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Prevalence, Forms, Contributing Factors, and Consequences of Academic Cheating among Public Second Cycle Primary School Students: In Mersa City Administration, Amhara Region, Ethiopia

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Abstract

This study examined the prevalence, forms, contributing factors, and perceived consequence of academic cheating among students. Assessing the status, identifying the forms, and contributing factors, examining the consequences and inspecting the practice across socio-demographic variables were the objectives. Data were collected from students, teachers, supervisors, educational experts, PTA, principal and vice Principals. A self-made questionnaire consisting of 45 items was administered for selected students with stratified random sampling. Mainly mean rank order, one and independent sample t-tests and Pearson correlation coefficient were used for data analysis. The finding of the study revealed that cheating is highly prevalent in second cycle primary schools. The most frequently used forms of cheating were using crib note, looking to a nearby another's answer sheet and copy it, doing the exam together and using exercise book or text materials during the exam. The major contributing factors of academic cheating were fear of failure and to get good result and fear of consequence of failure. The result also indicated that perceived consequence of academic cheating was high in second cycle primary schools. Regarding with socio-demographic variables, the result revealed that no statistically significant difference between male and female students in practice of cheating, but between grade level and schools. The finding also indicated that age and prevalence of academic cheating has statistically significant negative relationships. It was concluded that the problem is serious and multifaceted. Urgent and everlasting intervention is needed to be taken by the concerned body to tackle the problem.

Keywords: prevalence, forms, contributing factors, perceived consequence, academic cheating.

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Introduction

Education is a process by which human beings transmit their experience, new findings and values from generation to generation over the year, in their struggle for survival and development (MOE, 1994). It also enables individuals and society to participate in developmental process by acquiring new knowledge and skills along with positive attitudinal change. Farooq (2011), quoting Battle & Lewis (2002) makes a statement that in this era of globalization and technological revolution, education is considered as a first step for every human activity. It plays a vital role in the development of human capital and therefore, enhances national development, and is linked with an individual's well-being and opportunities for better living. It ensures the acquisition of marketable knowledge and skills that enable individuals to increase their productivity and improve their quality of life.

School examinations are a tool for measuring learners' mastery of content and teachers' effectiveness in delivering the content at different levels of schooling all over the world. According to Onger (2009) examinations are also used for placing students in various institutions and jobs and provide feedback in the teaching and learning processes and curriculum delivery in general. This means, quality of education can be determined by proper assessment of academic achievement measurements such as tests/exams/ and assignments. Scholars of education underscore the students' assessment strategies as a core part in ensuring quality of education.

However, educational goals and objectives cannot be achieved as planned because of different problems. One of the serious problems facing in school is cheating during tests and examinations. Cheating on which students, teachers and educational administrators tend to agree as one of the problems facing schools ranges from looking at others answers to bringing cribs sheets to an exams and hiring someone to take one's test (Eble & Frisbe, 1965). Nowadays, cheating becomes serious problem for the students since it makes them to be dishonest and they do not believe themselves. Securing good score and pass the exam are considered as a triggering factor for cheating.

According to Jones (2001 & 2011), academic dishonesty is any deceitful or fraudulent attempt to evade rules, standards, practices, customs, and norms to gain an unfair advantage or to protect someone who has done so. Bowers (1964) defined academic dishonesty as "student's engaging in any in dishonest behaviors not limited to activities such as plagiarizing and cheating".

Academic cheating is a growing concern among adolescents in schools worldwide, it is a problem that starts in elementary school and goes on through college. Previous research shows that academic cheating is a serious problem in all educational levels in the entire world (Mc Cabe, Trevino, & Butterfield, 2001).

Cheaters are using technology to undermine academic integrity and students are becoming innovative in their cheating techniques, so students are now using cell phones to get the exam information, communicate with others outside the exam room to obtain answers and searching for answers on the web during an exam and such techniques are posing a new challenge today's educators (Johnson and Martin, 2005).

The contributing factors of academic cheating have been classified in to two major categories as personal factors and external factors by Baird (1980), and Davis et al. (1992), these personal factors include: laziness, awareness of the performance of fellow, students low grades, previously experienced failure, a certain expectation of success,

wish to help a friend, aversion to teachers, to gain social acceptance/liking; while the external factors incorporated: seating order, importance of the test, level of test-difficulty, unfair test scheduling, unfair supervision, overcrowded classrooms, preparing multiple-choice questions, the desire to get economic benefit, lacking of strict supervision, and badly organized courses.

In the study of Kwong et al. (2010), it is indicated that students participate in academic misconduct, because of their workloads and time pressures, their desire to achieve good grades, and unclear instructions from teachers about what constitutes academic misconduct. Moreover, societal and technological factors that may contribute to increased tendency towards cheating include: lack of awareness, peer culture, lack of punishment, absence of risk and pressure to achieve (Ma, et al. 2006). Classrooms that stresses high grades and test scores may lead the learners to cheat. Situational factors also contribute to the students' tendency to cheat. For instance, some students find their work challenging or boring, fear of failure, lack training and may be pressured by insufficient time to study and heavy workloads (Razera et al., 2010).

Academic cheating has detrimental effect on academic integrity and the quality of education provision as a whole. Academic dishonesty is more detrimental to the educational community than other stakeholders, because it affects students, teachers, and the quality of education as a whole (Wilkerson, 2009). Academic cheating behavior is transferable to later life and can affect the performance of the individual during life time. On the other hand, the performance of the student rooted in honesty enables them to take pride in work which is their own. Moreover, cheating can result in ethical erosion and exacerbate self centeredness among the growing generation.

In the Philippine education system, its participants, learners in particular, are required to faithfully follow the mandate of excellence, mastery and integrity of learning knowledge and skills, which are intended for the proliferation of their infinite potentials which lie dormant, if untouched with the graces of academic instructions. In this sense, the purpose is now adays almost and always frustrated by misconducts or undisciplined performances among the learners of this 21st century era while technological advancements have made cheating easier and more prolific (McGregor & Stuebs, 2012).

Quality of Education is the great concern of Ethiopian government these days. Scholars of education underscore the students' assessment strategies as core part in insuring quality. Joughin & Macdonald (2004) as cited in Mebratu (2014) stated that student assessment should be regarded as a complex, multidimensional activity that requires alignment, balance and rigor assessment in order to assure quality outcomes.

Cheating is one of the detrimental factors that affect the quality of education at all levels. In spite of this fact, some researchers have conducted a study on academic cheating, but they focused on one or two variable at a time and more of higher education than primary schools. Thus, the researcher has been initiated to conduct a study which is comprehensive and focused on the prevalence, forms, causes, and perceived consequences of academic cheating in primary school s.

Academic dishonesty is a growing concern among students in various academic institutions in worldwide. It is a problem that starts in elementary school and goes on through college and university (Mebratu, 2014).

Cheating in higher grades may be attributed to the emphasis given to grade scores (Payne, 2003) and high academic pressure from parents (Lindgren, 1980). But the

reason why cheating is common even in first cycle primary schools where all students who attended in the class are allowed to pass to the next grade level provided that the teacher should support these students until they improve performances is questionable.

Cheating can be considered an epidemic according to many statistics available on the prevalence of cheating behavior, one third of elementary age students admit to cheating (Cizek, 1999), and approximately 60 percent of middle school students sit on cheating as a major problems in schools (Evans & Craige, 1990), 74 percents of high school students admit to cheating on tests (Macabe, 2001) and among college students cheating rates as high as 95 percent (Macabe & Trevino, 1997). Based on the above data it is clear that cheating rates appears to be increasing, because these numbers are substantially higher than those in the earlier studies.

According to Bowers (1964), stated that 75% college students admitted cheating in their courses at least once. in other study Stern and Havlicek (1986), result shows that between 70% and 82% of US College undergraduate students engaged in some forms of cheating during their college careers whereas, Maramark and Maline (1993) claimed 95% of college students have been dishonest at least once in their academic careers. Fawkner and Keremidchieva (2004) stated that 80% of college students committed academic dishonesty at least once.

In Ethiopia academic dishonesty is rising in an alarming rate (Bachore, 2014). According to a study conducted by Tilahun (2009) 88.2% urban and 80.2% of rural totally 84.2% of the participants assured that there is cheating in primary schools. Similarly 68.87% urban and 59.2% rural totally 66.87% of participants reported that more than half of the class students cheat during tests. Feyisa (2015). indicted that 52.3% of the respondents reported they have had committed academic dishonesty at least once since they enrolled the university, 44.2% of the students accepted that they have had engaged in sending or sharing exam answer with other students during exam while 23.4 stated that they have received the answer from other students. In addition, 20.6% reported that they have copied from unauthorized piece of papers in the exam sessions.

The findings of Tefera & Kinde (2009, 2010) clearly indicated that the prevalence rate of academic dishonesty in Ethiopian Universities is as high as 84%. In line with this Mebratu (2016) revealed that the contributing factors of academic cheating in higher education associated with; 85% time scarcity, 81.6% test difficulty, 78.3% course material relevance and pressure to get good grade and 68.3% of the respondent proved that loosing clarity on the policy and the need of having extra points to raise their grades.

Tefera & Kinde (2009) also reported that the perception and actual encounter of teachers of Addis Ababa University and Jimma University School of Business and Economics and education faculty found that (7.2%) respondents reported that they did not encounter students engaged on academic dishonesty, (14.5%) encountered students engaged on academic dishonesty once, (14.5%) encountered twice, (30.1%) encountered 3 - 5 times, (4.8%) encountered 6 - 10 times and (25.3%) encountered more than ten times. According to this finding, only 7.2% of teachers respond that they did not encounter students engaged in academic dishonesty while more than 89% percent of the respondent told the researchers that they encounter students engaged on academic dishonesty. Tefera & Kinde, (2010) found that about (96.4%) of the respondents (students) were engaged at least once in one form of assignment related dishonesty

while (82.1%) and (82.0%) respondents reported they were involved at least once or more on research

The above research findings indicated that the focus of many researchers were on secondary schools, college, and higher education institutions than primary schools despite being the foundation for other upper educational structures. It is also noticed that the previous researches were focused mainly on the factors and forms of academic cheating.

Thus, this study was intended to: assess the prevalence, identify the forms, assess the contributing factors, inspect the perceived consequences, and scrutinize the prevalence of academic cheating as a function of socio-demographic variables in Mersa city administration second cycle primary school students.

Methods

A cross-sectional survey method was employed. It was carried out in Mersa city administration which is found in North Wollo zone of the Amhara regional states. The population of the study were grade 7 and grade 8 students who were registered in 2018/19 academic year in Mersa and Melkacheffie primary schools in Mersa City Administration. Participant students were selected using stratified random sampling. 284 students were determined to be a participant using a single population proportion formula. Two cluster center supervisors, two School principals, two vice principals were selected by comprehensive sampling and 13 teachers, two woreda education expert and two PTA members were selected using judgmental and availability sampling techniques. For collecting data, questionnaire, interviews and focus group discussion were employed. After the data were collected, preliminary process, like sorting, coding and tabulating of items were made. One sample t-test, mean rank, percentage, independent sample t-test, and Pearson's product moment correlation were used for analysis.

Result

Though 284 students were participated (138 male and 146 female), 2 male and 3 female students totally 5 respondents did not return back the questionnaire paper and 5 male and 3 female students failed to provide complete data. So the analysis was done based on the data obtained only from 271 students.

Prevalence of Academic Cheating

The first purpose of this study was to assess prevalence of academic cheating in Mersa City Administration second cycle primary school. To do this, one sample t-test was computed and the results are presented.

Table 1. Prevalences of academic cheating in Second Cycle Primary Schools students (N=271)

Variables	Mean	SD	t-value	Df	T	Sig
Prevalence of cheating	31.14	6.5	30	270	2.91	.004

Statistically significant at $P < 0.05$

As indicated in the above table the results of one sample t-test demonstrated that the mean value of students' prevalence of cheating was (31.14) which is significantly greater than the mean test value of 30. At 0.05 level of significance, $t(270) = 2.91$ $p = 0.004$. The result shows that prevalence of cheating is significantly higher than the

expected one in Mersa City second cycle primary schools.

The data obtained from interviews and focus group discussion also supports the above results and all respondent said that cheating is becoming highly prevalent in primary schools from time to time. In focus group discussion one teacher respondent said that “*students prefer changing their name and sit with better students than studying and do by themselves alone in grade 8 regional examinations.*”

This highly prevalent academic cheating may be the result of environmental factors including migration and socio-economic related issues of students and parents. Most of the students in Mersa city Administration live with their grandparents since their parents live in Arabian countries. Due to the fact that these parents provide extra pocket money for their children, these children don't give attention for their education and finally they strive for cheating to promote from grade to grade.

Forms of Academic Cheating

The results of mean rank order demonstrated that the major forms of cheating students used during the exam were: using crib notes, looking at another's answer sheet and copy it and doing the exams together. The data obtained from interviews and focus group discussion about forms of cheatings indicated that using crib notes, using mobile phone for sending and receiving texts, using discussion during the exam, using body sign language, using bulldozing invigilator or teachers, using writing answers on tables, walls, and chairs before the exam, using deceit teachers during the exam, using changing exam papers, and by using writing answers on their body parts.

Contributing Factors of Academic Cheating

The major contributing factors of academic cheating in these schools were fear of failure and to get good results (79.7%), followed by fear of consequence of failure 75.6%. Similarly the data obtained from interview and focus group discussion revealed that lack of preparation, lack of knowledge, lack of self confidence, difficulty of subject content, lack of strict supervision from teachers, to get good results, lack of clear rules and regulation in relation to cheating in the schools, local prejudice and government were indicated being contributing factors. One teacher respondent in the focus group discussion said that “*regional government education bureau make computation among the schools based on their percentage of promotion rates in grade 8, 10 and 12 regional and national exams and give rewards based on their achievement, as the result woreda education office and school administration wants to get that reward, thus, they give clear orientation for the invigilators, supervisors and exam center chief to let students free during examinations*”. So this creates a good opportunities for students to cheat the exams freely. Another contributing factor for academic cheating may be due to the gap between parent school relationships on the issues of teaching-learning process and lack of follow up by their parents. As a result the students may be careless for their education and this lead to be lazy and focus only on cheating.

Table 2. Perceived consequence of academic cheating

Variables	Mean	SD	Test Value	DF	T	Sig
Consequence of cheating	34.6	8.9	30	270	8.52	.000

As indicated in the above table, the results of one sample t-test demonstrated that the mean value of students' perceived consequence of cheating was (34.6) which is

significantly greater than the mean test value which was 30. At 0.05 level of significance, $t(270) = 8.52$ $p = 0.000$. The result shows that consequence of academic cheating is higher than the expected. As the data obtained from principals' interview and teacher focus group discussions also indicated that, the consequences of academic cheating on students were related with:

Increase their level of dependence, makes them ineffective for their performance, create lack of self confidence, decrease students creativity, makes them to dislike their education, make conflict with their teachers, make them absent from the class frequently, make the students hopelessness, creates result inflation and had an influence on high achiever students

One teacher FGD discussant said that “The leader who has been participated in cheating in his/her learning experience, he /she engages in corruption case when he/she get the responsibility to lead an institution.” As the result cheating creates maladaptive behavior for the students in the future careers and this leads to produced non responsible and self centered citizen for the country.

Table 3. Academic Cheating Prevalence and Across-Socio-demographic Characteristics of Participants(N=271)

Variable	Mean	SD	DF	T	Sig	η^2
Sex						
Male	30.8	6.2	269	-.79	.433	0.002
Female	31.4	6.7				
Grade						
Grade 7	32.5	5.7	269	3.42	.001	0.04
Grade 8	29.8	6.9				
School						
Mersa	32.1	5.3	269	2.72	.007	0.03
Melkacheffie	29.9	7.5				

Statistically significant at $P < 0.05$

As indicated in table above, the result of independent sample t-test demonstrated that there was no statistically significant difference between male and female students. This shows that both male and female students have a similar practice in cheating. The level of prevalence across grade level has a statistically significant difference between grade 7 and grade 8 students and with medium effect size. The mean value of grade 7 students was higher than the mean value of grade 8 students which were 32.5 and 29.8 respectively. This shows that grade 7 students practice more in cheating than grade 8 students in teacher made exams. The levels of prevalence of academic cheating across the schools had statistically significant difference between Mersa and Melkacheffie primary schools and have a medium effect size between them. The difference between in grade level on students' academic cheating may be the values of the exam results, as we know that grade 8 students are expected to sit for regional exams and their promotion depends on the result scored in that exam, as the result, students may not give attention for teacher made exams and not more participated in cheating during these exams. But grade 7 students promotion depends on teacher made exam to pass from grade to grade due to this, they may highly participate in cheating practice during the exam than grade 8 students do.

In relation to school setting, Mersa primary school students participate on cheating than Melkacheffie primary schools. This may be the result of student back grounds. Mersa primary school students are living in the town starting from their birth. But student who attends in Melkacheffie primary schools comes from neighboring rural areas around the schools and live within their grandparents.

Discussion

The prevalence result found in this study supports previous finding. For instance, Tilahun (2009), revealed that the extent of cheating behavior in primary schools was 88.2% of urban and 80.2% of rural totally 84.2% of the participants assured that there was cheating in primary schools, similarly Tefera & Kinde (2009), indicated that 96.4% of college students committed in academic dishonesty behaviors related to the exam at least once. Feyisa (2015) also showed that 52.3% of the respondents reported that they have had committed academic dishonesty activities at least once they enrolled in the university.

The finding of this study revealed that most students use crib notes, looking at another's answer sheet and copy it, doing the exam together, asking someone for an exam answer, using exercise book or text material during the exams, allowing another student to copy the answer during the exams, arrange to give and receive answers by sign and so on. This finding is supported by the findings of Mekuant (2014) which indicated that the easiest methods of cheatings were using crib notes, and coping from the nearest student that most students exercised during exams. Similarly, Mekuanint, G. Mihret, Y. and Aynalem, T. (2016) also revealed most of the cheating techniques students use are: using short note, coping from the nearest students and writing on the wall, chair and clothes.

The finding of this study also revealed that the major contributing factors for academic cheating are: fear of failure and to get good results followed by fear of the consequence of failure and lack of well preparedness for the exam. This finding is supported by what Tilahun (2009) revealed that fear of failure and its consequence were the primary factors of cheating and carelessness of test administrator is the next factor for student cheating in the exams. Airasian (1997) also pointed out that one of the motives of academic cheating on test is that students may fail to prepare for tests and rely upon cheating to get them through when they are in an intensively competitive class room. Similarly to the resent result obtained from teachers' group discussion, Brand (1986) found that the rate of cheating was high in high achieving schools than in low achieving ones.

In contrast to the present finding Mebratu (2016) indicated that test difficulty was the first factor for cheating, followed by lack of enough time to read.

The present finding indicated that the consequence of cheating is significantly higher than the expected ones. This finding is similar with what Getachew & Dereje (2017) summarized about the effect of academic cheating on students including, loss of interest to study, missing classes, since the cheater score high, they strive also to cheat in steady of exerting efforts to work hard, withdrawal, hopelessness, delinquency, and other behavioral problems.

Conclusion and Suggestions

Based on the findings along with the reviews of related literature, it is concluded that an intervention mechanism that minimizes the practice of academic cheating need to be designed by stakeholders of the schools. All forms of academic cheating that students are engaged in shall be explicitly presented for all stakeholders including parents, students, teachers, school administrators, woreda and zone level education experts. The factors that lead students engage in academic cheating need to be a subject of discussion among parents, students, teachers, school administrators, woreda and zone level

education experts. All the immediate, intermediate and long term effects of academic cheating need to be explicitly presented for all stakeholders including parents, students, teachers, school administrators, woreda and zone level education experts.

Based on the findings of this study the following suggestions are forwarded: The school administrators in collaboration with other stakeholders shall organize a panel discussion on the issue of academic cheating. The regional education bureau, zone education department and woreda education office shall change the evaluation methods of schools that contribute for engagement in academic cheating. Exam administration shall be the central turning points for teachers and school principals; all teachers shall know about common cheating techniques used by the students and cheating controlling mechanisms during exam sessions. All teachers, school principals and parents shall give consistent support and advice for students to develop self-confidence and study habits. School administrators in collaboration with other stakeholders shall create awareness among students that academic cheating has immediate, intermediate and long-term negative effects on students learning, their future behavior and interpersonal relationships. Further study shall be conducted taking more heterogeneous participants and involving different stakeholders including parents and the community along with a variety of data collection instruments for triangulation purpose.

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