Integrity ‘deflation’: Preparatory students’ perceptions and practices of academic cheating behaviors

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ABSTRACT

Scholars assert academic cheating behaviors as sabotaging another student’s work, forging official documents, not participating in a group project, lobbying for leaking examinations making false excuses for missing assignments or exams. It is becoming a common practice that only good grades in examination are gateways to further education and entry into the world of better jobs. With such perception, primary to tertiary level students strive to earn good grades either by hook or by crook. The general objective of this study was to assess preparatory students’ perception and practice of academic cheating behaviors. To achieve this objective, 112 students (80 male and 32 female) from Assela preparatory school had been randomly selected and used as respondents. Basically, highly adapted Self-Report Cheating Scale (Paulhus, Williams & Nathanson, 2004) was utilized. Data collected in such manner had been analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively. In the first place, the study disclosed that students consider such behaviors as copying answers from other students on difficult subjects (33%), corporate cheating (25.9%) and making someone to write home work for someone (23.2%) are ethical and acceptable. Moreover, 25% of the respondents admitted that they had copied answers from other students in grade 10 national examination. On the other hand, about 78.6% of the participants responded that academic cheating is justifiable. On top of this, it was known that the students’ perception of academic cheating behaviors significantly predicted reported academic cheating behaviors (F= 42.208, p.000). It was identified that the students’ overall perception of academic cheating behaviors has contributed about 27.7% for the variation of the reported prevalence of academic cheating behaviors. Finally, analysis of t-test revealed no significant difference in perception and reported cheating behaviors between male and female respondents.

Keywords: Integrity ‘deflation’, Cheating Behaviors

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Introduction
Background of the study
By its nature, student-centered teaching approach is more of inter-active and learners make their own plan, choose learning goals and activities, test their progress, take care of their own learning and understanding (Darsih, 2018; Qutoshi & Poudel, 2014; Krishnan, 2015). Commonly, active learning has to do with cooperative learning and experience sharing among the learners (Akachukwu & Doye, 2013; Tran, 2014; Sharan, 2010).
Parallel to that of active learning practices, academic cheating has become a global phenomenon increasing in frequency and becoming more and more sophisticated (Nyamwange, Ondima & Onderi, 2013; Thomas, 2017). Evidences indicate that the virus of academic cheating has infected the education system from primary to graduate levels of the education structure (Ukpepi & Enukoha, 2012; Alutu & Aluede, 2006 ). Practically, academic cheating is wide-spread across all levels of education, but it is asserted that more cheating is present in high schools and colleges than in elementary schools (Blachnio & Weremko, 2011; Mebratu, 2016)
At concept level, scholars argue that cheating is the use of inappropriate and unacknowledged materials, information or study aid in any academic exercise (Nelson, Devardhi & Abdulaziz, 2012; Ismail & Omar, 2017). Specifically, cheating is perceived as deceiving or misrepresenting in a manner that creates a false impression of student performance in a class (UNESCO, 2003; Ercegovac, 2014; Pramadi, 2017).
Some researchers contend that cheating behavior is based on the belief that a person's ability to succeed in after school life is by and large a function of his performance in certain examinations and acquisition of relevant academic qualifications (Alutu & Aluede, 2006; Galloway & Mollie, 2012). In reality, students know that cheating is wrong but they feel like the most important thing they do is to get the grades by hook or by crook. Contrary to this, students who learn for the sake of learning and who have higher intrinsic motivation for education are less likely to be predominated by academic cheating behaviors (Naliaka, Odera & Poipoi, 2014).
Basically, academic cheating behaviors are diverse in types and magnitude. Some researchers describe academic cheating behavior as sabotaging another student’s work, forging official documents, not participating in a group project, lobbying for leaking examinations, making false excuses for missing assignments or exams, and failing to report grading errors (Boysen, 2007, Danielsen, Simon & Pavlick, 2006; Nelson, Devardhi & Abdulaziz, 2012). Similarly, Sarita and Dahiya (2015) described academic cheating as an illegal change of a grade, the use of helping materials during a test without permission or representing someone else’s work as one's own. The researchers further explained that cheating can take the form of crib notes, looking over someone's shoulder during an exam or any forbidden sharing of information between students regarding an exam or exercise.
Similar studies identified major reasons why students choose to engage in academic cheating. Some students are pressured to get better grade whereas others struggle academically and feel that cheating is their only path to any kind of success (Ruto et al., 2011; 2012). Furthermore,
evidences indicate that lack of time, poverty, uncaring instructors, laziness, peer pressure, poor role model, fear of failure and technology are some of the reasons mentioned by the students (Sarita & Dahiya, 2015; Carrel, Malmstorm & West, 2008, Nyamwange, Ondima & Onderi, 2013; Naliaka, Odera & Poipoi, 2014).

On the other hand, parental and school pressure towards student academic achievement were reported to make unprepared students to shift to cheating behaviors (Naliaka, Odera & Poipoi, 2014). Parents want their children to score high marks and join Universities to study highly valued disciplines (Sarita & Dahiya, 2015; Kaufman, 2008). Above all, teachers want excellence in their subjects so as to get as many awards and recognized as top teacher. Surprisingly, the society expects students to do well regardless of the methods they employ (Nyamwange, Ondima & Onderi, 2013, Galloway & Mollie, 2012).

Since recently, it is being accepted that only good grades in examination are gateways to further education and entry into the world of better job (Batool, Abbas & Naeemi, 2011; Isakov & Tripathy 2017). From this perspective, secondary and tertiary level students strive to earn good grade either by hook or by crook. Obviously, such thought contradicts with societal values which give due emphasis to honesty and integrity.

Besides external factors, some researchers relate academic cheating behaviors to locus of control, which suggests that social outcomes result from either one’s own dispositions or extraneous forces (Yeşilyurt, 2014; Murdock & Anderman, 2006). With this regard, scholars contend that students who believe in their success depend on internal forces such as personal effort and ability rather than external forces such as others’ help, are less likely to cheat because they believe that the grade earned in a subject is within their control (Pino & Smith, 2003; Nora & Zhagn, 2010). On top of that, scholars argue that, for students who have high self-efficacy beliefs and high success expectation at an academic task, cheating is probably neither a necessary nor useful strategy (Mudrock & Anderman, 2006; David, 2014). Furthermore, researchers contend that cheating rates are higher when students have poor expectations of their abilities to accomplish their goals through personal effort or when suffer from low self-esteem (Blachnio & Weremko, 2011).

Pertinent the cause of cheating, a study conducted by Callen, et al. (2013) revealed that poor preparation for examinations was the main cause of examination cheating for about 32% of the respondents. The researchers extended that the second cause of cheating was pressure to produce good grades (21.6%) because students had to pass before they proceed to the next level of schooling. Similarly, Eastman, Iyer and Reisenwitz (2008) confirmed that lack of motivation, lack of time to study, difficulty of material to learn, poor teacher and peer pressure are some of the major factors that push students towards cheating behaviors.

On one hand, students’ perception about academic heating and examination malpractice varies depending on personal experiences and values. Previously, to be caught cheating on exam was considered as academic crime. These days, however, many students perceive the various forms of cheating as a normal process of learning (Ukpepi & Enukoha, 2012; Murtaza, et al, 2013). Related with this, Jones (2011) asserted that many students fail to identify what was and what was not
cheating and even too many students believed that it was okay to cheat. On the other hand, studies indicate that most students know that cheating behaviors in school setting are prohibited, but most of them cheat or cooperate to cheat during tests (Pramadi et al., 2017; Galloway & Mollie, 2012). Obviously, this shows existence of discrepancy between overt and covert behavior or perception and actual behavior of secondary school students (Getachew and Dereje, 2017). In a study conducted by Davis et al. (1992), it was known that about 90% of the participants reported that it is wrong to cheat. However, about 76% of them indicated being engaged in academically dishonest behaviors. Similarly, Abdulah (2014) stressed that most students do not see any negative effect of cheating on their overall academic work and they consider cheating on examinations as a normal learning process.

Problem Statement

Customarily, academic success was supposed to be achieved through hard work, individual effort and cognitive superiority. These days, however, the reverse is becoming the case and academic success is measured by how much one can acquire certificates and good grades at school without bothering about the process (Pramadi et al. 2017; Sarita & Dahiya, 2015). As to Nelson, Devardhi and Abdulaziz, 2012), cheating enhances culture of academic dependency, which in turn results in artificial learning. When students are highly engaged in cheating behaviors, the entire assessment system becomes fictitious and all the academic results fail to explain the outcomes of the individual learner (Nelson, Devardhi & Abdulaziz, 2012; Sarita & Dahiya, 2015).

Evidences indicate that academic cheating is being manifested in Ethiopia in a form of cheating in exams, plagiarism, damaging equipment so other students would not be able to use it (Feday, 2017; Abdulah, 2014; Mebratu, 2016). It was confirmed that many secondary school students depend on each other to be promoted to the next grade level and count up ladder of grades without any background knowledge (Getachew & Dereje, 2017).

More than ever before, the issue of academic cheating in Ethiopian education system reached its pick by 2016, when the Ethiopian University Entrance Examination leaked out and displayed through social media. Even if the suspects might not have been the students, the practice had revealed the decline of the system of academic integrity in the history of the country (Addis Standard, 2016). Taking such unusual practices into account, the following basic questions are formulated to be answered at the end of the study.

• How do preparatory students perceive cheating and non-cheating behaviors pertinent to academic activities?
• What types of academic cheating behaviors are commonly seen among preparatory students?
• What is the relationship between perceptions of academic cheating and actual behaviors?
• Is there a significant difference between male and female preparatory students in academic cheating behaviors?
• What measures should be used to curb academic cheating behaviors in preparatory schools?

Objectives of the study

The general objective of this study is to assess preparatory students' perception and practice of
academic cheating behaviors. Specifically, the study is designed to:

• identify whether students properly identify cheating and non-cheating behaviors.
• list out the most prevalent types of academic cheating behaviors among preparatory students.
• indicate the appropriate preventive measures to be used in order to curb academic heating behaviors in preparatory schools?

Significance of the study

The result of this study has prominent implication for school principals, teachers, exam-invigilators, curriculum designers and researchers. More specifically it;

• helps school teachers to enable students differentiate cheating and non-cheating behaviors.
• initiates curriculum designers to integrate contents related to academic integrity into school curriculum so as to discourage academic cheating behaviors during implementing active learning methods.
• provides background information for researchers in the field of education and psychology to undertake further investigation in this discipline.

Research design and methods

Research Design

The major purpose of this study was to assess preparatory students’ perception and practice of academic cheating behaviors. For this reason, descriptive survey design was used to properly implementing this study. With this regard, Kerlinger (1986) argued that descriptive survey design enables researchers to gather data on a one shot basis and at a particular time.

Participants

The population of this study was students, teachers and principals of Assela Preparatory school, Oromia Regional State, Ethiopia. By the time of data collection, there were (1389 male and 949, totally 2338 students in Assela preparatory school. Based on random sampling technique, 112 (80 male and 32 female) students were selected and used as respondents. On the other hand, 7 teachers were randomly selected and involved in focus group discussion. On top of this, principal and vice principal of the school had been interviewed.

Instruments

The major data collecting instrument for this study was self-report questionnaire. The questionnaire has both close and open-ended items, which was highly adapted from the Self-Report Cheating Scale (Paulhus, Williams & Nathanson, 2004). The first part of the questionnaire was about the students’ perception of behaviors to be labeled as ethical or unethical. Under this section, there were 14 items prepared on 3 point likert scale in a form of 1=ethical, 2=I’m not sure 3= unethical. These items yielded reliability value of (α.71). The second part of the questionnaire was about practices. For this purpose, 12 items were prepared on four point liket scale in a form of 1= not at all, 2=rarely, 3= commonly, 4= usually. The internal correlation coefficient of these items was computed to be (α .69). Similarly, the third part of the questionnaire was prepared to know the major reasons why students get involvement in cheating behaviors. In this part of the instrument, 12 possible reasons were described to be sorted by the students from most common to least common reason. Besides the close-ended items, there were some open-ended items prepared to solicit additional information.
that cannot be addressed by the close-ended items. Furthermore, structured interview guiding note has been developed by the researchers to collect information from the school principal and vice principal. On top of this, focus group discussion framework had been developed by the researcher to get supplementary information from some selected teachers.

**Data analysis**

The data analysis method applied in this study was both qualitative and quantitative. Percentage and numbers are used to show summary of the responses obtained from the students. Based on the type of the data, tables and charts were used to indicate major findings of the study. Furthermore, simple regression analysis was computed to test the relationship of the students’ perception of academic cheating behaviors and self-reported cheating behavior prevalence. Finally, analysis of t-test was conducted to identify whether there is differences in perception and actual cheating practices as a function of gender of the respondents.

**Results**

The major purpose of this study was to assess preparatory students’ perception and practice of academic cheating behaviors. With this intention, the first task was to pinpoint whether the students had been told about the unethical side of academic cheating behaviors or not. Accordingly, the following table shows the responses obtained from the students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes (%)</th>
<th>I don’t remember (%)</th>
<th>No (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Have your parents told you that academic cheating is unethical?</td>
<td>79.5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Have you ever been taught in school subjects that academic cheating is unethical?</td>
<td>77.7</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As described in the above table, the majority of the respondents (79.5%) admitted that their parents had informed them about unacceptability of academic cheating behaviors. Similarly, 77.7% of the respondents assured that they had been taught at school level about the ethical issues of academic cheating behaviors. Regarding the school subjects, the respondents admitted that most subject teachers discourage cheating behaviors. Besides information access, it was also attempted to assess the students’ perception of cheating and non-cheating behaviors. Based on common assessment practices, a list of activities related to cheating behaviors were given to be rated by the students. The result has been summarized as follows.

**Table 2** : The students’ perception of behaviors related to academic cheating.
As portrayed in the above table, about 33% of the respondents argued that copying answers from top students particularly on subjects that they are poor is ethical. Similarly, 25.9% of the respondents consider corporate cheating is ethically acceptable. On both cases, about 15.2% of the respondents reacted that they are undecided to the given behaviors. Many respondents indicated that such behaviors as making someone do homework for someone (23.2%), transferring exam answers to a closest friend or relative (21.5%), searching for a leaked examination (21.4%) , bringing hidden notes to examination rooms (21.4%) and doing a class work for someone (20.5%) are ethical.

Unluckily, a large number of respondents are found uncertain to respond to the given behaviors either as ethical or unethical to the best of their knowledge. For example, searching for leaked examination questions (19.6%), transferring answers to poorly performing students (17.9%) and writing a homework for someone (17.9%) were answered undecided. Above all, it is surprising to see that only 59% of the respondents consider searching for leaked examination questions unethical. Farther than their perception, it was also tried to pinpoint the prevalence of cheating behaviors among the students. For this purpose, the students were made to rate their own behaviors on the basis of some activities related to ethical issues. The summary of the finding is presented as follows.

Table 3: Reported prevalence of academic cheating behaviors
As described in the above table, about 25% of the respondents admitted that they had copied answers on grade 10 national examination whereas 26.8% of them reported that they had allowed students to copy from them during grade 10 national examination. A significant number of respondents revealed their involvement in such behaviors as making other student to do homework for them (23.2%), sat next to a top student in order to copy from him/her (22.4%), transferred answers to poorly performing students on final examination (33%), had someone write a class work for them (20.6%) and brought hidden notes to a school test (14.3%). As clearly noted in the above table, a greater number of respondents reacted that they had been involved in the given behaviors rarely. As part of their perception, it was intended to identify the reasons that students attribute for their involvement in academic cheating behaviors. Surprisingly, 78.6% of the respondents reacted that cheating behaviors are justifiable. Only 1.8% of the respondents indicated that they are not sure whereas 19.6% of them reacted that cheating is never justifiable. The following summary table indicates contexts in which the respondents think cheating is possible.

### Table 4: Reported justifications for getting involved in academic cheating behaviors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SN</th>
<th>Intentions of the cheating behaviors</th>
<th>Acceptable (%)</th>
<th>I’m not (%)sure</th>
<th>Unacceptable (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>when improving ranking in school is highly important</td>
<td>28.7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>43.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>when one is not aware of exam rules and regulations</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>46.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>when the school atmosphere is highly competitive</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>when one failed study for the exam</td>
<td>26.8</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>36.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>When one is struggling to get a passing grade in a subject</td>
<td>25.9</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>39.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>when one felt pressured by parents to achieve more</td>
<td>25.9</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>35.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>when it is unexpected that the cheating will be detected</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>when exams are too difficult</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>44.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>during grade 10 national examination</td>
<td>23.2</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>41.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>during University entrance examination</td>
<td>23.2</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>38.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As portrayed in table 4, a significant number of respondents indicated their agreement to the potential justifications for getting involved in academic cheating behaviors. As to the respondents, the need for improving class ranking (28.7%), failure to study for the exam (26.8%), struggling to get a passing grade (25.9%), pressure by family for better achievement (25.9%), sitting for grade 10 national and university entrance examination (23.2%) are some of the major contexts for the students to get involved into academic cheating behaviors. Similarly, a large number of respondents agreed that cheating could be right when the academic work is highly competitive (21.4%), when exams are too difficult (19.6%), when students don’t think that cheating is detectable (18.8%) and when students are not aware of exam rules and regulations (17.8%).

In this study, the respondents were asked to indicate the one who would be most affected by academic cheating practices. Accordingly, about 33.9% of the respondents indicated that both the receiver and the provider would be affected, where as 29.5% of them reported that none would be affected by this behavior. Similarly, 18.8% of them re-acted that one who copies would be most affected where as 17.9% of them mentioned that one who provides would be most affected.

Lastly, the respondents were asked to indicate the ways forward to academic cheating behaviors. Unluckily, only 27.3% of the respondents mentioned that cheating should totally be banned. Almost an equal number of respondents (20%) mentioned that cheating should be tolerated. On the other hand, 26.4% of the respondents indicated that cheating should be discouraged based on conditions whereas 7.3% of them indicated that cheating should be tolerated only on national examinations. In order to test for the relationship between perceptions about academic cheating and prevalence of cheating behaviors, a simple regression analysis had been conducted considering perceptions as independent variable and cheating behaviors as dependent variable. Summary of the analysis is presented as follows.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Unstandardized coefficients</th>
<th>Standardized coefficients</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Constant)</td>
<td>11.162</td>
<td>1.751</td>
<td>6.375**</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perception</td>
<td>0.361</td>
<td>0.056</td>
<td>6.497**</td>
<td>R=.277</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This shows that perceptions of academic cheating behaviors contributed about 27.7% for the variations of the respondents’ involvement in academic cheating behaviors. In order to identify whether differences were observed in perceptions and practices of academic cheating behaviors as a function of gender, analysis of t-test was computed. However, no statistically significant result was obtained.

Discussion
In education, assessment and evaluation provide a means to ascertain the attainment of objectives set at the very beginning. Thus, scholars contend that assessment mechanisms should be as
systematic as possible and reflect the real performance of the learner (Nalika et al., 2015; Callen et al., 2013; Umali & Asu, 2012; Nalika, Odera & Poipoi, 2015). In this regard, assessments results are widely accepted as important means of evaluating the learning process (Adow, Alio & Thinguri, 2015). However, learning assessment practices are being challenged by academic cheating behaviors of the learners (Blachnio & Weremko, 2011; Wideman, 2008; Galloway, 2015).

Scholars contend that cheating undermines the educational process by compromising the integrity of the students through impeding their learning, which again leads them to be ill-prepared for further study and employment (Sierra and Hyman, 2006).

The purpose of this study was to assess preparatory students’ perceptions about academic cheating behaviors and their actual practices. Basically, a self-report measure has been used to collect data from preparatory students on their perception of cheating behaviors and reported prevalence of the behaviors. Qualitative and quantitative analysis of the data has numerous points worth discussion.

To begin with, the respondents honestly claimed that their parents had told them that academic cheating is unethical. As described in table 1, 79.5% of them pointed out that their parents had told them that academic cheating is forbidden by school rules and regulations. It is clear that parents have a significant role in academic attainment and proper moral development of their own children. Possibly that is why, some scholars assert that parents can play an important role to reduce student cheating behaviors in schools (Animasahung & Ogunniran, 2014; Sykes, 2010). On one hand, this result supports a former study, which reported that the majority of parents do not want their children to get involved in academic cheating behaviors (Mike, 2010). On the other hand, this result contradicts with previous study which reported that parental pressure triggers on children to cheat to achieve the desired goal, particularly when previous result is poor (Umali & Asu, 2012). As a second source of information, almost an equal number of respondents (77.7%) confirmed that they had been taught in school subjects that academic cheating is unethical. Specifically, the respondents listed subjects such as Civic and Ethical Education, Mathematics, English and History are subjects in which they were taught as cheating behaviors are ethically unacceptable. Thus, this result confirms the conviction that teachers role as contextual variable has positive effects on academic achievement and can reduce the level of cheating behavior (Orosz et al., 2015; Diego, 2017).

In studying the prevention of academic cheating, it would be worth noting to examine how it is perceived by the students. Scholars assert that the way students view cheating might have a great deal to do with how often it occurs and how it can be prevented (Gillenspie, 2003). These days, it is believed that several students have difficulty of identifying what is and what is no cheating. Many students consider cheating as acceptable behavior that occurs so frequently. Thus, assessing the students perceptions would be a foot step towards addressing concerns about academic cheating in schools (Edgren & Walters, 2006; Jones, 2011).

As part of the students’ perception assessment, the respondents were made to rate a list of behaviors as ethical, unethical or undecided. As depicted in table 2, about 33% of the respondents signified that copying exam answers on subjects difficult to them is ethical. These days, corporate cheating
is becoming a common challenge in secondary schools, particularly during national examinations. In the present study too, 25.9% of the respondents do consider corporate cheating ethically acceptable. Similarly, it is given in table 2 that about 21.4% of the respondents ratified that searching for leaked examination questions is ethical. More or less, the present result supports a study conducted by Naliaka, Odera & Poipoi (2014) which revealed that 45.6% of the respondents agreed to buy an exam question papers if they were offered before exam. Related with this, studies indicate that parents are also involved in buying question papers for their children and even bribe examiners to allow their children to cheat (Umali & Asu, 2012). It is a recent memory that Ethiopian University Entrance Examination (EUEE) had leaked in the 2016/17 academic year. Disgracefully, this type of academic dishonesty had never been heard in the history of modern education of the country.

Furthermore, it was known in this study that many respondents consider such behaviors as bringing hidden notes to the exam rooms (21.4%), making someone to do a home work for someone else (23.2%) and transferring exam answers to a closest friend or relative (21.5%) are ethically acceptable. This result is in accordance with some previous studies which accounted that many students do not perceive working with other students on exams as cheating (Umali & Enukoha, 2012; Jones, 2011; Peled, Eshet & Grinautski, 2013; David, 2014). One most likely reason for such result could be the impact of cooperative learning strategies being implemented in classes. In the current teaching-learning paradigm, inter-group information exchange is highly encouraged and as a result, the students might have developed more sharing and cooperation skills. The frequency of such behaviors might have affected the students to exhibit similar behavior on individual assessment practices including exams.

Beyond identifying their perception, it was attempted to assess reported prevalence of cheating behaviors. On this issue, data presented in table 2 has many points worth noting. Among others, about 33% of them admitted that they commonly transferred answers to poorly performing students. Almost an equal number of respondents, 26.8% and 25%, indicated their involvement in copying and offering answers in grade 10 national examinations. Moreover, it has been confirmed in this study that about 23.2% and 20.6% of the participants admitted to have done home works and class works (respectively) to each other. Honestly, this result sounds good as compared to a previous study by Galloway (2012) which disclosed that 66.9% of male and 54.4% of female respondents indicated that they had helped someone else to cheat on test. Furthermore, this result confirms a study finding by Adow, Allo and Thingur (2015), which unveiled that 24% and 5% of the respondents admitted to have cheated in examination and written examinations respectively. As further mechanism of understanding their perception, the participants were made to categorize cheating behaviors as justifiable or unjustifiable. Very sadly, about 78% of the respondents consider cheating justifiable. Only 19.6% of them reacted that academic cheating is never justifiable. Related with this, Korb (2011) described that students may know that cheating is unethical, but they may justify that cheating is based on contextual factors.

As depicted in table 4, about 28.7% of the respondents counted that students should cheat when
improving class ranking is a priority. Furthermore, inadequate preparation for a test (26.8%), struggling to get a passing mark (25.9%), being pressured by family to achieve more (25.9%) and competing for grade 10 national and university entrance examinations (23.2%) were reported as some of the major contexts for the students to getting involved in cheating. Obviously, inadequate preparation for examination is more likely to lead students to a short cut mechanism to success through cheating. This result supports previous findings by Syam and Al-shaikh (2013) and Alutu and Aluede (2006) who posited that many students cheat in examinations if they do not study well. In many ways, this result is in line with many previous studies which affirmed that pressure from parents (Ruto, Kipkoach & Rambaei, 2001; Nyamwange, Ondima & Onderi, 2013; Sarita & Dahiya, 2015), need to make better grades (Jones, 2011; Nalika, Odera & Poipoi, 2014; Gillespie, 2003), failure to prepare for exam (Isakov & Tripathy, 2017; Starovoytova & Namango, 2016) make some students to shift to cheating.

There are indistinct arguments about the values of students’ contextual perception of academic cheating behaviors. On one hand, scholars contend that such justifications enable students to maintain some sense of integrity and simultaneously attain the success they believe they are afforded because of their hard work (Galloway & Mollie, 2012). On the other hand, it is also argued that students who have strong reasons for committing academic cheating are more likely to be more12 academically dishonest and continue to commit more cheatings (Eastman, Bradley & Reisenuwitz, 2008)

One interesting point in this study is related to a question presented to the respondents as "whom do you think would be affected by academic cheating practices?". Unpredictably, 29.5% of them reacted that 'no one' would be affected by cheating behaviors. However, about 33.9% of the respondents claimed that both the provider and the receiver would be affected. This implies that a significant number of respondents have a feeling that 'academic cheating hurts no one'. This result is slightly closest to a study finding by Jones (2011) who uncovered that about 17% of the respondents had a belief of cheating is no more big deal and does not matter to anyone. In reality, “it hurts no one” perception is among the first ego defense mechanism students use to safeguard their self-interest.

Besides assessing the students' perception of cheating behaviors and actual cheating practices, it was the interest of this study to assess the relationship of perceptions and the actual cheating behaviors. As described in table 5, perception about academic cheating behaviors significantly predicted actual cheating behaviors of the respondents (F= 42.208, sig.00). It was known that perception of cheating behaviors had contributed about 27.7% for the variations in actual cheating behaviors.

With regard to similarities and differences, it was found in this study that girls and boys did not show significant difference in their perception and actual practice of cheating behaviors. On one hand, this result coincides with a study result by (Athanasau & Olasehind, 2002; Umali & Enukoha, 2012) who found no significant difference was between boys and girls in their cheating behaviors. In this study, it is known that perceptions about cheating and actual cheating behaviors do not differ whether the
student is male or female. Contrary to this result, many previous studies confirmed that males cheat more than females (Ballantine, McCourt & Mulgrew, 2014; Roth & McCabe, 1995; Williams, Nathanson & Paulhus, 2010; Bjorklud & Wenestam, 1999).

Lastly, the respondents were given a chance to indicate the ways forward to academic cheating. Very sadly, 20% of them reacted that cheating should be tolerated. Similarly, 26.4% of them indicated that cheating should be discouraged based on condition where as only 27.3% of them indicated that cheating should be discouraged without any preconditions. In reality, cheating should be discouraged without preconditions and all of the respondents were expected to have such mentality.

**Conclusions and Implications**

It was identified in this study that more than 75% of the respondents have information access on how academic cheating is unethical. Regardless of such information from parents and school teachers, a significant number of them reported that copying exam answers from friends on difficult subjects (33%), bringing hidden notes to exam rooms (21.4%), transferring exam answers to a closest friends or relatives (21.5%), doing home works and assignments to one another (20.5%) are ethical. Practically, many of the respondents admitted to have been involved in copying and transferring answers on grade 10 national examinations, doing home works and class works to each other. Furthermore, it was known that about 78.6% of the respondents perceive that academic cheating is justifiable where as 20% of them argued that cheating should be tolerated. Sadly, it was also identified that about 30% of the respondents believe that “cheating hurts no one”. Based on the conclusions drawn from the major findings, the following points are implied for consideration so as to curb the epidemic to the educational assessment system of the schools.

• Secondary school teachers should promote cooperative learning methods with due emphasis on both individual and collaborative practices among the students.
• Secondary schools should establish ant-academic cheating clubs and disseminate information against academic cheating through mini-media, written materials and posters in schools.
• School principals should continuously familiarize students with school rules and regulations which demote academic cheating behaviors. Beyond information provision about unethical nature of academic cheating, secondary schools should promote academic integrity and better self-esteem among the students so that what the students know and do corresponds.

**References**


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