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Influence of Students' Peer Pressure on Academic Dishonesty in Public Secondary Schools in Makueni County, Kenya

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There is a worldwide concern on academic dishonesty particularly in the third world countries. The main purpose of this study was to scrutinise the effects of students' peer pressure on academic dishonesty in public secondary schools in Makueni County, Kenya. The study was based on the Psychosocial Dynamic Theory and the Theory of Planned Behaviour. The study employed mixed methodology and the concurrent triangulation design. The sample size of 802 consisted of 750 students sampled randomly, 25 principals and 25 teachers, both sampled purposively. The study utilised 1 SCDE and 1 CDE purposively sampled. The instruments employed were questionnaires for principals, teachers, and students and interviews for the education officers. Descriptive data was scrutinised using frequencies and percentages and presented through tables and figures. Inferential statistics was examined using linear regression and presented through tables, while qualitative data was analysed thematically and presented through narration and verbatim citations. The investigation results were that peer pressure implicitly impacted academic dishonesty. The investigation established that there was a need to improve the students' peer pressure. It was recommended that engaging participation, such as the introduction of skilled, well-informed, and competent counsellors in the institutions, was mandatory to eliminate academic dishonesty cases during the examinations.

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INTRODUCTION

It is most probable that when candidates experience pressure, they simply become dishonest in exams; for instance, in an environment where students see their peers cheat without being caught, they, likewise, may generate a feeling of not caring since everyone else is doing the same thing (Joseck et al., 2015).

Nevertheless, the roots of this vice of academic dishonesty are not known; Mweru et al. (2013) dated it back to thousands of years ago. The first known case was in the Chinese public service examinations, whereby exams were conducted in secluded booths to prevent the examinees from glancing at the examination papers of their peers. In this procedure, examinees searched for materials preceding their entering into the booths. Perry (2010) found out that during the 19th and the 20th centuries, academic dishonesty was predominantly practised in the United States of America. It was extensive at all levels of schooling. In high schools in the US, for instance, it was continuously swelling as a big problem, although it had jail terms for the crooks if discovered to be deceitful. In Pakistan, for instance, Aslam & Mian (2011) upheld that the exam structure was dynamic, but it lacked ethics in the ethos of Pakistan, causing numerous snags in the schooling structure in that republic.

Regionally, in Nigeria, examination dishonesty increased in the 1970s, when young people who were in the schools and campuses before the onset of the Nigerian civil war in 1967 were involved in the army. The youths came back after the war in 1970 and went back to school to continue their schooling (Saana, Ablodeppy & Mensah, 2016). Those adolescents had concepts only of guns and shooting but not the class work from their teachers. They abruptly became psycho-emotionally troubled and were not prepared for

examinations, and so, they chased other ways of succeeding in the exams, for instance, corrupting overseers to permit them to be knotted with academic fraudulence. There was, for example, the engagement of impersonators who did exams on their behalf.

In Kenya, the degree to which academic fraudulence arose in the schooling system was enormously disturbing. The end of yearly exam outcome reports showed that academic deceitfulness was widespread, necessitating some schools' and candidates' exam outcomes be annulled every time exams were conducted. The Saturday Nation Team (2016) reported Chavakali and Kisii high schools as among the five national schools whose 2014 KCSE results were annulled due to academic fraudulence. In Chavakali School, Mathematics and English outcomes for 307 candidates were invalidated. At Kisii High School, results for 145 out of 323 were termed null and void after there was cheating in English and History papers. Reports of annulment of exam results have been filed after the announcement of KCSE results every year. Any process that endangered the equality and fairness of exams had to be exposed and, if possible, lessened (McCabe et al., 2018). Additionally, it was established that there were several things that tempted candidates to be dishonest in exams. The most common ones included intense rivalry, inadequate preparation on the part of applicants and teachers, bad invigilation and administration, pressure to pass exams and pass with good results, and poor exam amenities.

In Makueni County, cases of academic dishonesty were strongly reported continuously for some years. In 2015, Makueni County had the highest number of candidates who were entangled in academic dishonesty in the KCSE exam. The candidates whose results were invalidated were

382 from 22 centres in the county (Saturday Nation Team, 2016). In 2017, a total of 113 candidates had their results cancelled, and in 2019, Makueni County was among the counties that were under vigilance for deceitfulness in KCSE. In the 2021 KCSE examinations, a police officer and three teachers were caught spreading the Kiswahili Paper 2 exams, which were leaked out, and its origin was Ngungi Secondary School in Mbooni East Sub County, still in Makueni County. Out of 42 students who sat KCSE in 2021 at St. Patrick's Kyamatheka Secondary School in Makueni county, only 5 got their results fully, as the remaining 37 got Y grades in Kiswahili. In the same year, the results of all candidates in Nduluni Secondary School in Makueni County were nullified. The candidates confessed to sneaking into exam rooms with written materials hidden inside belts, ties, and underwear. In Two Travelers Oasis Centre secondary school in Makueni county, two students were detained, having been found with a chemistry paper in their phones (Makau, 2021). Consequently, research on the influence of self-awareness, which could lead to academic dishonesty, was essential to address the disturbing rate of examination cheating in the study county.

Additionally, Bifwoli and Momanyi (2020) established that there was prevalent academic fraudulence in Makueni County. The investigators identified factors inducing deceitfulness as pressure to get high grades, pressure to get jobs, laziness, and poor self-image. Despite the tough measures meted out on academic dishonesty by KNEC and the Ministry of Education, which included annulment of the results, suspension from sitting the KCSE for three years, a jail term of not less than five years and enormous penalties, academic dishonesty appears to be persistent in Makueni County.

Some factors that advanced the widespread academic dishonesty in Makueni County, Kenya, included improper preparation for examinations by students, lack of mastering skills, congestion in exam halls, improper supervision of examinations, lack of essential facilities, lack of

self-confidence, pressure from parents and teachers to perform well in examination (Makau, 2020).

In the year 2022, the education cabinet secretary, Hon. Ezekiel Machogu, while appearing before the parliamentary committee dealing with education matters on claims of widespread cheating in national examinations, indicated that there was no cheating during the 2022 examinations (Owiti, 2023). This work examined the influence of students' peer pressure on academic dishonesty in Makueni County, henceforth filling the study gap.

LITERATURE REVIEW

As far back as 1948, Colnerud & Rosander (2009), in their study on academic dishonesty, ethical norms and learning in the US, reported that persons in social settings - for whatever reasons - would subscribe to the perceptions of the "erroneous majority" with a high degree of conformity, and these group perceptions would persist for many generations. The role of peers is central in numerous education policy debates such as affirmative action and ability grouping.

Boehm, Justice & Weeks (2009), in their study on peer pressure and academic dishonesty, found diverse degrees of peer pressure from irregular versus regular cheaters. In several specifications of experimental models, institutions with the lowest levels of cheating have the highest levels of peer reporting violations. This may mean that peer pressure may be an evolving conformity which can be highly adaptive, safeguarding the group's cohesiveness and nurturing feelings of safety. When a group member engages in misbehaviour, other group members tend to choose to handle the situation within the group and often react negatively when members endeavour outside the group to report the misconduct. Peer reporting, therefore, signified a violation of group norms concerning loyalty. Group members were likely to respond to a peer reporter with disapproval, gauging the peer reporter as unlikable and judging his or her peer reporting as intolerable. The peer reporter may

face group sanctions, including revenge, snubbing or dismissal from the group.

Van Zantvliet et al. (2020) argued that whereas some examinees deliberately got involved in academic dishonesty, other learners found themselves indulged in the vice owing to peer norms, ignorance, not being careful or forgetting to apply protocols. The study findings were that learners would develop a custom of dishonesty by observing colleagues perform dishonest activities. Carrell, Malmstrom and West (2016) and Henningsen, Valde and Denbow (2013) found out that when academic misbehaviour was seen as tolerable, learners were more likely to be engrossed in academic dishonesty. They contended that the suitability of academic dishonesty was directed by the awareness that other learners were dishonest. The current study, by use of a different population, confirmed or refuted the findings of these studies as a research gap.

Munachonga (2015), in an investigation in Zambia, established that peers' pressure in the community and in the institutions and likewise from parents led to academic dishonesty. Pressure from peers was found to be a significant reason for academic fraudulence (Pope, 2013). Consequently, learners who believed that their colleagues condemned dishonesty were less probable to be dishonest. Bachore (2017) argued that if learners took their education seriously, they would be preparing sufficiently to do and pass exams and evade academic dishonesty. The researcher reported that academic dishonesty was a dreadful evil which needed to be done away with totally by the community. The researcher recommended that learners should be disciplined and utilise their time to work hard so as to shine in their exams and their selected professions. While those studies used descriptive research methods, the current study used mixed research methodology to scrutinise the outcome of peer pressure on academic dishonesty in Makueni public secondary schools.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Psychosocial Dynamic Theory

The Psychosocial Dynamic Theory was used to inform the independent variable, while the Theory of Planned Behaviour informed the dependent variable. The Psychosocial Dynamic theory focuses on the events that occur in childhood life that influence the behaviour of a person in adulthood. The unconscious thoughts and feelings move to the conscious mind and determine the behaviour of an adult. The dynamic interaction between the id, ego, superego, and the outside world forms the basis of human behaviour, according to the theory. When the ego is threatened, the person uses defence mechanisms to distort the impulses into acceptable forms of behaviour or block the impulses. This theory applies to this study in that students use defence mechanisms to avoid failure in examinations by engaging in academic dishonesty. They are motivated by psychosocial influence (personality traits, self-awareness, peer pressure, study habits and societal expectations) to engage in academic dishonesty. The motivation to engage in academic dishonesty is the interaction and imbalance between the id, ego, and superego. Students with a threatened ego in examinations use defence mechanisms to avoid failure and, hence, engage in academic dishonesty. Đurišić & Bunijevac (2017) used psychosocial dynamic theory in their study on the relationship between psychosocial beliefs and academic outcomes to study a meta-analysis of academic dishonesty.

Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)

TPB states that an individual chooses to partake in behaviour based on their beliefs about integrity and their expectation that the act provides positive results. These beliefs and expectations constitute three paradigms of TPB. First, attitudes toward behaviour originated from earlier individual experiences and appraisals on whether the act would cause positive or negative results. Secondly, personal norms result from the social setting and indications of whether others judge it as appropriate or inappropriate behaviour and the

social pressure to participate or not participate in the behaviour. Lastly, the level of perceived behavioural control refers to the perception of the ease or difficulty in engaging in the behaviour. These three paradigms affect the intention of someone to behave and the level of control over circumstances that can prevent individuals from engaging in such behaviour (Nazir, 2020).

This theory applies to this study in that students make logical and reasoned decisions to engage in academic dishonesty. They intentionally decide to engage in academic dishonesty with the expectation of achieving good grades. If students have observed others cheating or they have cheated successfully in the past, they are likely to engage in academic dishonesty. Students whose peers approve of cheating are likely to engage in academic dishonesty. Students who view academic dishonesty as an act that would result in avoiding failure in examinations are likely to engage in academic dishonesty. Awaah (2018) used the Theory of Planned Behaviour in their study to investigate academic cheating in a cross-cultural comparison.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study examined how peer pressure among students affected academic dishonesty in public secondary schools in Makueni County, Kenya. The sample consisted of 25 principals, 25 teachers, one SCDE and one CDE, all purposively sampled. There were 750 students randomly sampled. Data was analysed in descriptive and inferential statistics using linear regression. The study employed a mixed methodology approach, which utilised both non-numerical and numerical approaches. The mixed methodology provided the researcher with different choices of design involving a range of sequential and concurrent strategies. The features of these designs were then reported, besides quality control methods and taking care of ethical concerns. A mixed methodology was suitable for this investigation as the investigator combined elements of non-numerical and numerical research approaches, information gathering, analysing, implications and practices for the extensive resolutions and

depth of comprehending the research problem. The study applied the concurrent triangulation model that combined correlation survey and phenomenology methods. The correlation method was used for quantitative data, while the phenomenological method was used for qualitative data. Descriptive information was examined using frequencies and percentages and presented through tables and figures. Inferential statistics was scrutinised through linear regression and presented through tables, while qualitative data was analysed thematically and presented through narration and verbatim citations.

The targeted participants were 79,122. This consisted of 75,000 students, 3,865 teachers, 250 principals, 6 SCDEs and 1 CDE. The sample size was 802, which consisted of 750 students sampled randomly, 25 principals and 25 teachers sampled purposively. There was 1 SCDE and 1 CDE purposively sampled. Questionnaires for heads and from three class teachers were prepared. The teachers were sampled purposively, while the students were sampled randomly. The validity of the quantitative tools was ensured through close guidance by the supervisors and peers during the development of the research instruments. Confirmatory factor analysis was used to test the content, face, and construct validity of the instruments. Items were written to cover all areas of the constructs for all the instruments. The input from these people was used to improve the content and construction of the instruments. Cronbach Alpha Reliability Coefficient was used to calculate the reliability. The test-retest method was used to determine the reliability of the academic dishonesty questionnaire. The researcher conducted an inquiry audit to establish dependability. An inquiry audit involves having a researcher, outside of the data collection and data analyses, examine the processes of data collection, data analysis, and the results of the research study. The researcher used the triangulation method to establish credibility. Triangulation involves using multiple methods, data sources, observations, or theories in order to gain a more complete understanding of the phenomenon being studied.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The results were analysed in descriptive, inferential, and thematic approaches, as seen below.

Descriptive Statistics Analysis

In this case, the researcher asked the principals and teachers to fill out their questionnaire. The data captured the indicators for both independent and dependent variables. The results were computed and presented in *Table 1*.

Table 1: Principals' and teachers' responses on students' peer pressure on academic dishonesty

Students' peer pressure statements		SD	D	U	A	SA
The society does not care about cheating in examinations hence the swapping of scripts.	N	4	9	1	15	7
	%	11.1	25.0	2.8	41.7	19.4
The society holds that it hurts no one when students cheat in exams by swapping scripts.	N	3	7	7	12	7
	%	8.3	19.4	19.4	33.3	19.4
The society values and rewards those with good academic certificates thus encouraging the swapping of scripts.	N	3	2	1	12	18
	%	8.33	5.6	2.8	33.3	50.0
The society abhors and disregards individuals with poor grades and therefore catapults the swapping of scripts.	N	1	4	2	12	17
	%	2.8	11.1	5.6	33.3	47.2
It is possible for a student to obtain a quality academic certificate by just swapping scripts.	N	4	3	12	12	5
	%	11.1	8.3	33.3	33.3	13.9
It is easy for students to get assistance from friends through swapping scripts.	N	1	5	2	23	5
	%	2.8	13.9	5.6	63.9	13.9
Students obtaining quality grades gain respect from peers, even if it means swapping scripts.	N	1	3	2	13	17
	%	2.8	8.3	5.6	36.1	47.2
Individuals who cheat by swapping scripts are holding prime jobs in society.	N	2	14	4	10	6
	%	5.6	38.9	11.1	27.8	16.7

Source: The researcher, 2022

From *Table 1*, the society did not care about cheating in examinations; hence, the swapping of scripts was agreed by 22 (61.1 %) and denied by 13 (36.1 %) with only 1 (2.8 %) not making a decision. Though the percentage that was denied was quite significant, the majority of the participants saw that academic dishonesty was a matter that was acceptable by society and, therefore, did not mind any form of cheating, including swapping of scripts. This attitude indicated that exam cheating was an acceptable necessary evil. The hope was in the percentage that, contrary to the majority still, there was a need for worry as far as peer pressure was concerned since students were likely to do what their peers did.

The society held that it hurt no one when students cheated in exams by swapping scripts as agreed by 19 (52.8 %) and disagreed by 10 (27.8 %) with 7 (19.4 %) who did not make any decision. From the percentage that agreed, it was clear that there was moral decay among the society members that

went into the minds of young students as far as academic dishonesty was concerned. It seemed that every person in the community accepted this evil, and for that matter, it was very easy for candidates to be forced by peers to get involved in this vice. After all, everybody was doing it, and so it became an accepted evil amongst the students who were driven by the influence of peer pressure.

The society valued and rewarded those with good academic certificates thus encouraging the swapping of scripts as agreed by 30 (83.3 %) with 5 (13.9 %) in disagreement and only 1 (2.8 %) not making a decision. Academic performance was valued and determined by excellent grades, not minding how these grades were obtained. The end justified the means. The prevalent practice of academic dishonesty developed from candidates ensuring that they copied what their colleagues were doing. This definitely caused students to practice cheating in exams for the desire for better grades.

The society abhorred and disregarded individuals with poor grades and therefore, catapulted swapping of scripts as agreed by 29 (80.6 %) with 5 (13.9 %) in disagreement and 2 (5.6 %) undecided. Poor performance was not condoned in the society. Candidates had to be driven by peer force to make sure that they performed well to avoid being rejected in the community. This stirred peer pressure among the students. Academic dishonesty, thus, emerged as a means of enabling people to stand tall in the schools as well as the community and fostering healthy social interactions. This being the case, there was no way academic dishonesty could have been eradicated or even condemned.

It was possible for a student to obtain a quality academic certificate by just swapping scripts as agreed by 17 (47.2 %) and disagreed by 7 (19.4 %), with significant 12 (33.3 %) making no decision. The percentage that did not decide indicated a mixed feeling. It is believed that though academic dishonesty could have been practised, it was not the right thing to do. Obtaining a certificate falsely could be unacceptable. However, there were other means of cheating other than swapping scripts, and this was probably the reason why more than thirty per cent of the participants were not comfortable making any decision.

It was easy for students to get assistance from friends through swapping scripts, as agreed by 28 (77.8 %) and 6 (16.7 %) who disagreed, with only 2 (5.6 %) who could not make decisions. The force of peer pressure was magnificent, such that students could exchange scripts in an effort to help others succeed in life. That kind of illegal teamwork was the necessary evil in academic dishonesty. Peer pressure served as a drive for psychosocial influences, which had an impact on academic dishonesty. The exchange of scripts could have been seen as a necessary evil.

Students obtaining quality grades gained respect from peers even if it meant swapping scripts as agreed by 30 (83.3 %), with 4 (11.1 %) in disagreement and 2 (5.6 %) making no decision. Recognition by others was very important and

valued. This blinded the candidates such that they could not feel that they were being dishonest in the exams. What mattered most was that they could be valued by their peers, not minding the route they took to reach that level of recognition. This was the peer pressure force working on the youths in schools. The data here indicated that peers were more valued than the fear of committing the evil of academic dishonesty.

The fact that individuals who cheated by swapping scripts were holding prime jobs in society was met with mixed feelings as 16 (44.4 %) agreed, and a similar number, 16 (44.4 %) disagreed, and 4 (11.1 %) did not make any decision. One possible reason was that the participants could not single out or mention any individuals who had succeeded in this way, even if they knew them. Though it can be known that some successful persons in the community cheated in the exams, it was not easy to say who they were. So, in the endeavour to succeed and get lucrative jobs, candidates would do anything to ensure this.

The findings agree with Henningsen et al. (2013) that when academic misbehaviour is seen as tolerable, learners are more likely to engage in academic dishonesty. The results support the implication of academic dishonesty, as stated by Daumiller and Janke (2020), that this is a dreadful evil that needs to be totally done away with by the community. The implication is that learners need to be disciplined and utilise their time to work hard so as to shine in their exams and their selected professions. This could have meant that peer pressure could be developing conformity, which could be highly adaptive, protecting group coherence and fostering spirits of security amongst students.

Students Peer Pressure and Academic Dishonesty

Again, on peer pressure, the investigator collected facts from the students who filled out part D of their survey. That information considered indicators for both independent and dependent

variables, as seen in the questions. The outcomes were computed and offered in *Table 2*.

Table 2: Students' responses in students peer pressure on academic dishonesty

Students' peer pressure statements		SD	D	U	A	SA
Cheating in examinations is not condemned in society and swapping of scripts was allowed.	N	337	141	41	117	95
	%	46.1	19.3	5.6	16.0	13.0
It hurts no one to cheat in exams, and thus, swapping scripts is allowed	N	349	147	54	105	76
	%	47.7	20.1	7.4	14.4	10.4
I only need the certificate even if I cheat by swapping scripts	N	401	131	45	67	87
	%	54.9	17.9	6.2	9.2	11.9
Those with poor grades are disrespected in society, so they can earn respect by even swapping scripts.	N	251	125	45	111	199
	%	34.3	17.1	6.2	15.2	27.2
I would buy a quality certificate if I had the means and even swap scripts if I could	N	376	125	63	62	105
	%	51.4	17.1	8.6	8.5	14.4
I have friends ready to assist in getting quality grades by swapping scripts.	N	262	143	60	129	137
	%	35.8	19.6	8.2	17.6	18.7
To gain respect from my friends, I need to get quality grades, even if it means swapping scripts.	N	211	79	52	179	210
	%	28.9	10.8	7.1	24.5	28.7
My peers have quality jobs due to probably swapping scripts in the examinations.	N	435	147	49	41	59
	%	59.5	20.1	6.7	5.6	8.1
Peer pressure drives me to cheat in exams by swapping scripts	N	358	131	55	94	93
	%	49.0	17.9	7.5	12.9	12.7

Source: The researcher, 2022

From *Table 2*, the fact that cheating in examinations was not condemned in society and swapping of scripts was allowed was not acceptable, as seen in 478 (65.4 %) who disagreed and 212 (29.0 %) agreeing with 41 (5.6 %) not decided. The majority of the students were defending themselves from the accusation of being dishonest in exams. The views of principals and teachers were contrary. The students did not want to accept that they could cheat as part of the community in which they lived. Peer pressure had encompassed them such that it became normal for any candidate to be dishonest. Parents had been involved in purchasing fake exams to enable their children to pass well.

It was not accepted that it hurt anyone to cheat in exams, and thus, swapping scripts was allowed as disagreed by 496 (67.9 %) and accepted by 181 (24.8 %), with 54 (7.4 %) making no decision. This denial could lead the investigator to believe that there was no likelihood of cheating among the students. However, information from other participants indicated the contrary. Thus, any likelihood of cheating was welcomed by candidates due to the peer pressure among them.

Students denied that they only needed the certificate even if they cheated by swapping scripts, as seen in 532 (72.8 %) who denied and 154 (21.1 %) accepted, with 45 (6.2 %) who could not make a decision. This looked like the students were in defence of whatever happened in academic dishonesty among them or their peers. There is no student who wants to hear that they have been caught in exam cheating. Students wanted to show that they passed honestly even when there was cheating among them.

It was not acceptable that those with poor grades were disrespected in society so they could earn respect by even swapping scripts, as seen in 376 (51.4 %) who denied and 310 (42.4 %) who agreed with 45 (6.2 %) not making decisions. One characteristic of peer pressure is acceptance by the concerned groups. Respect in the community came with performance in the exams. The higher one achieves the more respect. This did not matter which method was used to gain this respect so long as it was earned.

Students did not agree that they would buy quality certificates if they had the means and even by

swapping scripts if they could, as per 501 (68.5 %) who disagreed and 167 (22.8 %) who agreed with 63 (8.6 %) not deciding. The data here indicated great honesty in certification and performance of examinations. However, contrary information was seen from other participants. On the one hand, it could be accepted that students wanted clean certificates free from academic dishonesty. The fact of the matter, on the other hand, was that it was occurring. The principals and teachers may be right when they think the contrary since they have witnessed the purchasing of certificates previously, as well as all other types of irregularities amongst the students.

Students denied that they had friends ready to assist in getting quality grades by swapping scripts (405, 55.4 % disagreed), 266 (36.4 %) agreed, and only 60 (8.2 %) were undecided. Any assistance from anywhere must have been welcomed. From the peer pressure point of view, no assistance from peers would be rejected unless, in this case, very honest students could not be quantified in this investigation.

It was acceptable to gain respect from friends; there was a need to get quality grades even if it meant swapping scripts as agreed by 389 (53.2 %) and significantly denied by 290 (39.7 %), with 52 (7.1 %) undecided. The reason could be the truth that respect comes as a result of excellent performance in exams. On the other hand, there was an element of swapping the scripts, which participants saw as evil even if it was practised. The majority were driven by the force of peer pressure.

The students denied that their peers had quality jobs due to probably swapping scripts in the examinations (582, 79.6 % disagreed), 100 (13.7 %) agreed, and 49 (6.7 %) were neutral. This was contrary to what the principals and teachers thought. The participants may not have known that this happened, unlike other participants who were more experienced and had the information about this. There was no clear way of establishing who got jobs through dishonest means.

Students denied that peer pressure drove them to cheat in exams by swapping scripts (489, 66.9 % disagreed), 187 (25.6 %) agreed, and 55 (7.5 %) were neutral. There was no way that the students could accept that they did this evil. On the basis of the peer pressure influences, even those who did not accept could accomplish this if given the opportunity. The agreeing side attracted more than a quarter of the participants, indicating a degree of significance in the whole matter.

The findings concurred with the findings of Van Zantvliet et al. (2020), who reasoned that although some candidates intentionally indulged in academic deceit, other candidates found themselves indulging in the evil due to peer pressure, unawareness, not being cautious or overlooking protocols. The study established that students would develop a tradition of deceitfulness by seeing their peers perform dishonest actions. This meant that peer pressure among the students could not be ignored in any case. These findings are further supported by the Theory of Planned behaviour (TPB) that students decide to commit academic dishonesty after carefully considering their options, with the objective of getting good grades, and they choose to cheat in class on purpose.

Inferential Statistics in Students' Peer Pressure on Academic Dishonesty

Linear regression analysis for peer pressure and academic dishonesty was done. This was to assess whether peer pressure significantly predicted academic dishonesty.

The results of the linear regression model were significant, $F(1,729) = 361.52, p < .001, R^2 = .33$, indicating that approximately 33.15% of the variance in academic dishonesty is explainable by peer pressure. Peer pressure significantly predicted academic dishonesty, $B = 0.51, t(729) = 19.01, p < .001$. This indicates that, on average, a one-unit increase in peer pressure will increase the value of academic dishonesty by 0.51 units. *Table 3* summarises the results of the regression model.

Table 3: Inferential statistics on students' peer pressure on academic dishonesty

Variable	B	SE	95.00% CI	B	t	p
(Intercept)	0.56	0.07	[0.43, 0.69]	0.00	8.22	< .001
Peer pressure	0.51	0.03	[0.46, 0.57]	0.58	19.01	< .001

Note. Results: $F(1,729) = 361.52$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .33$

Source: The researcher, 2023

The inferential findings concurred with the findings of Carrell, Malmstrom and West (2016) and Henningsen, Valde and Denbow (2013), who established that the appropriateness of academic dishonesty was steered by the consciousness that other peers were dishonest. The present study, using a dissimilar populace, confirmed the reality.

Thematic Analysis of Students' Peer Pressure on Academic Dishonesty

The communities within which students lived may not have cared about academic dishonesty. Any method of cheating seemed to be accommodated, as one officer lamented,

"Nowadays, we cannot trust the communities from where students come as they are part and parcel of the candidates in matters of cheating. There are no ways community members can condemn academic dishonesty. It has been part of life and a way of life. I have never witnessed any case whereby the communities, for example, demonstrated against any form of dishonesty in the examinations as they do when they are unhappy with any other issues" (EO1).

There was that feeling that nobody was disadvantaged in society, even if cheating occurred. It might not have been the business of the community members to indulge in academic dishonest as one officer observed,

"Do not think that members of the community are worried about examination cheating. It could be the business of those parents with children in the secondary schools only. Therefore, cheating does not do any harm to anybody even if it occurred" (EO2).

The community members have high esteem for academic giants who have succeeded well in the

schools. The means and the ways may not have been an issue. One officer had this to say,

"In the community, persons with high education receive much respect. These make their peers jealous, such that they also want to earn the same honour from the community. The peer pressure has, no doubt, encouraged academic dishonesty. It has been an irresistible necessary evil among the community" (EO1).

It was a common thing to say that the community obviously disliked and disrespected individuals who were academically incapable of rising above the rest. Such persons were seen as rejects in the community as one officer said,

"It seems that to be somebody in the community, one has to achieve a certain level of education. Failures from the school systems are not valued. They do not even seem to exist in any way in the community. They are not only the forgotten lot but also the cursed ones and termed as community rejects" (EO2).

Falsely obtained certificates were not news in the community. People could possess very good certificates without having come through the curriculum through which the certificates were supposed to be earned. As one officer said,

"You have heard of verification of certificates for people contesting leadership positions such as the governors' positions. It could be possible to hold a certificate yet not go to school to study for it. If any form of cheating can earn somebody a certificate, then it becomes easier that way. This is why academic dishonesty has roots even in the society" (EO1).

Peers can assist other peers in any form of examination dishonesty. Candidates have been caught cheating through exchanging scripts during the exam period. So long as the vice is acceptable to their peers, it does not seem to raise eyebrows; as one officer said,

“It is a common practice for candidates to exchange scripts. What I do not know is if there is adequate time to do all this within the time limit for exams in each paper. The peer approval in this vice is very strong. It makes candidates blind and fail even to notice the negative consequences of their actions” (EO2).

There has always been peer respect for students who do well in exams. This does not take into account the ways and means through which they passed their exams. The end seems to justify the means, as one officer said,

“People with high expectations are respected in society irrespective of whether they cheated in their school time or not. The worst thing is that peers want to be recognised by other peers come rain or sunshine. It is the power of knowledge that matters” (EO1).

It may not be a surprise that some highly learned people have cheated in exams during their school time. Not all persons have earned their certificates honestly, as one officer had this to say,

“You will be surprised to discover that some dignitaries and academic giants were dishonest during their examination times. Some persons hold certificates they are not worthy to hold since they acquired such papers through academic dishonesty, even if it was by exchanging scripts. Exam cheating nowadays may be a sophisticated issue since candidates are devising new methods of cheating which may be too complicated to notice” (EO2).

The findings in this thematic data were similar to the findings of Boehm et al. (2019) in their investigation of peer pressure and academic deceitfulness. It was established that there were

varied degrees of peer pressure from irregular versus perennial frauds. Schools with the lowest levels of dishonesty had the highest levels of peers reporting cheating. This meant that peer pressure was a developing conformity. When a cluster member engaged in misconduct, other cluster affiliates tended to choose to handle the condition in the cluster and frequently reacted negatively when members endeavoured to report the misbehaviour. Peer reporting, consequently, indicated a ruin of cluster rules regarding allegiance.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It was determined that enhancing control of peer pressure among students is statistically a significant factor in relation to academic dishonesty. Discoveries of the investigation showed that students' self-awareness explained a significant portion of academic dishonesty. This confirms that students' peer pressure influences academic dishonesty in secondary schools in Makueni County. The importance of peer pressure among students is revealed as a positive aspect of enhancing optimism, a sense of responsibility and critical decision-making.

Recommendations

The Ministry of Education should assist in hiring, promoting, training and developing qualified teachers and counsellors to assist in inculcating virtuous behaviours in students to deter academic dishonesty. It is critical for education stakeholders and public secondary school management to strive to create forums for teachers, students and even parents in order to improve self-discipline, self-management, and competence as mechanisms for enabling self-understanding of learners on the risk of academic dishonesty.

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