the reputation of academic institutions, which are the source of human capital. The integrity of an academic institution depends much on people who are honest and fair. If good academic conduct is not maintained, the quality graduates and education in general will be at stake. Therefore, participatory and collaborative efforts are called for in order to maintain discipline, values and faculty development in higher learning institutions.

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