ACADEMIC DISHONESTY AMONG UNIVERSITY HEALTH SCIENCES STUDENTS: A DESKTOP REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Background: Academic dishonesty is the act of giving or receiving an authorized assistance in an academic task. It is currently a big challenge particularly in the institutions of higher learning and a growing concern locally, regionally and globally. Whereas institutions of higher learning aspire for academic integrity, the practice of academic dishonesty may impact negatively on the quality of education and erode the originality and authenticity of academic achievements of others. This practise is particularly serious with far reaching implication particularly when health sciences students are involved. It is with this that the study reviewed literature to identify the main reasons for cheating, together with the forms of cheating. The study also sought to identify the factors that contribute to cheating among university students.

Methods: Desktop review.

Results: The findings revealed a high rate of cheating with major forms of cheating being using crib notes as well as writing on the desks, body parts as well as looking at others’ work. Among the factors contributing to cheating were lack of preparedness, pressure from parents/guardians to perform as well as poor self confidence among the students.

Conclusion: From our findings, there is dire need for instituting academic integrity in institutions of higher learning. This calls for a collaborative approach among all the stakeholders involved in charting a workable solution to eliminate academic dishonesty.

Key words

Academic dishonesty, University, Health Sciences Students,

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A.0 INTRODUCTION
Cheating on examinations in academic institutions is a worldwide challenge particularly in institutions of higher learning. Academic dishonesty is the act of giving or receiving unauthorized assistance in an academic task. It includes being found in possession or copying from materials brought in to an examination that are not specifically permitted or allowing a student to copy from one’s examination paper through oral, symbolic, written and electronic or any other means. When cheating occurs in medical schools, it has serious consequences for human life, social values, and the economy (Desalegn & Berhan, 2014) Academic cheating not only leads to misled academic evaluations, but it has long term consequences of future physicians impacting harshly on patient outcome and life in totality. (Oran, Can, Şenol, & Hadımlı, 2015).

Cheating is a very serious problem not only because it affects the quality of the education system, but it is also unfair to those who don’t cheat. In addition, it gives a false message on evaluation of students’ knowledge and skill. It can cause damage to the society as it results in professionals with poor quality. When this occurs in medical and health sciences professionals, it costs human life and has an economic impact. In addition, studies have shown that academic dishonesty at college or university can also be a predictor of workplace dishonesty (Nonis & Swift, 2001)

B.0 STUDY OBJECTIVES
2.1 BROAD OBJECTIVE:
To critically analyze literature to explore the extent of academic dishonesty amongst university students undertaking health sciences courses.

2.2 SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES
1. To identify main reasons for academic cheating
2. To assess the forms of academic cheating
3. To identify factors contributing to academic cheating among university students

3.0 PROBLEM STATEMENT
Guided by the literature study, a perception was formed that, academic dishonesty is a wide-ranging practice globally that is also prevalent in the school of health sciences (Oran et al., 2015). This perception was strengthened by the researcher’s personal experience of academic dishonesty amongst a group of undergraduate students during a term paper examination invigilation. Frequent encounters with students possessing unauthorized materials in an examination room during invigilation exercise, has prompted a justifiable inference that the practice of academic dishonesty could prevail among health sciences university students in Kenya. This conjecture, personal experiences together with the previously mentioned correlation between academic dishonesty and unethical professional conduct, motivated the researcher to critically review literature to investigate the prevalence of academic dishonesty amongst health services students. It is hoped that the literature review would result in greater insight into the problem, and that it would suggest contextually relevant interventions to address academic dishonesty, thus enhancing academic integrity.
4.0 Significance of the study

The study meets the need for contextually relevant research into the academic integrity of health services students in Kenya. Existence of academic dishonesty amongst health services students has been demonstrated by literature. As such, the study increases awareness around the problem and highlights the need for health sciences education institutions to accept the challenge of establishing a learning environment where academic integrity is highly valued and zealously protected. This must be done so that, ultimately, ethical health service practitioners are developed for the future. The study will also suggest/recommend contextually relevant interventions to address academic dishonesty with the goal of enhancing academic integrity.

5.0 Literature review

5.1 Introduction

Cheating has plagued universities since inception and higher education institutions training medical practitioners and other allied health services are not immune to cheating and other unethical behaviors (Oran et al., 2015). Literature has showed that unprofessional behavior in medical schools also predicts disciplinary action by professional bodies notably the Kenya medical practitioners and dentists board, (KMPDB) Nursing council of Kenya (NCK) and even association of public health practitioners (APHOC) (Muthaka, Kimani, Mwaura, & Manda, 2004). This review examines the prevalence of cheating, its causes and factors associated with cheating.

5.2 Prevalence of cheating

Problems concerning cheating among undergraduate students have become increasingly apparent in academic institutions all over the world. In the United States Education Portal states that in 1940, only 20% of college students in the United States of America (USA) admitted to cheating during their academic careers. Today that number has increased to a range of 75% to 98%. According to them, cheating typically begins in school and nine out of ten high school students in the USA admit to copying someone else's homework while two-thirds indicated ever cheating on examinations. In addition to this, 75% to 98% of university students surveyed each year admit to cheating at some time in their academic careers. The reported prevalence of cheating among United states Medical schools ranges from 0% to 58% (Kusnoor & Falik, 2013). This trend seems to be on the rise as evidenced by a study on Cheating in medical schools by Anita et al, which revealed a high cheating rate with 87.6% students interviewed admitting to have cheated during examinations. With these cheating rates as high as 75% to 87% and detection rates as low as 1.30%, academic dishonesty seems to be on the increase and getting reinforced gradually. The same trend of cheating in examinations seems to be repeated in other parts of the world. In Greece for instance, the cheating rates of undergraduate medical student is seemingly high. In a study done by Bazoukis and team on cheating in medical schools by Anita et al, which revealed a high cheating rate with 87.6% students interviewed admitting to have cheated during examinations. With these cheating rates as high as 75% to 87% and detection rates as low as 1.30%, academic dishonesty seems to be on the increase and getting reinforced gradually. The same trend of cheating in examinations seems to be repeated in other parts of the world. In Greece for instance, the cheating rates of undergraduate medical student is seemingly high. In a study done by Bazoukis and team on cheating in medical schools revealed a high proportion (72%) of students believed to have cheated to pass examinations (Bazoukis & Dimoliatis, 2011). In South Africa, more than 1400 students in 2014 alone were found guilty of academic dishonesty, 20 of whom were expelled from the university (Teferra, 2001). In Niger, the trend of cheating is also rife as confirmed by a study by Aderounmu and team on their study on examination malpractices in medical schools and the import of tomorrow’s doctors. (Aderounmu et al., 2011). In Kenya, several studies have highlighted the vice of examination cheating in Kenyan Universities. In a study done in Moi University on student factors influencing
cheating in undergraduate studies by David and his team, there was a high prevalence rate of examination cheating (74%) with male students being more involved (63.5%) than the female students (36.5%) (Ruto, Kipkoech, & Rambaei, 2011) With the advent of improved technology, the prevalence of cheating may have gone higher than what David and team reported in 2011. These prevalent trends are really worrying and could have implications to service provision by those who qualify and graduate through cheating. Indeed, literature has confirmed that there is a relationship between the classroom cheaters and workplace ethics. In an examination of the relationship between academic dishonesty and workplace dishonesty, the authors found that students who believed cheating, or dishonest acts, to be acceptable acts were more likely to engage in dishonest behaviors. Additionally, students who engaged in dishonest acts in college classes were more likely to engage in dishonest acts in their places of work. (Nonis & Swift, 2001)

5.3 Causes and factors enhancing examination dishonesty

Many researchers have pointed out a number of factors that influence students to cheat in examinations. Davis, Drinan, and Gallant (2009) reported that the situations that students find themselves in are to blame for cheating. These situations include stress and pressure for good grades. They further reported that students also willingly enter into collusion with other students to cheat. Furthermore, large crowded classrooms foster cheating as students are in close proximity to access each other work. Other scholars have indicated that students cheat when value is placed on grades instead of learning. This has received overwhelming support from many other researchers. According to Denise Pope of Stanford University for example, students’ performance on a topic is emphasized instead of performance process to mastering a concept. When the emphasis is on grades than the process of learning, students are more likely to cheat. (Finn & Frone, 2004). Additionally Parental expectations, cultural expectations and peer pressure associated with today’s achievement culture have all played a role in examination cheating because students cheat when they feel pressured to do well. Seemingly, parents and teachers, with good intentions often compel students to get good grades. This stress to attain high and to succeed at all costs mentality creates the innate feeling to cheat in order to meet the expectations. (Anderman & Midgley, 2004). Consequently, Academic dishonesty costs institutions administrative time, loss of integrity within the school, and student lack of respect for ethics and values. (Boehm, Justice, & Weeks, 2009)

6.0 Methodology

6.1 Study area
This was a desktop review on literature on health sciences students.

6.2 Study design
This was majorly a desktop review.

6.3 Study population
Articles whose study population entailed university students. More emphasis given to those undertaking health sciences courses.

6.4 Sampling method
Purposive sampling was done. The desktop review focused purposely on articles published on the issue of academic dishonesty.
6.5 Data collection
The articles reviewed were obtained from scientific journal data bases such as biomedical central (BMC) public health, Pub Med, google scholar, World Health Organization, global library and pop line. Among the mesh terms used in the search engine were; “academic dishonesty”, “academic cheating”, “health sciences” “university students”

6.6 Data management and analysis
Only articles with relevant content were analyzed and synthesized.

7.0 Findings
A total of 37 articles were reviewed out of which only 25 articles that focused on the cheating among health Sciences University students were critically synthesized. On review of the selected articles, high levels of cheating among university students was revealed. Of all the researches reviewed, at least each one had an aspect of either cheating, dishonesty or involved in plagiarizing other people’s work.

The pertinent literature reviewed revealed cheating methods to include traditional methods such as looking at someone else’s paper, talking to another student sitting next to them, preparing cheat sheets, and writing notes on the wall/desk in advance. Additionally, technological methods of cheating were also widely noted to be in use despite these materials being prohibited in the exam room.

Literature further revealed the major form of cheating to be copying from crib notes as well as copying from other students. The leading factors influencing cheating were lack of preparedness, lack of confidence, peer pressure as well as pressure from parents and or guardians to perform well.

8.0 Discussion
The desktop review study revealed high levels of cheating among university students. This compares to what other researchers found globally in various times of their researches. Bennett and team, while undertaking their assessment and evaluation of higher education found a trend of highly increasing cheating and dishonesty(Bennett*, 2005)(Rabi, Patton, Fjortoft, & Zgarrick, 2006)Similarly, a self-reported study on dishonest academic behaviors in Australian Universities confirmed the vice with a greater number of students in this study confirming to have ever cheated academically in their course of university life(Marsden, Carroll, & Neill, 2005)

However, there was a contrast on the forms of cheating revealed by this desktop review. Whereas the major form of cheating in the review was traditional, other studies have found totally different forms. A randomized response technique study on academic disintergrity among medical students revealed a form of fabrication where students copy from each other(Mortaz Hejri, Zendehdel, Asghari, Fotouhi, & Rashidian, 2013) These findings were similar to those found among nursing students(Chertok, Barnes, & Gilleland, 2014). These variations could be because of the form of academic assessment, the former being a sit in assessment while the latter being a take home assessment.

In trying to connect with what other researchers have done on the findings on factors contributing to cheating, there were mixed findings. Other researchers revealed medical student get fatigued, stress and burnout thus resort to cheating(Cardall, Rowan, & Bay, 2008; Dyrbye, Thomas, & Shanafelt, 2006) while others indicated
pressure to perform (Fargen, Drolet, & Philibert, 2016). Surprisingly, findings from other researches blamed parental monitoring in the student early stages of life for their cheating at the university (Jessor, Costa, Krueger, & Turbin, 2006; Prinstein, Boergers, & Spirito, 2001).

9.0 Conclusion

Our findings revealed a dire need for instituting academic integrity in institutions of higher learning. Additionally, the desktop review confirms some profound fears that students cheat because value is placed on grades other than the learning process. This calls for a collaborative approach among all the stakeholders involved in charting a workable solution to eliminate academic dishonesty in institutions of higher learning.

10.0 Recommendations

Fair assessment of student work is a critical factor in creating an optimal learning environment. When students cheat, the environment becomes less than optimal. Therefore;

- Faculty have the responsibility to discourage students from cheating and to appropriately deal with cheating when it is detected.
- Instructors can reduce the incidence of cheating by paying specific attention to how they communicate their expectations to students, how they prepare their exams, and how they administer their exams.
- Policies and any other decisions made regarding academic integrity should be fully communicated to students. These policies and guidelines and other expectations regarding academic integrity are made clear on the first day of class, by including theses statements in the course syllabus, and by repeating it on the class day before an examination and again as the examinations begins.
- On test Preparation, the test itself should be fair to your students. Item analysis should be done to improve the quality of examinations set.
- On anxiety, the instructors should control anxiety by discussing the test procedures and outlining the material to be included as per the approved curriculum.
- On test administration, it is worth noting that most cheating on tests in large classes occurs when students are allowed to sit wherever they choose. It should be no surprise that cheaters choose to sit near each other. To avoid this, assign students to sit in the seat with the same number as the number on their test (As per admission/registration numbers)
- The students should prepare well for the exam by revising areas covered /or as in the curriculum. The time given for revision should be adequately utilized by the student.
- The students should read and understand the policies and regulations to build their own self integrity consciousness.
11.0 List of Abbreviations

AMPATH – Academic Model Providing Access to Health services
APHOC – Association of Public Health Officers
BMC – Biomedical Central
NCH – Nursing Council of Kenya
KMPDB – Kenya Medical Practitioners and Dentists Board
USAID – United States Aid
WHO – World Health Organization

12.0 Declarations

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All the authors participated actively. J.H was the major contributor in manuscript writing. C.J, K.M and M. Z read and approved the final manuscript.
13.0 References and Bibliography


