FACTORS LEADING STUDENTS TO ACADEMIC DISHONESTY ON THE UNIVERSITY LEVEL IN PAKISTAN

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ABSTRACT

This research aimed to investigate the reasons behind academic dishonesty among postgraduate students at the University of Agriculture Faisalabad in Pakistan. A total of 105 students were randomly selected from the Faculty of Social Sciences for this study. Data was collected using a reliable and validated questionnaire, and the analysis was carried out using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The results of the study revealed several factors contributing to learning difficulties, which in turn led to academic dishonesty. These factors included the fear of failure, lack of interest in studies, lower retention ability, difficulty speaking and writing English, fear of teachers, and language barriers. Personal factors like time management, daydreaming, laziness, parental pressure, low motivation from family, financial problems, and lower work morale had impacts on students. Behavioural factors such as deviation from targets, habits of sadness, careless behaviour, unethical behaviour, excessive anger, abuse and addiction, considering work or study as a burden and irrelevant teaching methodologies contributed to academic dishonesty. Teaching and social factors such as lack of teaching skills, communication barriers, overloading students with subject matter, sense of competition, social rejection and social injustice were also influential. This study suggested implementing strict and corrective measures, including raising awareness among teachers, students, and institutions to address and overcome academic dishonesty.

INTRODUCTION

Dishonesty refers to engaging in deceit and fraud for personal gratification. It has negative consequences on emotional regulation, empathy, effective communication, healthy social interactions, and social independence. In the realm of education, many students resort to academic deception, which may provide temporary benefits but can lead to disastrous outcomes in the long run (von Jena, 20203). Park (2003) investigated various situations that motivate students to cheat, such as collaborating with peers for mutual gains and engaging in practices, both at the undergraduate and post-graduate levels, where they present others' work as their own without proper acknowledgement of the sources. Academic dishonesty has been a persistent issue in higher education over the years. Misconduct among students at the graduate and undergraduate levels poses a serious problem for both the education and business sectors, especially when such dishonest practices extend into their professional lives (Nazir & Aslam, 2010).

The primary forms of academic dishonesty include cheating, bullying, submitting duplicate work, falsifying information, seeking unauthorized help during exams, academic misconduct, and lack of genuine interest in the subject (Bylieva et al., 2020). While these actions may lead to improved grades in the short term, they often result in significant challenges in practical life as students lack a solid grasp of the subjects they were dishonest about. The underlying causes of academic dishonesty can be related to factors that generally impact people's educational and economic status (Cazan & Icob, 2017). Academic dishonesty represents an unhealthy and unlawful educational practice used primarily to achieve high marks or pass exams. However, it undermines the principles of fairness and compassion within society. Although such misconduct may temporarily boost students' grades, it ultimately leads to moral failures in various aspects of their lives (Bailey, 1995).

Academic dishonesty has emerged as a significant problem in higher education institutions in Pakistan, and its prevalence is on the rise (Nazir and Aslam, 2010). It is crucial to address this issue and discourage students from engaging in deceptive practices as it impacts the country's reputation. This study aims to analyze the factors contributing to unethical behaviour among students, which encourages academic dishonesty, ultimately affecting their academic performance not only in the short term but throughout their educational journey. The research also seeks to investigate the frequency of academic dishonesty among students and its detrimental effects on society.

Students resort to cheating and plagiarism using various acceptable-sounding excuses, such as seeking help from peers during exams, collaborating with others on assignments, or relying on the Internet for assistance (Amjad & Arif, 2014). Educational institutions have the objective of providing quality education that equips graduates to be competitive and successful. Examinations and tests serve as assessments to gauge students' knowledge, information, and skills acquired during their studies. The results of these assessments determine whether a student should pass the subject in question. However, academic dishonesty undermines the validity of these results, distorting the evaluation process. Any form of cheating is considered a serious breach of expected student behaviour and may lead to disciplinary action (Shu et al., 2011).

METHODOLOGY

The main purpose of this study is to identify the factors that influence academic dishonesty among graduate students at a specific university. There is a total of 10 publicly recognized universities in Faisalabad, and for this research, the University of Agriculture Faisalabad was chosen purposively. Among the University's 7 faculties, the Faculty of Social Sciences was purposively selected. From this faculty, the Institute of Agriculture Extension, Education, and Rural Development was randomly chosen as the focus of the research.

The entire population for the study consisted of all students enrolled in the 2nd semester of M.Phil. Education at the selected institute. This population comprised 144 students, with 124 students in Section A and 20 students in Section B of M.Phil. Education 2nd semester. The sample size of 105 respondents was determined using a proportional sampling technique, and participants were selected through simple random sampling. The sample size included 90 students from Section A and 15 students from Section B of M.Phil. Education 2nd semester, chosen with a confidence interval of 5% and a confidence level of 95%. The detailed methodology is presented in Figure 1.

The formula used for the proportionate sampling is given as follows;

$$n = \frac{sample\ size}{Population\ size} X\ stratum\ size$$

Using this formula for section A, the sample drawn is as follows;

$$n = \frac{105}{144} X\ 124 = 90$$

Using this formula for section B, the sample drawn is as follows;

$$n = \frac{105}{144} X \, 20 = 15$$

Data for the study was collected through a questionnaire designed to align with the research objectives. The collected data were then analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS).
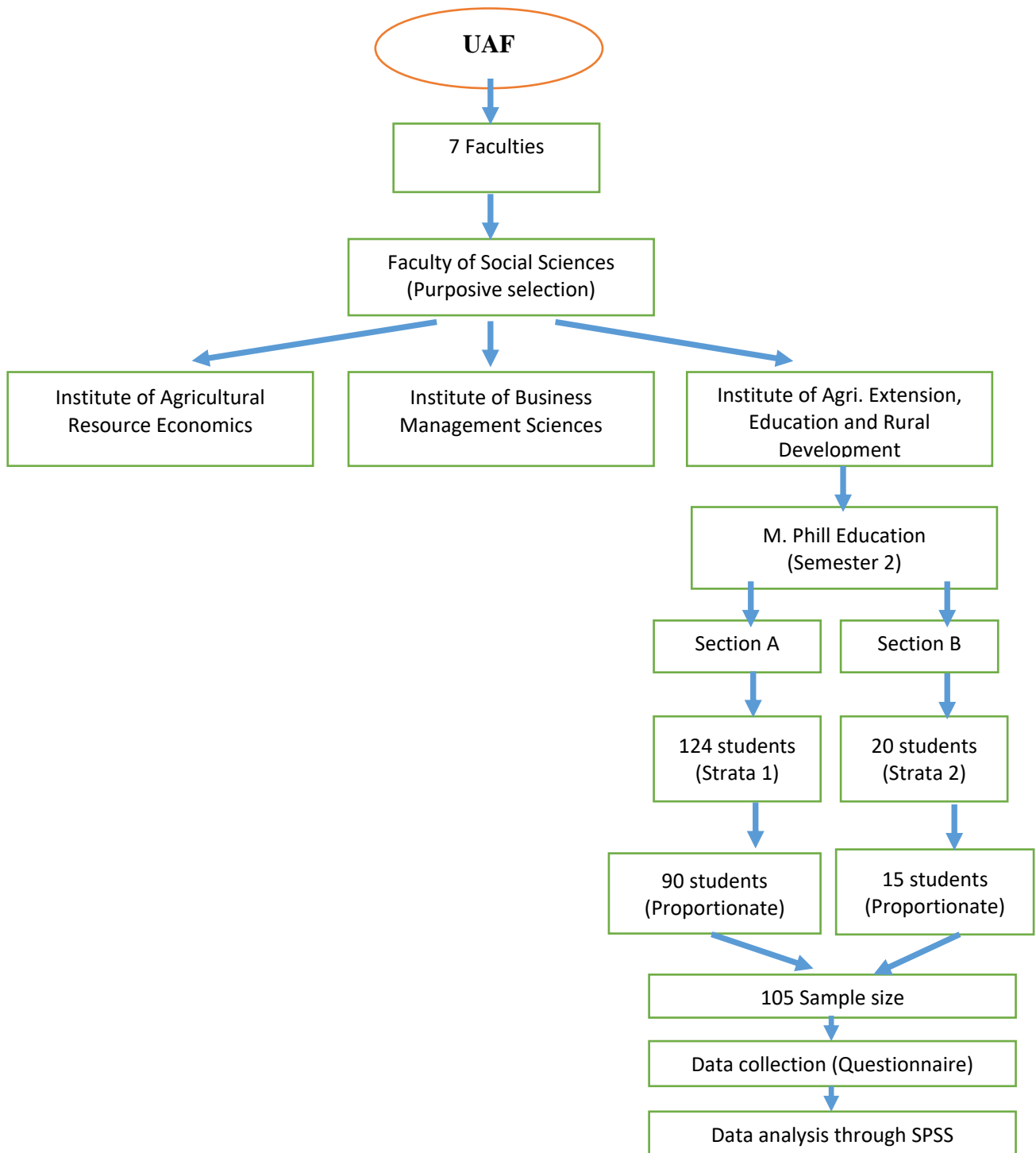

Figure 1. Sampling strategy.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section elaborates on the perception of respondents about different factors regarding learning difficulties, including personal, teaching, behavioural, and social factors that lead the students towards academic dishonesty. A five-point Likert scale (1= Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Undecided, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly Agree) was used to record perception, whereas results were reported based on mean values. Data in this regard are given in the following tables.

Learning Difficulties

Table 1 presents the respondents' perceptions regarding factors that encourage them to engage in academic dishonesty related to learning difficulties. The first prominent factor in learning difficulties is the fear of failure," which obtained a mean value of 4.44 on the scale used, indicating that respondents mostly leaned towards strongly agreeing with this factor. Lower retention ability" was ranked second, with a mean value of 4.30, falling between agreement and strongly agreeing, leaning more towards strongly agreeing. The third factor, lack of interest in studies, ranked with a mean value of 3.38, indicating respondents were between undecided and agreeing, tending towards agreement. Writing difficulty in English" ranked fourth, with a mean value of 3.30, lying between undecided and agreeing but tending towards agreement.

Table 1. Perceptions of respondents regarding learning difficulties lead them towards academic dishonesty.

Learning difficulties	Mean	Std. Deviation	R. O
Fear of failure	4.44	1.145	1
Lower retention ability	4.30	1.013	2
Lack of interest in studies	3.38	1.146	3
Writing difficulty in English	3.30	1.110	4
Fear of teacher	3.28	1.149	5
Language barrier	3.14	1.196	6
Difficulty in speaking English	2.37	1.145	7

Fear of teacher was ranked fifth, with a mean value of 3.28, lying between undecided and agreeing but leaning towards agreement. The main factor influencing learning difficulties appears to be the fear of failure. Students seem to be worried about how they will be perceived in society and the impact on their status, reputation, and academic life if they fail in their courses. Similar findings were reported by Orok et al. (2023), where around 77% of students were driven towards academic dishonesty due to the fear of failure. Another significant factor leading students towards academic dishonesty is the lack of interest in studies (Jatmika et al., 2022; Yang et al., 2013). Some students are preoccupied with other activities, such as political affairs or engaging in negative behaviour, leaving them with little time or interest in their studies. As a result, they may resort to alternative ways to pass exams or complete assignments. Language barrier ranked sixth, with a mean value of 3.14, lying between undecided and agreeing but leaning towards agreement. Studies such as Klocko (2014) and Hensley et al. (2013) have reported that language barriers have negative impacts on students. The results were contrary to those of Ives et al. (2017), who did not predict negative impacts on students. Difficulty in speaking English ranked seventh, with a mean value of 2.37, falling between disagree and undecided but leaning towards undecided.

Personal Factors

Table 2 displays the students' perceptions regarding personal factors that contribute to academic dishonesty. Difficulty in time management" ranked first with a mean value of 3.71, lying between undecided and agreeing but inclined towards agreement. The second-ranked significant factor is a financial problem with a mean value of 3.68, falling between undecided and agreeing but leaning towards agreement. "Daydreaming" ranks third with a mean value of 3.41, falling between undecided and agreeing but tending towards agreement. Laziness ranked fourth with a mean value of 3.40, lying between undecided and agreeing but tending towards agreement. Lower work morale was ranked fifth with a mean value of 3.38,

also falling between undecided and agreeing but leaning towards agreement. Low motivation from family" ranks sixth with a mean value of 3.39, lying between undecided and agreeing but tending towards agreement. Parental pressure was ranked seventh with a mean value of 3.29, falling between undecided and agreeing but leaning towards agreement. Results are endorsed by Akbulut et al. (2008), who highlighted the role of internet facilities in spreading academic dishonesty among students, including plagiarism, collusion, and unauthorized assistance. They analyzed both individual and situational factors contributing to dishonesty, such as individual characteristics, institutional politics, and peer pressure. Among the personal factors, "financial problems" received the highest value. Students coming from diverse backgrounds face numerous personal challenges, with financial issues being a significant problem. Many students juggle part-time jobs to support their education financially. As a result, they struggle to focus on their studies and may resort to fraudulent activities like academic dishonesty to achieve higher marks. This behaviour has long-lasting negative effects on students' academic and professional lives, as highlighted by Zahra (2021). Moreover, Macaulay's (2015) findings indicated that socioeconomic status, academic pressure, and job pressure were leading factors driving students towards academic dishonesty. While socioeconomic status did not directly influence cheating, academic and job pressures were linked to higher rates of academic dishonesty. This suggests that when students take on part-time jobs to meet their financial needs, they experience academic and job-related stress, which can lead them to engage in academic dishonesty.

Table 2. Perceptions of respondents regarding personal factors which lead them towards academic dishonesty.

Personal factors	Mean	Std. Deviation	R. O
Difficulty in time management	3.71	1.035	1
Financial problem	3.68	1.058	2
Day dreaming	3.41	1.191	3
Laziness	3.40	1.115	4
Lower work morale	3.38	1.155	5
Low motivation from family	3.39	1.188	6
Parental pressure	3.29	1.100	7

Behavioural Factors

The data presented in Table 3 illustrates the behavioural factors of the respondents that contribute to academic dishonesty. "Deviation from targets" obtained the 1st ranking with a mean value of 3.723, falling between undecided and agreeing but more inclined towards agreement. The 2nd ranked factor was the "habit of sadness," with a mean value of 3.647, rated between undecided and agreeing but leaning more towards agreement. The respondents' "Careless behavior" received the 3rd ranking with a mean value of 3.600, rated between undecided and agreeing but more inclined towards agreement. "Unethical anger" ranked 5th with a mean value of 3.542, lying between undecided and agreeing but tending more towards agreement. "Exhausting anger" ranked 5th with a mean value of 3.495, rated between undecided and agreeing but tending more towards agreement. "Abuse and addiction" obtained the 6th ranking with a mean value of 3.419, rated between undecided and agreeing but tended towards agreement. The 7th ranking went to "work or study is a burden" with a mean value of 3.142, rated between undecided and agreeing but inclined towards agreement. These results are consistent with Razek's (2014) findings, where factors such as performance pressure, peer pressure, and lack of faculty enforcement were identified as contributors to student misconduct, leading to the prevalence of academic dishonesty among students. Furthermore, the study revealed a disparity between students' moral behaviour, as they may accept academic dishonesty as a practice while simultaneously denouncing it against their cultural, religious, and ethical beliefs.

Table 3. Perceptions of respondents regarding behavioral factors role in academic dishonesty.

Behavioral factors	Mean	Std. Deviation	R. O
Deviation or targets	3.723	0.837	1.
Habit of sadness	3.647	1.065	2.
Careless behavior	3.600	1.140	3.
Unethically behavior	3.542	1.160	4.
Exhausting anger	3.495	1.161	5
Abuse and addiction	3.419	1.090	6
Work or study is a burden	3.142	1.078	7

Teaching Factors

Table 4 presents the respondents' viewpoints on teaching factors that contribute to academic dishonesty. The highest-ranking factor is "irrelevant teaching methodologies," with a mean value of 3.88, rated between undecided and agreeing but strongly leaning towards agreement. The second-ranking factor is "lack of teaching skills," with a mean value of 3.84, rated between undecided and agreeing but leaning more towards agreement. "Communication barrier" is ranked third, with a mean value of 3.80, rated between undecided and agreeing but more inclined towards agreement. "Shortage of classroom facility" is ranked fourth, with a mean value of 3.78, rated as undecided and agreeing but more tending towards agreement. "Failure to create an effective environment" ranks fifth, with a mean value of 3.76, rated between undecided and agreeing but tending towards agreement. "Less command of the subject" is ranked sixth, with a mean value of 3.74, rated between undecided and agreeing but leaning towards agreement. "Loaded classrooms" also rank sixth with a mean value of 3.74, rated between undecided and agreeing but more tending towards agreement. "Lack of cooperation between teachers or students" is ranked eighth, with a mean value of 3.69, lying between undecided and agreeing but leaning towards agreement. Shoaib and Ali (2020) investigated students' and teachers' attitudes towards cheating in grading. While they identified various forms of moral misconduct, some respondents also highlighted other deficiencies, such as poor organization of study time and strict deadlines set by professors for paper submissions, which can contribute to academic dishonesty.

Table 4. Perception of respondents regarding teaching factors as the circumstance which lead them to academic dishonesty.

Teaching factors	Mean	Std. Deviation	R. O
Irrelevant teaching methodologies	3.88	0.993	1.
Lack of teaching skills	3.84	0.958	2.
Communication barrier	3.80	1.101	3.
Shortage of classroom facility	3.78	1.117	4.
Failure to create an effective Environment	3.76	1.096	5.
Less command of the subject	3.74	1.028	6.
Over loaded class rooms	3.74	1.135	7.
Lack of cooperation between teachers or students	3.69	1.161	8.

Regarding teachers' factors, the highest values were observed for "irrelevant teaching methods" and "lack of teaching skills." These findings suggest that some teachers may lack the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively teach and engage with their students. They might lack command over their subjects or fail to adopt suitable methodologies based on students' age or mental level. Consequently, some teachers may resort to academic dishonesty to produce favourable results, especially when their teaching methods are not yielding the desired outcomes.

Social Factors

Table 5 displays the respondents' perceptions regarding social factors that contribute to academic dishonesty. The highest-ranking factor is the "sense of competition," with a mean value of 3.52, rated between undecided and agreeing but tending towards agreement. "Social rejection" is ranked second, with

a mean value of 3.48, rated between undecided and agreeing but leaning towards agreement. "Social justice" ranks third, with a mean value of 3.46, rated between undecided and agreeing but tending towards agreement. "Illiterate background" ranks fourth, with a mean value of 3.43, rated between undecided and agreeing, leaning towards agreement. "Social insecurity" is ranked fifth, with a mean value of 3.41, rated between undecided and agreeing but tending towards agreement. "Inferiority complex" ranks sixth, with a mean value of 3.40, rated between undecided and agreeing and leaning towards agreement. The seventh-ranking factor is with a mean value of 3.25, rated between undecided and agreeing and inclined towards agreement. "Low self-worth in society" is ranked eighth, with a mean value of 3.24, rated between undecided and agreeing but inclined towards agreement.

Table 5. Perception of respondents regarding social factors as the circumstance which lead them to academic dishonesty.

Social factors	Mean	Std. Deviation	R. O
Sense of competition	3.52	1.161	1.
Social rejection	3.48	1.136	2.
Social justice	3.46	1.144	3.
Illiterate background	3.43	1.255	4.
Social insecurity	3.41	1.183	5.
Inferiority complex	3.40	1.124	6.
Societal pressure	3.25	1.152	7.
Low self-worth in society	3.24	1.238	8.

The social factor with the highest value is the "sense of competition," and "social rejection" also received a significant value. Students are not identical in every aspect; they differ physically and mentally. Parents, teachers, and society often compare individuals with others, fostering a sense of competition among students. While some students view this competition positively, others perceive it negatively. For those with different mental capacities, this educational competition can lead them towards academic dishonesty, as they feel compelled to use every trick to achieve good marks and maintain their self-respect, reputation, and image in society. Unfortunately, resorting to dishonest means can have adverse effects on individuals, educational institutions, society, and the nation. Anitha and Sundaram (2021) argued that parental expectations, conformity, class-taking due to external influences such as parental decisions and social pressure, and intense competition for grades are significant reasons leading students towards academic dishonesty, as also highlighted by Randy et al. (1995).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study's findings indicate that students are inclined towards academic dishonesty as an alternative to hard work. Various factors, including learning difficulties, personal issues, teaching methods, behavioural aspects, and social influences, contribute to this problem, and they have detrimental and long-lasting consequences on students' lives in multiple aspects. Major factors driving students towards academic dishonesty include the fear of failure, financial problems, deviation from goals, irrelevant teaching methodologies, and a sense of competition among students. Academic dishonesty makes students vulnerable to unethical behaviours that negatively affect their personal, social, and professional lives in the long term. Cheating not only impacts students' lives but also has implications for educational institutions and the reputation of the state. Therefore, organizations must adopt strict policies to combat dishonesty. Additionally, educators must guide students about the harmful effects of academic dishonesty, as this knowledge is essential in curbing the prevalence of dishonest practices.

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