

STUDENT AND STAFF VIEWS OF ACADEMIC INTEGRITY AND DISHONESTY: A CASE OF POLYTECHNIC OF NAMIBIA

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Abstract

Extensive research reveals that academic dishonesty remains a persistent challenge all over the world. Many institutions have tended to downplay the levels of this behaviour. In the Namibian higher education system there has been very little or no studies that deal with the question of academic dishonesty. Hence this paper reports on the prevalence of academic misconduct of students and compares student and staff perception of academic cheating and plagiarism at the Polytechnic of Namibia.. In general, perceptions of both students and staff is that academic dishonesty is relatively high (much higher than what is indicated by the disciplinary cases), the lowest level being at about 21% on the question "use of cheat sites for preparing assignments". Secondly, perceptions are higher on issues of plagiarism than cheating. In many instances, staff hold the view that misconduct occurs at higher frequency than perceived by students. While regulatory framework is important from an administrative point of view, it is not the solution as the culture of dishonesty seems widespread and well embedded. Strategies to overcome the problems rests with pedagogical approaches and a greater emphasis on competency based learning and assessment.

Keywords: Academic dishonesty, cheating, plagiarism, higher education, Africa

1. STUDY BACKGROUND

This paper deals with academic conduct of students in the assignments which form the major items of assessment that determine the students' final semester grades. The Polytechnic of Namibia, one of three major higher education institutions in Namibia has a well-defined policy dealing with student academic conduct, which has been in place for a number of years. The paper highlights the recent trends in relation to formal student misconduct cases resulting from academic dishonesty. Table 1 presents data for the period 2009-2013 showing two categories of cases that reached the disciplinary hearing stage. The first category is those cases relating to formal examination misconduct and comprises cases of cheating during examinations and the second category relates to non-examination based cases relating mainly to dishonesty in assignments or plagiarism in a mini-thesis, research proposals or research projects.

Table 1: Statistics on student misconduct cases resulting from academic dishonesty

Year	No of Exams	No. of Exam based cases of cheating	No. of non-Exam based cases
2009	67 064	24	2
2010	73 154	51	4
2011	76 200	105	26
2012	74 363	26	25
2013	77 758	28	3

The number of cases that reached formal disciplinary proceedings is low relative to the number of examinations, peaking in 2011 when the Polytechnic reviewed its strategies for conducting examinations to avoid the prospect of cheating. However, the number of non-examination based cases of cheating, plagiarising from various sources may not be indicative of the true extent of the problem, as many such cases are either not detected or never brought to the formal hearing stage.

Academic integrity can refer to a number of issues of lack of integrity and dishonesty and is generally comprised of two categories, namely cheating and plagiarism. Cheating occurs when a student obtains or attempts to obtain some advantage or extra marks by any dishonest or deceptive means. This can include lying; copying from another's test or examination; interacting with other students during assessments; taking any unauthorised material into an examination venue, paying others to do assignments; doing an assessment for others or letting someone sit an examination for him/her (Jordan, 2001, McCabe *et al.*, 2001, Northumbria University, 2013). On the other hand, plagiarism is the use of the ideas or work of others and claiming it as one's own by not acknowledging the source. Some examples of plagiarism include the submission of work, either in part or in whole completed by another; failure to give credit for ideas, statements, facts or conclusions which rightfully belong to another; failure to use quotation marks and identifying sources when quoting directly from another; use of another's project or programmes or part thereof without giving credit (Park, 2004, Packard, 2006, Ellery, 2008, Northumbria University, 2013).

The number of non-examination based cases of cheating, largely originating from copying someone else's work or plagiarising from various sources were in general much lower than those relating to formal examinations. Informal reports from staff indicate that non-examination based academic dishonesty is an increasing problem and monitoring this is time consuming. Therefore, there is a tendency to only formally pursue the most blatant cases. Through surveys of staff and students at the Polytechnic of Namibia, this study sourced their views with respect to the large number of integrity issues identified in the literature. The aim of the study is to provide a broader and deeper understanding of the challenge of academic integrity and thus enabling the institution to implement more effective measures to minimise academic dishonesty.

University administrators and faculty, in designing appropriate strategies to promote academic integrity can benefit from understanding the attitudes and perceptions of students towards cheating and plagiarism. In addition, the views and approaches utilised by faculty are critical to balancing the integrity equation, because students may be just one

part of a bigger problem. Therefore, this study investigates the attitudes, perceptions and practices of academic integrity from both student and staff perspective.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction

As the abundance of information and their access continues to increase so has the tendency to participate in acts of academic dishonesty either deliberately or accidentally, most academic institutions and course leaders have rules relating to integrity, to which students are expected to adhere and the violation of these would constitute academic dishonesty. Of course, within these categories various degrees and seriousness of violation can be committed, for instance in cases of plagiarism students can inadequately paraphrase, leave out references, copy small disjointed portions, or copy large passages. The prevalence of various forms of cheating at academic institutions has increased dramatically in the last 30 years (McCabe *et al.*, 2001). Over recent years there has been a large push in African countries to educate the masses and in Namibia there are three major and a number of smaller institutions providing programmes at degree and diploma levels. The tertiary institutions are the source of employees for the various public and professional sectors and are the training ground for future economic and social leadership of the country. Therefore, the notion of personal ethics and academic integrity are fundamental for the present generation in our educational institutions. This study attempts to understand the nature and extent of the problem of academic dishonesty so that appropriate steps can be taken to curb the problem.

Academic dishonesty is widely reported to be on the increase and this can be attributed to the easy access to an increasing volume of sources facilitated by the internet. Student reliance on internet based sources fosters a patchwork method of completing assigned work rather than interpretation, analysis and synthesis. This comes at the cost of deep learning and understanding. Internet use and material downloading behaviour has created a belief among many, both young and old, that the internet is a free source and no acknowledgement is required (Thompson, 2006, Reingold and Baratz, 2011, Babalola, 2012). To avoid the problems of academic dishonesty growing and becoming more widespread, there is a need to understand the myriad issues relating to cheating from the perspective of students. Wilkinson (2009) found significant divergence in the views of students and staff relating to various conduct concerning academic honesty, showing that problems may be greater than most academics believe. Power (2009) suggests that students appear to view plagiarism less seriously than academic staff, and that many students suffer from a profound misunderstanding of what constitutes academic dishonesty. This lack of understanding may be an important contributor to the problem (Song-Turner, 2008).

2.2 Difference in student and staff views

In a study of nursing students in Australia, Wilkinson (2009) found a significant difference between the number of staff (39%) and students (49%) who reported that cheating on assessment tasks was common. Furthermore, 55% of staff indicated confidence in being able to detect plagiarism in student work. In this study students identified the most common forms of cheating to be "copying a few paragraphs from a source without citing" and "working with another student on work that is meant to be individual". However, "downloading the whole essay from the internet" or "cheating in exams" were identified as

the least common (Wilkinson, 2009). In a study of student attitudes towards plagiarism at University College Northampton, Pickard (2006) found significant disparity between staff and student views in that 86% of students estimated that activities such as submitting work as individual when it was done with another student or allowing your work to be copied, never happens. On the other hand, 27% of staff reported that this happens sometimes. Seventy-two percent of staff had detected cases of plagiarism in the previous year. Staff were unable to deal with cases of plagiarism when they are not able to identify the source. There are a number of studies that suggest that academic staff view cheating more seriously than students (Sim, 1995; Koljatic and Silva, 2002). In a study involving over 1000 staff members across 21 college campuses, McCabe (1992) reports that more than 30% of staff did not actively pursue cheating despite being aware that it was happening in their classes. This may be because cyber cheating is not that easy to trace, requiring time and effort, in addition to tech-savviness. Internet provides such a bounty of sources so quickly for students, making tracking for staff without appropriate software a never-ending challenge.

Kwong *et al.* (2010) report 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. There is no consensus between faculty members and students on perceptions, definitions and seriousness of plagiarism and collusion. The consequences of misconduct are also unclear as faculty members rarely report cases to the university. The literature suggests that academics find officially dealing with academic dishonesty to be unpleasant and difficult largely because the institutional processes are time-consuming and cumbersome (Elander *et al.*, 2010).

Some authors have suggested that there may be a link between teacher credibility and student academic dishonesty. Anderman *et al.* (2010) found that when students perceive their teachers to be credible (knowledgeable, honest and caring) they are less likely to report cheating. This is because students may perceive that what they are being taught is of value and they learn the material more effectively and feel less need to cheat (Banfield *et al.*, 2006). Others contend that this occurs because students form a higher degree of respect and stronger relationship with the teacher, who they perceive as credible, resulting in greater engagement in the learning process and it is this that deters them from acting dishonestly (Pogue and Ah-Yun 2006; Murdock *et al.*, 2001).

Student lack of understanding of what constitutes plagiarism has been cited by many authors as a cause of academic misconduct (Power 2009, Ramzan *et al.*, 2012, Ryan *et al.*, 2009, Song-Turner, 2008). Consequently, many authors suggest more concerted training, especially interventions carefully built into the entire curriculum (Hall 2006). Holt (2012) in a study of STEM students over four semesters, found that training and interaction contributed to positive student outcomes, in that at the end of the semester, students trained to avoid plagiarism were able to differentiate poor paraphrases, improper attribution and failure to insert quotation marks. "The plagiarism training administered in this study helped to demystify the gray area of plagiarism in which students struggle most" (Holt, 2012, p.589). Many academics assume that students have mastered these skills in their secondary school years (Emerson *et al.*, 2005).

In a study of Swedish students and teachers Razera *et al.* (2005) found that training to understand and avoid plagiarism was required and the most effective way to overcome the

divergence in staff and student views on some aspects of academic misconduct is communication (Braun *et al.*, 2005).

2.3 Student beliefs and views

Generally the magnitude of the problem of academic dishonesty is difficult to assess, because of obstacles in gathering reliable data. The questionnaire based survey is the easiest way to collect the maximum amount of data in a cost effective manner. A study about cheating at the University of North Carolina (UNC) at Chapel Hill addressed whether "academic cheating in college courses is an acceptable behaviour under certain circumstances." In this study about 89% of college freshmen at UNC believed that academic cheating is never justifiable (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1994). However this finding was not confirmed by a study of 31 campuses around the US (McCabe and Trevino, 1993). This study showed that two-thirds of the college students surveyed admitted to some form of academic dishonesty (including allowing other students to get away with cheating). Furthermore, 53% of students attending schools without codes of academic practice and 29% of students at institutions with clear codes of practice reported having cheated on tests (McCabe and Trevino, 1993). A later study at UNC found that nearly 90% of both males and females had been academically dishonest in some way (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1996).

Interestingly, there may be some deep seated underlying situations that may compel students to cheat. What effect does economic inequality have on academic integrity? Using data from search-engine queries made between 2003 and 2011 on Google and state-level measures of income inequality and generalised trust, Neville (2012) found that academically dishonest searches such as queries seeking term-papers and help with cheating, were more likely to come from States with higher income inequality and lower levels of generalised trust. In situations where higher economic inequality prevailed, people are less likely to view one another as trustworthy. This resulted in a greater prevalence of academic dishonesty. Therefore, if students do not trust each other, some of them might think they have to cheat to keep up with their unscrupulous classmates. Other research has shown that this kind of distrust is more likely to be found in places with high income inequality (Neville, 2012).

Many students in emerging nations struggle with the demands of academic discourse for various reasons, among them are their disadvantaged backgrounds, difficulties in comprehending academic literary practices and myriad issues related to mother tongue and language (de Jager and Brown, 2010). In such circumstances students may be characterised as "disenfranchised and voiceless" and in the use of patchwork construction, students are not being dishonest (Hall, 2006). When the mother tongue is different from the language in which one is writing there is a greater vulnerability to plagiarism (Bennett, 2005). Angelil-Carter (2002) contends that plagiarism may be a manifestation of more complex learning issues facing students related to language discourse and English being the second or even third language. Non English speakers may engage in copying because of cultural attitudes about ownership of sources so readily accessible online, challenges faced with understanding texts and expressing themselves as well as educational approaches that encourage copying as a way of mastering a subject. In such a cultural context and the style of education the whole concept of plagiarism can be confusing for learners (Amsberry, 2009). The expression of complex ideas and concepts into one's own words is a skill that needs to be persistently taught and re-taught. Merely

laying down punitive rules of conduct and expecting students to adhere to this leaves a significant gap in the academic learning process.

There is some debate in the literature about the student approach using patchwriting (Howard 1999) and whether this strictly constitutes cheating or merely a failure to project oneself due to lack of appropriate skills. Howard (1999) sees this as a learning process rather than cheating. For untrained students some of what may normally be classed as plagiarism may in fact be accidental or inadvertent (Park, 2003). Hall (2006, p.6) suggests that "all discipline-specific writing courses cannot be taught on the same level, and so a hierarchy of expectations must be described, regarding student preparation in critical thinking, reading, writing, and research". This will require a well coordinated approach as faculty provides guidance in their disciplines, prepare students regarding what is required and produce appropriate assignments for students with various levels of preparation and experience in writing in the discipline. Hayes and Inrona (2005) found that in their research process students take notes as they conduct their research, often identifying the relevant passages and writing these down exactly as they appear in the source and later when completing the assignment would unintentionally include such passages. Their view is that the ideas are already stated perfectly. In some educational systems, analysis and synthesis is regarded as secondary as the primary emphasis is on facts, resulting in memorisation of teaching material. The teaching approaches in some cultures place the highest value on the learning material given to them by teachers. Authorship is deemed less important as "information is considered to be owned by the whole society" (Mundava and Chaudhuri, 2007, p.171).

According to Bennett (2005), student plagiarism is based on three main factors: attitude, comprising ethics, fear of punishment and fear of being caught; personality, which includes goal orientation and academic integrity; and situational factors such as grade achievement and staff approach to plagiarism. Ellery (2008) concludes that plagiarism is linked to attitudes, values and beliefs, and that if one is serious about improving writing skills and preventing academic dishonesty, one needs to acknowledge that this has to be treated as a step-by-step process in the learning curriculum. University students are increasingly less likely to plagiarise as they get closer to graduation (Sims, 1995) because they have had more practice in writing with sources and that they have been educated about issues relating to academic dishonesty over time. Becoming a participant in the academic discourse is a progressive, often slow process and merely stating rules at the start of each semester is a simplistic approach to a complex problem (Deckert, 1993). Ellery (2008) recommends that the first year may be too early for drastic punitive measures, rather at this stage using pedagogical processes may be more appropriate.

Volpe *et al.* (2008) using factor analysis on a large dataset identified three underlying themes relating to academic integrity: dishonest acts, poor referencing, and group work, providing a broader overview of student understanding of plagiarism. Students considered cheating related to group work to be far less serious than other types. Some students believe that it is alright to copy so long as you understand the text and it is pointless rewriting passages already written so perfectly (Fawley, 2007). The most serious acts of academic misconduct includes plagiarising an assignment, taking an examination for someone else and copying from a fellow student in an examination while the less serious included failing to contribute equally to group work and submitting the same paper for credit in more than one class (Graham *et al.*, 1994; Sims, 1995; Johns and Strand, 2000).

3 THE STUDY

This study investigates the views of both staff and students at the Polytechnic of Namibia with respect to the large number of integrity issues identified in the literature. A survey methodology was used to collect data from 82 staff members and 443 students from various discipline areas. Participation was voluntary. Data gather from students required them to address a series of questions relating to the prevalence of cheating in various forms, based on their experiences. There were a limited number of questions which required the respondents to report on their own behaviour and it was explained to them that apart from these few questions the survey should be responded to, based on what they know. First semester new students were excluded from the survey as they would have had limited experience of the problem. In addition a similar survey was undertaken by staff to gauge the extent of the dishonesty problem from their point of view.

4. FINDINGS

4.1 Profile of students involved in disciplinary cases

Further analysis of data on examination based disciplinary cases provided the student profile shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Profile of students subjected to disciplinary process for academic dishonesty

Number of years student enrolled at the institution	Percentage of students that were disciplined (%)	Academic performance of the students
1	8.7	*Fair (1) ; *good (1)
2 - 3	43.4	*Poor (6); fair (2); good (2)
4 and over	47.8	Poor (7); fair (2); good (2)

*Good performance means students passing 70% and more of their courses; fair performance means passing 50-70% of the courses; and poor performance is passing only below 50% of the courses.

Of the students who were disciplined for academic dishonesty the highest percentage (47.8%) were those who had already been registered with the institution for at least 4 years, while those who were registered for the first time were the lowest (8.7%). Since most of the programme offerings of the institution are certificates, diplomas and bachelor degrees which take up to 3 years to complete, the majority of the students disciplined are those who have failed to complete their qualifications on prescribed time. Assessment of academic performance of the disciplined students revealed that 56.7% of these students had poor academic performance.

4.2 Profile of student participants in the survey

A summary of student survey respondent profile is presented in Table 3, indicating the total size of the study body at the Polytechnic. The student survey sample included 58% females and 42% males. Business students comprised 65% of the sample, Engineering, Health and Applied Sciences comprised 27% and Humanities 8%. The majority of students did not live on campus (92%).

Table 3: Respondent profile

Respondent profile	
Student population (FTE)	9800
Sample size (n)	443
Females	58%
Males	42%
On-campus respondents	92%
Business students	65%
Science students	27%
Humanities students	8%

4.3 Self-reported behaviour

The students responded to seven questions in the survey about participation in cheating behaviour. These responses are shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Self-reported participation in dishonest behaviour

Have you ever participated in any of the following (N= 423)	% YES	% NO
Ever been warned or penalised for academic dishonesty	10.0	90.0
Been involved in academic dishonesty in the previous 12 months	12.3	87.7
Copying most of the assignment from some source	33.8	66.2
Cheating in tests run during the semester	10.2	89.8
Lent your assignment to friend to copy from	50.1	49.9
Working with another student when assignment is individual work	64.5	35.5
Copying a few sentences from book, article or web without citing	66.4	33.6

Based on self reporting, 10% of the respondents reported that they had previously been warned or penalised for academic dishonesty and 12.3% admitted that they had participated in academic dishonesty in the previous twelve months.

Cheating in tests, which are normally in a formal setting, was 10.2%, which is consistent with other studies. The lending of a completed assignment to a friend to copy from, which is a serious academic integrity issue, was common at over 50%. In case of the last two items in Table 4 over two thirds of the students participated in working together with others when assignment was individual and also copying a few sentences from books, articles or web without citing. In the case of working with another student when an assignment is individual, which is commonly encountered (64.5% in this study), some literature reports that this may not be strictly “cheating” but more related to the way students learn through interaction and discussion amongst themselves. Similarly, failure to cite sources is relatively high. In a similar study in Malaysia, it was reported that 37% had “cheated sometimes” (Saidin and Isa, 2013). Also, sharing of work with other students is reported to be common (62%), (Naghdipour and Emeagwali, 2013).

4.4 Prevalence of dishonest behaviour

When asked about their perception of the prevalence of certain dishonest activities, students reported that “copying another student’s assignment in whole or in part was common” (38.2%); as was “copying most of the assignment from another source” (38.6%). “Handing in of work done by students in previous semesters” was reported to occur sometimes (14%) and encountered frequently (16%). There are often fliers placed on campus notice boards offering to do student projects and assignments. Forty-seven percent of respondents report that “paying someone to write assignments” is sometimes or

frequently encountered. The culture of copying and general academic dishonesty was reported to be prevalent and 66% of students believed that “most students copy from one place or another”. In addition, 44% of respondents believed that “all information belongs to everyone to use” and 35% believed that “some plagiarism should be allowed”.

4.5 Student’s own experience and perception of some academic misconduct

While 10.3% of students admitted that they themselves had participated in some form of academic misconduct in the previous 12 months, their perception was that the practice was much more widespread at 26%. Lending assignments was reported to be common as about half the respondents had participated in this and their perception was that this is common behaviour. Students’ own experience and their perception of working with others on individual assignments and not citing small passages, seems to occur in approximately 60% to 65% of cases. Students report that copying assignments from other sources was also common at 60%, however, only 33.6% report that they had themselves participated in this form of misconduct.

Table 5: Experience and perception of some academic misconduct

Type of misconduct	Student’s own experience (%)	Student perception (%)
Participation in academic dishonesty in the last 12 months	10.3	26.0
Lending assignments to or making use of assignment of friends to copy	49.9	53.1
Copying assignments from other sources	33.6	59.9
Working with other student when an assignment is supposed to be individual work	64.2	63.7
Copying a few sentences from books, articles or web site without citing	65.9	60.7

4.6 Perceptions of students and staff on cheating

This study supports the finding of similar research that there is a divergence between student and staff perceptions on the prevalence of cheating at the institution, as shown in Figure 1. Staff perception was that academic dishonesty amongst students was about five times higher than what students themselves claim to have encountered. The incidence of “cheating in tests” was perceived to be occurring by 43% of staff as opposed to 26% of students. Sixty two per cent of staff had experienced “students turning up at the last minute with an excellent piece of work which they suspected the student did not do himself” and 56 per cent experienced students “handing in research reports without showing evidence of data collection”. Students’ belief was that “inventing references and bibliography” was more prevalent (48%) than staff (38%).

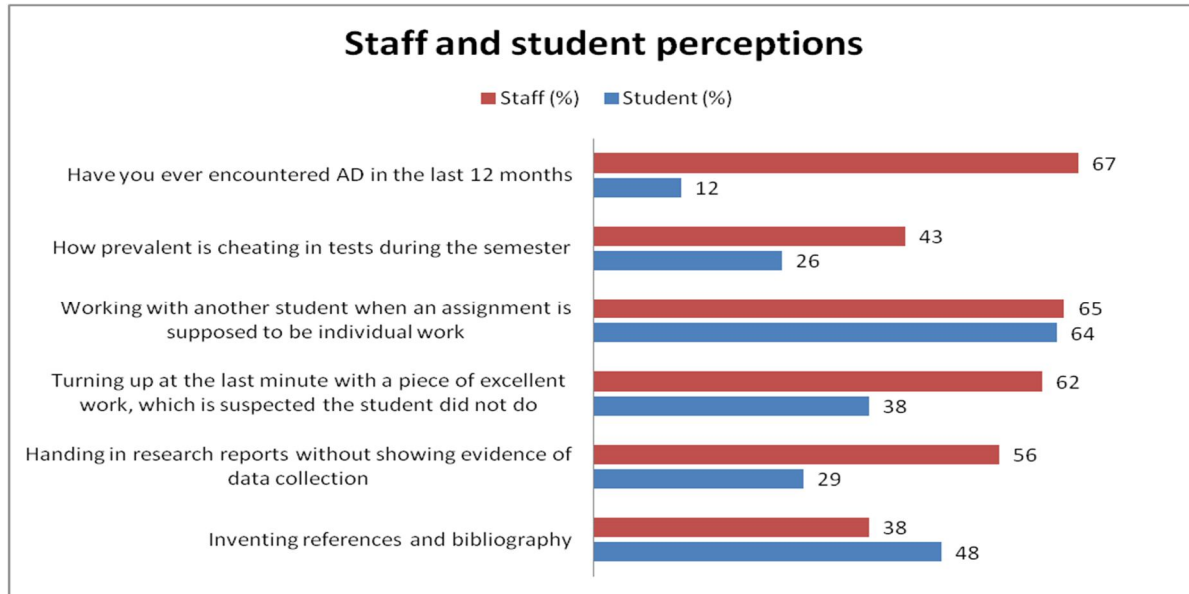


Figure 1: Comparison of staff and student perceptions on cheating

4.7 Perceptions of students and staff on plagiarism

The prevalence of “copying a few sentences from a book, article or website without citing” is reported to be extremely high, with 61% of students and 85% of staff revealing that this is common behaviour (Figure 2). This is also the case with “copying large chunks” from others work without acknowledging the source common practice as seen by staff (75%) as well the perception of students (50%). Students report that “paying someone to write their assignment” is common (47%), while staff knowledge of this was low (22%) compared with what students seem to know about this.

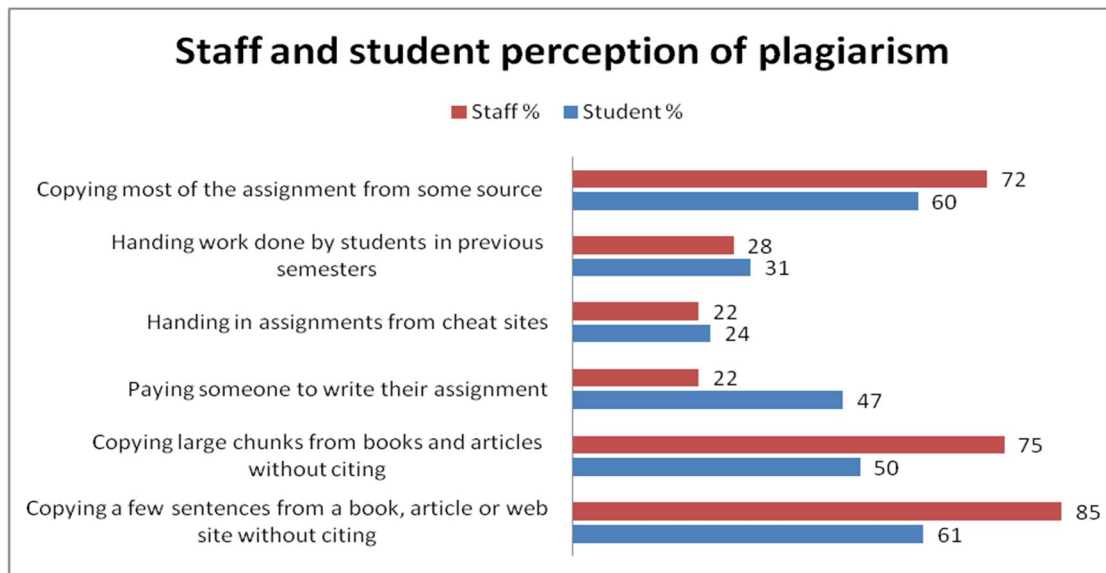


Figure 2: Comparison of student and staff perception on plagiarism

In the case of “handing in assignments from cheat sites “ and “handing in work done by students in previous semesters” there was a smaller degree of divergence in student and staff perception, but on both issues students reported higher incidence of these than staff.

In the case of “paying someone to write their assignment” the student perception of 47% was more than double that of staff (22%). Sixty per cent of students and 72% of staff report that the incidence of “copying most of the assignment from some source” is prevalent in the institution.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Many institutions of higher learning in their vision, mission or strategic plans commit themselves to striving for excellence in their core business and this is dependent on the framework of excellence they set for themselves as well as on the perception of student experience. According to the ENQA Report (2014) the framework of excellence provides a platform to drive quality improvement and hence the latter leads to excellence, good reputation and standing of an institution. It is therefore not surprising that institutions will guard against any threat that seeks to undermine student experience or its reputation. Unfortunately, student academic dishonesty which, as indicated by a plethora of studies (McCabe *et al.*, 2001, Koljatic and Silva, 2002, Hayes and Introna, 2005, Wilkinson, 2009, Witherspoon *et al.*, 2012), is proliferating rapidly is but one such threat and hence institutions are finding ways to mitigate this threat.

The study is the first of its type to cover comprehensively issues of cheating and plagiarism in the Namibian context and reveals that academic dishonesty is an increasingly serious problem for the institution and has implications for the future of the country. A preliminary report of the of the institution investigating academic dishonesty and corruption (Unpublished Report, 2011) had found that students were engaging in various practices of academic misconduct ranging from students doing assignments for each other at a cost, using external agents to do their assignments , selling technical assignments that are done from year to year to cheating in tests. However, the current study attempts to get a deeper understanding of these practices from both staff and student perspective. This is of paramount importance given that good governance is critical for national development and academic integrity provides the foundations for good management and decision making. “Cheating does not end at graduation. For example, resume fraud is a serious issue for employers concerned about the level of integrity of new employees” (ETS, 1999). According to McCabe *et al.* (2001), students who adhere to high moral and ethical standards are less likely to commit ethical violations in the workplace.

Evidence from the disciplinary cases held indicate that fewer students (8.7%) are get involved in academic dishonesty in the first year of their study, however the number increases substantially the longer they are enrolled in the institution and also if their academic performance is poor and they are not able to complete their qualifications in record time. There are many possible explanations for this phenomenon. Whilst one cannot discount the culture of academic cheating and plagiarism stemming from the school system, however, what this study confirms is the pervasiveness of academic dishonesty at the tertiary level. This may be a manifesting of learning approaches used in the secondary school system where there is an absence of “deeper learning” and comprehension and an over emphasis on “recall and repetition” of learnt material. When students with such an educational background enter the tertiary level they are unable assimilate various components of learning to create own thoughts, ideas and opinions. Subject areas are treated as discrete and mutually exclusive such that linking of ideas from diverse sources to create new ideas is missing from their educational backgrounds. The lower academic misconduct in the first year might be arising from the fact that these students in the first

year are grappling with adjusting to a new academic environment and only in their second and third years of enrolment that they begin to experiment with alternative coping mechanisms, particularly if academically they are not performing well.

An important observation in this study was that the number of examination based disciplinary cases of students was higher than that of non-examination (assignment) based cases. However, on the contrary perception studies of both students and staff reflect that the occurrence of plagiarism seems to be much higher than cheating. It will be particularly important to investigate and get a better understanding of what regulatory or academic or other basis might be the reason for this apparent differentiated official reporting of cheating and plagiarism.

In line with other studies on perceptions of staff and students on academic dishonesty (Koljatic and Silva, 2002, Wilkinson, 2009), findings in this study indicate differences in these two groups. The perception of staff on many of the issues relating to both cheating and plagiarism was that their occurrence was higher compared to what students reported; and this notwithstanding the overall frequency observed by both staff and students was relatively high ranging from about 22 to 86%. Similar observations were made by Saidin and Isa (2013) and Naghdipour and Emeagwali (2013) when they reported respective frequencies of 37% and 62% for cheating sometimes and for sharing work with other students. The only exception in this study concerned “encountering academic dishonesty in the last 12 months” where the students put prevalence at 12% in contrast to 67% reported by staff. In general academic dishonesty was relatively higher on matters relating to plagiarism compared to cheating.

The implications from the extent of the problem may be more serious than first appears. The academic institutions alone may not be able to address this problem and will need to develop strategies to minimise, if not overcome, the practice of academic dishonesty. The kneejerk reaction to the findings of this study may be to put in place stricter rules and policies, but this is unlikely to reduce the problem. There are already such rules and despite their existence the student self-reported experience and practice of academic dishonesty appears to be flourishing. Therefore, alternative strategies must be considered. One of the first areas to address should be a serious review of first year teaching practice which needs to move away from “content focused” teaching and learning to “analysis and synthesis”. The study shows that those students carrying a heavier semester load are more likely to participate in academic dishonesty, so there may be a direct link between the two. Reducing student loads should be considered, in addition to the clear identification of learning objectives and outcomes of each subject area. In other words, there needs to be a review of curriculum with a shift from content to competencies. If such a paradigm shift is to occur, it will require the re-educating of teaching staff to move focus from content based curriculum to competency based student outcomes, with an emphasis on deeper learning rather than content recall. Students copy and plagiarise because the teaching and assessment approaches tend to facilitate such behaviour, so to reduce such behaviour the shifting of student centred approaches to teacher centred solutions may give better outcomes. Jordan (2001) reports that learning oriented students are unlikely to copy in comparison with performance oriented students. As an institution we must ask not how we can change students’ attitudes, behaviours and practices, but how we can re-orient our teaching and assessment styles and approaches so it reduces reliance on reproducing existing sources. Studies indicate that students are more likely to engage in cheating when there is a lack of clarity in a lesson, poor explanation of what is

required, a perceived lack of relevance and too many tests and assessments close together putting workload pressure on students (Lathrop and Foss, 2005). In addition, overly harsh grading, unfair tests designed to fail students, and unreasonable workload are reasons for academic dishonesty (Whitley and Keith-Spiegel, 2008).

Regarding plagiarism a strong case for active education of students is made by Choo and Paull (2013, p.1) who state, "exhorting students not to plagiarise and appealing to their moral compass are not sufficient to reduce the frequency of plagiarism and neither enough to change their attitude. Instead active education required to lead to a situation whereby students are taught in practical ways skills of what is expected then when submitting academic writing." In conclusion, Clegg and Flint (2006) points to the fact that it is critical that there is shared understanding of academic integrity and values between staff and students in order to develop interventions that would help minimise academic misconduct. Therefore, it is only when there is collective responsibility on the part of management, staff and students that we will be able to reduce academic dishonesty.

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