



# Influence of Students' Personality Traits on Academic Dishonesty in Public Secondary Schools in Makueni County, Kenya

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**Abstract:** *There is a worldwide concern about academic dishonesty and more so in African countries. The main purpose of this study was to investigate the influence of students' personality traits on academic dishonesty in public secondary schools in Makueni County, Kenya. This study was informed by Psychosocial Dynamic Theory and Theory of Planned Behaviour. The investigation used mixed methodology and the concurrent triangulation design. 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. The research tools utilized were questionnaires for principals, teachers and students, and interviews for SCDEs and the County Director of Education. The study findings were that, personality traits significantly influence academic dishonesty. The study established that there was need to improve on the students' personality traits. It was recommended that integrating interventions like introduction of competent, experienced and professional counsellors in schools was necessary to eliminate academic dishonesty.*

**Keywords:** *Academic dishonesty, Examinations, Influence, Public secondary schools, Students' personality traits*

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## 1. Introduction

According to Naliaka, Chumbe, Muthamia and Liambila (2015) when students feel pressured in schools, they can easily develop dishonesty in examinations, for example, in an atmosphere where learners see their peers cheat without being caught, they also, may create a feeling of "everyone is doing it" (Naliaka *et. al*, 2015).

Although the beginnings of the practice of academic dishonesty is unknown, Mweru *et. al* (2014) dated it back to thousands of years ago. It was observed that its first known existence was in the Chinese public service exams where exams were conducted in separate cubes to prevent candidates from taking a look at the examination papers of their colleagues. In the procedure, learners looked for

information prior to entering the cubes. Perry (2010) found out that during the 19<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, academic dishonesty became prevalent in the USA. It was endemic at each level of schooling. In high schools in US, it was unceasingly rising as an issue although it had imprisonment terms for culprits who were caught cheating. In Pakistan, Nazir (2011) argued that the exam structure was robust but the failure in morals in cultures of Pakistan created numerous hitches for the schooling system.

In Nigeria, academic dishonesty bulged in the 1970s, when adolescents who were in the institutions and campuses before the beginning of the Nigerian civic war in 1967 got recruited in the militia at the time of fighting, were back after the war in 1970 and returned to institutions to further their schooling (Saana, Ablodeppy & Mensah, 2016). These adolescents who knew only

about guns and shooting rather than teachers' words became psycho-emotionally unbalanced, not ready for examinations and sought other ways of succeeding in the exams like giving bribes to examiners to permit them get involved in academic dishonesty and employing of impersonators to do exams on their behalf.

In Kenya, the rate at which academic dishonesty occurred in the educational system was highly disturbing. Annual examination results reports had indicated that academic dishonesty was rampant in Kenya with some schools and students' examination results being cancelled every year. The *Daily Nation* (2016) reported Chavakali and Kisii high schools as among the five national schools whose 2014 KCSE results were cancelled due to academic dishonesty. At Chavakali, English and Mathematics results for 307 candidates were cancelled. At Kisii High school, results for 145 out of 323 were cancelled after they cheated in English and History examinations. Reports of cancellation of examination results for candidates have been recorded after release of KCSE results every year. Any procedure that jeopardizes the fairness and objectivity of exams must be discovered, and if at all feasible, stamped out (Kagete, 2018). He further found that there were a number of things that tempt students to cheat on examinations. The most frequent ones include 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 examination facilities.

In Makueni County, cases of academic dishonesty had been reported continuously for several years. In the year 2015, Makueni County had the highest number of candidates who were involved in academic dishonesty in the KCSE examination. The students whose examination results were cancelled were 382 from 22 centers in Makueni County (*Daily Nation*, 2016). In 2017, a total of 113 students had their examination results cancelled and in 2019, Makueni County was among the counties that were under scrutiny for examination dishonesty in KCSE. During 2021 KCSE examinations, a police officer and three teachers were traced circulating leaked Kiswahili paper 2 examination which originated from Ngungi secondary school in Mbooni East sub county in Makueni County. Out of 42 candidates who sat for KCSE in 2021 at St. Patrick's Kyamatheka secondary school in Makueni county, only 5 got their results in full while the remaining 37 got Y grades in Kiswahili. In the same year, the results of all the candidates in Nduluni secondary school in Makueni county were cancelled. The students confessed to have sneaked into examination hall with written answers stuffed inside belts linings, ties and underwear. In Two Travelers Oasis Center secondary school in Makueni county, 2 students were arrested for possessing a chemistry paper in their phones (Makueni County Education Report, 2021). Therefore, research on

the psychosocial influence which could lead to academic dishonesty was necessary to address the alarming rate of examination cheating in Makueni County.

Moreover, Bifwoli and Momanyi (2020) used a descriptive research design to study academic dishonesty in Makueni County and found out that there was academic dishonesty which was rampant in the county. The researchers identified factors influencing cheating 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 cancellation of the results, suspension from sitting the KCSE for three years, a jail term of not less than five years and huge penalties, academic dishonesty seems to persist in Makueni County. Some factors catapulted on the widespread of 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, 2017). Most of the studies done in Makueni County were either on psychological, physical or environmental factors influencing academic dishonesty. None of the studies had incorporated a combination of social and psychological factors on academic dishonesty particularly, personality traits, hence the research gap that this study addressed. The studies done also employed mainly the descriptive survey research design and survey procedure in gathering facts. Subsequently, the survey method is fundamentally subjective, and the results founded on the method should be believed with caution. This study used mixed methodology design. This work examined the influence of students' personality traits, self-awareness, peer pressure, study habits and societal expectations on academic dishonesty in Makueni county, hence filling the research gap.

## 2. Literature Review

Studies done on personality traits have classified them into the big 5 factors. These include Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness and Neuroticism. They sum up discrete characteristics of human beings (Almhond, Lee, Heckman & Kautz, 2011). Almhond *et al* (2011) found that these discrete characteristics result in educational achievement, marks and examination scores. Specifically, they show that honesty and carefulness are vital in the determination of years of schooling, marks and test scores; and that Conscientiousness could be as predictive as mental capability in determining good outcomes, with the effect being mediated through effort and positive study habits.

On the other hand, lack of control and self-confidence are found to have important effects on adolescent education decisions. While that study investigated personality traits on performance, the current study addressed personality traits on academic dishonesty as a research gap.

Lundberg (2013) examined the effect of mental capability and personality traits on college graduation in a cohort of young Americans and how such traits varied by family upbringing. The study found relevant differences across family background groups, predominantly for men. Conscientiousness does not seem to influence the education of disadvantaged men, while openness to experience has a relevant effect on college graduation only for less-disadvantaged men and women. The current study addressed how personality traits influenced academic dishonesty rather than family background addressed in that study. That study failed to reveal how personality traits influenced academic dishonesty which was a research gap for the current study.

Chia and Mei (2020) in their study on risk attitudes and the big five personality traits in Malaysia found that, even when responding to anonymous self-reporting surveys, few students will wish to admit plagiarizing. Results from an anonymous self-reporting poll done for this article lend credence to this argument. Students were given about 100 surveys, and 77 of them were filled out and returned. Thirteen percent and 4%, respectively, of those who responded to the study agreed and strongly agreed that cheating occurred during their online exams. As opposed to this, a higher percentage of students (40%) and those who disagreed strongly (19%) believed that cheating occurred.

Omonijo, Rotimi and Uche (2014) studied the influence of personality types and socio-demographic characteristics of students on academic dishonesty in Ibadan. The study utilized correlation survey strategy and questionnaire to gather information. The t-test and Pearson correlation were utilized to examine the hypotheses, whereas regressions analysis was employed to explore which of the independent variables meaningfully made predictions on the dependent variable (academic dishonesty). The result revealed that personality A had a noteworthy association with academic dishonesty ( $r=0.28$ ;  $p< 0.05$ ).

Wanani (2018) examined the association between learners' personality features and their awareness of academic dishonesty in schools in Nyeri County. The results exposed no significant association between gender and motivation orientation on academic dishonesty, whereas a negative association was seen between expectation to succeed in an examination and academic dishonesty. The study suggested necessity to advance self-concept of the learners so as to improve a bad perception to academic dishonesty and consequently

control the issue. However, the study failed to show out clearly how personality traits affected academic dishonesty which is a research gap for the current study.

There was a study on the association amongst academic deceit and the 5 moral foundations in Indonesia, and established only a feeble predictive power of the "authority" foundation on academic dishonesty. In addition to the 5 personality factors, honesty-humility is a unique contributor to decreasing academic dishonesty (Madeline, 2019). Current works have recommended focus on truthfulness as the largest defense against deceit in every sphere of academic world. Results inspire university instructors and institutional policymakers to pay much attention to this dispositional protector (Behroozi, Rafiee & Yakhchali, 2019).

## 2.1 Theories

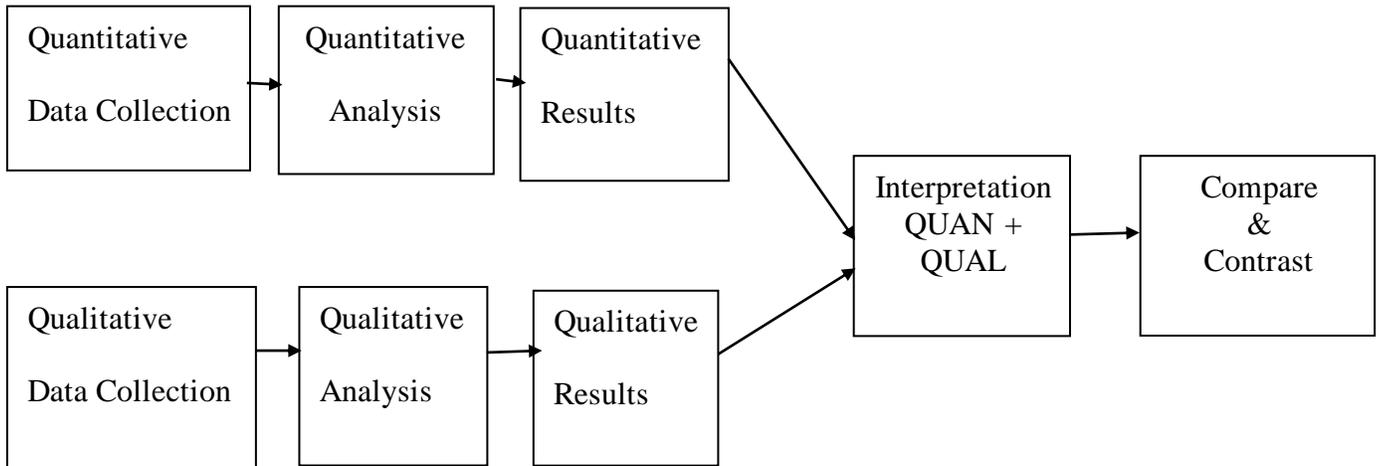
The Psychosocial Dynamic Theory was used to inform the independent variable, while the Theory of Planned Behaviour informed the dependent variable. Psychosocial Dynamic theory focuses on the events that occur in childhood life that influence the behavior of a person in adulthood. The dynamic interaction between the id, ego, superego, and the outside world forms the basis of human behavior, according to the theory. This theory applies to this study in that students use defense mechanisms to avoid failure in examinations by engaging in academic dishonesty. They are motivated by psychosocial influence such as personality traits. Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) states that an individual chooses to partake in behavior based on their beliefs about the integrity and their expectation that the act provides positive results. This theory applies to this study in that students make logical and reasoned decision to engage in academic dishonesty. They intentionally decide to engage in academic dishonesty with an expectation of achieving good grades.

## 3. Methodology

This study employed mixed methodology approach which utilized both qualitative and quantitative approaches. 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. Mixed methodology was suitable for this investigation as the investigator combined elements of qualitative and quantitative research approaches, information gathering, analyzing, 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 used for qualitative data and qualitative. Rational for use of correlational method was that the researcher measured the variables under study to understand and assess the

statistical relationship between the variables while the phenomenological approach rationale was that the researcher sought to understand and describe the universal essence of the phenomenon under study. Concurrent triangulation research design was further explained in the figure 1 below.



**Figure 1: Research Design. Source: Adopted from Creswell, 2014**

The targeted participants were 79,122. This consisted of 75,000 students, 3,865 teachers, 250 principals, 6 SCDEs and 1 CDE. Questionnaires for heads and form three class teachers was prepared. The teachers were sampled purposively while the students were sampled randomly. 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 were used to improve on the content and construction of the instruments. Cronbach Alpha Reliability Coefficient was used to calculate the reliability. Test-retest method was used to determine reliability for 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 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.

## 4. Results and Discussion

In this case, the researcher asked the principals and teachers to fill 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' Personality Traits on Academic Dishonesty**

Personality traits statements		SD	D	U	A	SA
Students feel that examinations are difficult, hence copying exams	N	1	4	1	23	7
	%	2.8%	11.1%	2.8%	63.9%	19.4%
Students cheat since they feel that examinations are meant to punish them and therefore, they copy exams	N	9	11	3	12	1
	%	25.0%	30.6%	8.3%	33.3%	2.8%
Cheating is a result of ill examination preparation among students and which makes them copy exams	N	2	5	2	14	13
	%	5.6%	13.9%	5.6%	38.9%	36.1%
Students cheat in examinations since they believe that they have no capacity to attain quality grades and so, they copy exams	N	2	3	5	18	8
	%	5.6%	8.3%	13.9%	50.0%	22.2%
Peers influence drives cheating in examinations making students copy exams	N	2	2	3	17	12
	%	5.6%	5.6%	8.3%	47.2%	33.3%
Fear of failing peers by not attaining quality grades leads to cheating in examinations by copying exams	N	1	7	2	15	11
	%	2.8%	19.4%	5.6%	41.7%	30.6%
The pressure by some students helping other students not to fail perpetuate the cheating habit and hence copy exams	N	2	8	6	13	7
	%	5.6%	22.2%	16.7%	36.1%	19.4%
Students believe that cheating in examinations is mutually beneficial to peers hence they copy exams	N	4	11	4	12	5
	%	11.1%	30.6%	11.1%	33.3%	13.9%
The belief in low academic ability drives some students to cheat by copying exams	N	2	5	2	14	13
	%	5.6%	13.9%	5.6%	38.9%	36.1%
The inability to pass in examinations drives the desire to cheat by copying exams	N	3	2	2	16	13
	%	8.3%	5.6%	5.6%	44.4%	36.1%

**Source: The researcher, 2023**

From the table, the principals and teachers felt that students had a feeling that examinations were difficult, hence the cheating habit causing exam copying amongst themselves. This was agreed and strongly by 30 (83.3 %). Those who disagreed and strongly disagreed were 5 (13.9 %) and those who were undecided were 1 (2.8 %). It seemed that students who cheated had fear for difficult exams, therefore, causing academic dishonesty among them. If there was no fear, then there would be no in cheating in exams. Majority of the participants disagreed that students cheated since they felt that examinations were meant to punish them and they copied exams as indicated by 20 (66.5 %). However, there was a significant figure of 13 (36.1 %) who were in agreement, with only 3 (8.3 %) who were undecided. Students must be made to believe that exams meant well for them but not to punish them so as to avoid academic dishonesty.

Most of the participants were in agreement that cheating was a result of ill examination preparation among students which caused exam copying as per views of 27 (75 %)

who were of that opinion. Only 7 (19.4 %) were on the disagreement side with 2 (5.6 %) undecideds. It seemed that poor preparation among candidates was a threat that caused academic dishonesty. Most likely, cheating would be seen if candidates were poorly prepared. Good preparations meant less cases of cheating in examinations.

It was agreeable that students cheated in examinations since they believed that they had no capacity to attain quality grades which made them copy exams as indicated by 26 (72.2 %) with 5 (13.9 %) disagreeing and another 5 (13.9 %) being undecided. It seems that when candidates felt too weak to do well, they were tempted to cheat. In other words, if candidates felt that they were poor, they would be tempted to compensate by cheating.

According to the principals and teachers, there was peer influence which fanned dishonest in examinations by causing exam copying as seen by the majority of 29 (80.6 %) and disagreed by 4 (11.1 %) with 3 (8.3 %) who were undecided. Peer pressure is known to be prevalent among the youths in schools. There is no doubt there was a big

influence as the students saw others cheat and probably not caught in the action. School counsellors need to address this issue so that cheating is curbed in schools and good results free from dishonesty are achieved. Fear of failing peers by not attaining quality grades led to cheating by copying exams as agreed and strongly agreed by the majority of 26 (72.2 %) with a minority of 8 (22.2 %) in disagreement and only 2 (5.6 %) were undecided.

The pressure by some students helping other students to avoid failure perpetuated the cheating habit and hence copied exams as per the majority of 20 (55.6 %) who agreed with 10 (27.8 %) in disagreement. There was insignificant percentage of 6 (16.6 %) who could not make decision on this issue. The percentage in this indicator did not score highly bearing in mind that more than a quarter of the participants were in disagreement, thus, the issue of candidates taking care of others may not have been that strong and rampant. This could have been so since in exams, everybody has to be selfish and ensure that good grades are attained instead of helping somebody with whom they won't share the marks at the end of the day. Students believed that cheating in examinations was mutually beneficial to peers hence copied exams as agreed by 17 (47.2 %) and disagreed by 15 (41.7 %) with 4 (11.1 %) being undecided. The issue of peers is strong among young persons and students to be specific but from these findings, it was not all that strong.

There was belief in low academic ability causing some students copy exams as per majority of 27 (75 %) who agreed with only 7 (19.4 %) in disagreement and 2 (5.6 %) could not make decision. Definitely most candidates who cheat have low performance as they don't have

confidence in themselves. They have to compensate their low capability in passing exams through academic dishonesty. They are poor academically and they are looking for ways and means of filling this gap. The inability to pass in examinations drove the desire to copy exams amongst students as per the majority of 29 (80.6 %) agreeing and 5 (13.8 %) in disagreement and 2 (5.6 %) were undecided. The cheating group was sure that they could not make it and so, they were dishonest in exams.

These findings from the questionnaire of the principals and teachers were in total agreement with many other findings found globally. Whichever the case, cheating in exams is evil and must not be tolerated, indeed, it must be heavily punished to avoid producing poor students in the system of education. The findings are congruent with Omonijo, Rotimi and Uche (2014) that personality A and B have a noteworthy association with academic dishonesty ( $r=0.43$ ;  $p<0.05$ ). The findings support Eyang, David and Umoh (2014) that students with a high level of carefulness and sociability are more motivated to study and can reach high levels in scientific academic competencies. Lundberg (2013) analyzed the impact of cognitive ability and personality traits on college graduation in a cohort of young Americans, and how such traits vary by family background. The study failed to reveal how personality traits (honesty, carefulness and coercion) influence academic dishonesty which was filled by the current study. The researcher therefore concluded that personality traits (honesty, coercion, and carefulness) influence the magnitude of academic dishonesty. The researcher gathered information from the students who filled their questionnaire. The results were computed and presented in Table 2.

**Table 2: Students' Responses in Students' Personality Traits on Academic Dishonesty**

Personality traits statements		SD	D	U	A	SA
I copy exams since they are usually difficult	N	454	146	31	47	53
	%	62.1%	20%	4.2%	6.4%	7.3%
Examinations are usually a punishment to me and I copy them	N	452	191	25	29	34
	%	61.8%	26.1%	3.4%	4%	4.7%
I engage in cheating since I never prepare well for examinations hence, I copy exams	N	401	131	53	84	62
	%	54.8%	17.9%	7.3%	11.5%	8.5%
I don't have the capacity to attain the quality grades expected of me, hence the copying of exams	N	435	154	42	58	42
	%	59.5%	21.1%	5.7%	7.9%	5.7%
My peers influence me to cheat in examinations thus causing me to copy exams	N	419	151	40	65	56
	%	57.3%	20.7%	5.5%	8.9%	7.7%
I fear to fail my peers by not attaining quality grades hence the necessity of copying the exams	N	424	130	41	70	66
	%	58%	17.8%	5.6%	9.6%	9%
I gain pressure by helping other students not to fail in examinations by whatever means hence I copy exams	N	310	156	46	97	122
	%	42.4%	21.3%	6.3%	13.3%	16.7%
I know that my peers mean well when they assist me with examinations materials for quality grades so I copy	N	296	129	66	113	127
	%	40.5%	17.6%	9%	15.5%	17.4%
The low belief in my academic ability drives me to copy exams	N	440	121	36	77	57
	%	60.2%	16.6%	4.9%	10.5%	7.8%
Inability to pass in examinations drives my desire to copy exams	N	451	131	40	42	67
	%	61.7%	17.9%	5.5%	5.7%	9.2%

**Source: The researcher, 2023**

From the table, the fact that students copied exams since they were usually difficult was not acceptable as per 600 (82.1 %) who disagreed and only 100 (13.7 %) who could agree with a mere 31 (4.2 %) undecided. This was contrary to views of the principals and teachers. The students might have not realized that the drive for them to cheat was the nature of exams. Those who cheat do so basically because they find exams too difficult for them and the principals and teachers were correct in this matter. It seemed that students were defending themselves, but the fact remained that there was always a motive in academic dishonesty.

The fact that examinations were usually a punishment to students and made them to copy was not agreeable as 643 (88 %) who disagreed as only 63 (8.6 %) could agree, with 25 (3.4 %) making no decision. This was not the view of principals and teachers though not so significantly. Many students may not have understood the reasons for exams. The assessment could have been misunderstood. However, there was no cause for them to agree that they were being punished through exams and

this was why they refused the indicator. Nevertheless, the interpretation of the principals and teachers may have been geared to the fact that they assumed that this was the way candidates thought. The crux of the matter was that academic dishonesty should not have been practiced for any reason whatsoever.

The issue of students engaging in copying exams since they never prepared well for them was not accepted by majority of 532 (72.8 %) with only 146 (19.9 %) in agreement with 53 (7.3 %) not decided. This was again contrary to the views of their principals and teachers. To tell candidates that they were not ready for exams could have caused this discrepancy. What the principals and teachers meant was that poor preparation of exams propelled cheating and it makes sense by so saying. If candidates were armed with knowledge and fully prepared, cases of academic dishonesty would diminish. Thus, poor preparation in exams could have been blamed for academic dishonesty.

The fact that students did not have the capacity to attain the quality grades expected of them hence the copying of

exams was not accepted by 589 (80.6 %) as only 100 (13.7 %) concurred with 42 (5.7 %) making no decision. This was contrary to what the principals and teachers said. Most cheating would be for better results and this is what the students were not upbeat. It can be seen here that there was defense on the part of the students that cheating does not have anything to do with quality grades. Then, one wonders why academic dishonesty could have been reported day in day out if it was not for better results.

The peers influencing others to copy exams thus, causing lack of honesty in them was not accepted fully by 570 (77.9 %) and only 121 (16.6 %) could agree with another 40 (5.5 %) not making decision. This was not the view of the principals and teachers. Students would not accept that they were controlled by their peers to cheat. It would rather be that they cheated on their own without influence of others. However, the principals and teachers had adequate psychology knowledge to feel the effect of peers in exam cheating. The defense of the students can't hide itself in this case although they might not have realized that there was peer pressure behind their actions.

The assumption that students feared to fail their peers by not attaining quality grades hence the necessity of copying exams was not a popular idea with 570 (77.9 %) who disagreed and only 121 (16.6 %) could accept with 40 (5.5 %) undecideds. The principals and teachers did not think the same. Probably they had a better understanding of the matter more than the students. It has been seen in the data analysis that there was influence of defense among the students instead of being open and tell the truth about academic dishonesty either knowingly or unknowingly. The issue of peer pressure is so pertinent that even the students may not know that they were propelled by that pressure in their actions.

Students gaining pressure by helping other students not to fail by copying exams was denied by 466 (63.7 %) and accepted significantly by 219 (30 %) while 46 (6.3 %) were not decided. This was contrary to what the principals and teachers thought. Naturally students would not wish others to fail in the exams and especially when they could do something about it. This is obviously cheating. However, there was always the issue of time in exams. There could have been no time to waste assisting others.

The fact that peers meant well when they assisted others with examination materials for copying for quality grades had agreement among 240 (32.8 %) but the majority of 425 (58.1 %) disagreed with 66 (9 %) undecideds. The principals and teachers differed with students in this view. The essence of cheating was to score the highest marks possible. The implication that the students would cheat for no other reason, was not realistic.

The claim that low belief in academic ability drove students to copying exams was not popular among the students, with 134 (18.3 %) in agreement. The majority 561 (76.7 %) disagreed and 36 (4.9 %) could not decide. The students again, could have been defensive in this case. Candidates who don't believe in their academic capability were most likely to cheat and that is why the principals and teachers could not agree with the students in this case. It could not be accepted that inability to pass drove students' desire to copy exams as this could be agreed upon by 109 (14.9 %) and the majority of 582 (79.6 %) disagreed with a mere 40 (5.5 %) undecided. In this case, academic dishonesty could have been propelled by the fact that there was the feeling of incapability among the cheating lot.

The findings from the students concurred with Chia and Mei (2020) that even when completing anonymous self-reporting surveys, few students actually want to admit to cheating. Students were given approximately 100 surveys; 77 of them were completed and returned. 13% of individuals who responded to the study agreed that cheating occurred in their online tests, and 4% strongly agreed. However, more students disputed (40%) and strongly opposed (19%) that cheating occurred. The findings are further supported by Milumbe, Phiri and Nyirende (2022) in Zambia on descriptive survey of teachers' perceptions on triggers of academic dishonesty that, even though they may not confess it, students participate in academic dishonesty. In addition, psychodynamic theory (Freud, 1901) hypothesized such relation that when the ego is in danger, the person employs defense mechanisms to channel their impulses into appropriate behaviors or to suppress them. This hypothesis is applicable to the study since it suggests that students cheat on exams as a form of defense to avoid failing though they may not confess it.

Linear regression analysis was conducted to assess whether personality traits significantly predicted academic dishonesty. The results of the linear regression model were significant,  $F(1,729) = 338.49, p < .001, R^2 = .32$ , indicating that approximately 31.71% of the variance in academic dishonesty is explainable by personality traits. Personality traits significantly predicted academic dishonesty,  $B = 0.58, t(729) = 18.40, p < .001$ . This indicated that on average, a one-unit increase of personality traits will increase the value of academic dishonesty by 0.58 units. Table 11 summarizes the results of the regression model. The equation model becomes academic dishonesty = 0.62 + 0.58\*personality traits. Table 3 has the details.

**Table 3: Inferential Statistics in Personality Traits on Academic Dishonesty**

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	95.00% CI	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
(Intercept)	0.62	0.07	[0.49, 0.75]	0.00	9.24	< .001
Personality traits	0.58	0.03	[0.52, 0.65]	0.56	18.40	< .001

**Source: The researcher, 2023**

The findings in the inferential statistics could be compared with Benjamin, Eugene, and Mabel (2021) who investigated the effects of personality, intellectual prowess, and religiosity. To complete the Big Five Personality Inventory, 333 students (M = 20.84; SD = 4.68) were conveniently sampled. According to results from correlational and regression analysis, attitudes toward cheating were connected to personality qualities like conscientiousness, and agreeableness.

The researcher prepared and organized data collected from the field interviews. The interviews were from the County Director of Education and the Sub County Director of Education in Makueni County. The data was prepared and organized and summarized in narratives and verbatim citations as it is seen underneath.

According to these education officers, the students felt that exams were always too difficult for them. This catapulted the habit of exam cheating by copying answers in fear of failure as one officer put it,

*“Many a times, examinations have been perceived too tough. Students enter exam rooms with phobia that they are going to face a monster spectacle. This should not be the case. Exams come from materials already known by students though they may not know this. Interestingly enough, the candidates carry the so called mwakenya and copy answers from these pre-prepared documents”* (EO1).

From further interviews, the officers had feelings that many students did not take exams positively. They thought that exams were meant to punish them and should have been either easier or removed from the system. In return, they plan to copy answers as one officer said,

*“The students I have come across have had negative attitude towards examinations. They think somebody is up to punish them. I believe that such students are not psychologically prepared to face exams bravely and that is why they end up copying answers”* (EO2).

Students in many institutions fear exams due to the fact that they are not fully prepared for such exams. Some teachers fail to cover the syllabus in good time hence causing fear, panic, and unpreparedness among the

students. This has resulted to copying answers among the students to fill this gap as one officer lamented,

*“It is a serious mistake for the teachers to fail to cover the syllabus. It is even much worse when candidates are not given advice on how to prepare for examinations. Sadly, the poor performers in most cases are the ones found copying exams”* (EO3).

Preparing candidates for examinations is mandatory if there is going to be successful eradication of dishonesty in exams. One officer said,

*“I agree that poor exam preparation especially, among the young schools is prevalent. The more the students are prepared, the less the copying of exams – this is my way of thinking. Good schools don’t cheat due to the fact that they fully prepare their candidates in advance”* (EO4).

According to the interviewees, there is some truth in the fact that some students copy exams due to the fact that they have no capability to achieve attractive grades. This self-defeat was observed during the interviews as one officer said,

*“If you look carefully at the dishonest candidates, you will find that they have a history of poor performance in school. Thus, they believe that unless they copy answers, they are not able to pass. Poor performers should be encouraged by being told that they can excel in life without having to necessarily pass exams. The poor performers should be advised that they have opportunities outside examinations”* (EO5).

## Discussions

The indicators were: honesty level, carefulness effect and coercion impact. The Psychosocial Dynamic Theory being the independent variable theory, was applied in this investigation. The theory was utilized in this investigation to mean that the candidates employed defense mechanisms to avoid disappointment in exams by getting entangled in academic dishonesty. The candidates were inspired by psychosocial influences like in this first objective, the personality traits which made them embrace academic dishonesty. The inspiration to get involved in

academic dishonesty was the interacting and unbalancing amongst the id, ego and superego. The candidates who had endangered ego in exams must have utilized defense mechanisms to evade disappointment and therefore, got involved in academic dishonesty.

There was the dependent variable theory. The Theory of Planned Behaviour was employed here by the investigator. The theory was applicable in this investigation to this study in that candidates made logical and reasoned decisions to get involved in academic dishonesty. They deliberately chose to participate in academic dishonesty with hope of attaining good results. Suppose candidates observed others being deceitful or they had been deceitful fruitfully in the past, they were likely going to involve themselves in academic dishonesty. If students' peers approved dishonest, they were expected to participate in academic dishonesty. If candidates viewed academic deceit as an action resulting into evading disappointment in exams, they were likely to get entangled with academic dishonesty.

In this objective, there existed a study gap in that Eyong, David and Umoh (2014) in their study on the influence of personality traits on academic performance of secondary school students in Cross River State, Nigeria found that students with a high level of carefulness and sociability were more motivated to study and could reach high levels in scientific academic competencies. They reported that neuroticism was negatively linked with academic performance in students. Individuals with a high level of self-confidence tended to have a low level of interest in science and a low level of beliefs in co-curricular activities. The current study went further to explore how other personality traits (honesty and coercion) influenced academic dishonesty which was a research gap for this study. Honesty was indeed essential if academic dishonesty was going to be minimized.

From the investigation findings, the principals and teachers had somehow different views in this objective. The principals and teachers had in mind that candidates had an attitude that exams were not easy and that was the reason why the students copied them. There was agreement that dishonest was an outcome of bad preparation for exams. The participants agreed that the students were dishonest in exams because they thought that they did not have the capacity to achieve excellent marks and for this reason, they copied exams. There was peer effect which propelled deceitfulness resulting to exams copying. There was fear of disappointing and failing peers which prompted dishonest behavior. There was pressure by some candidates assisting others to avoid failure. Dishonest in exams was a benefit to peers therefore, ending in copying examinations. It was seen

that low academic capability was one reason for copying exams.

The students in their questionnaire, reacted in a different way from the principals and teachers in most cases. They did not accept that they copied exams because they were not easy thus, being contrary to their principals and teachers. They similarly, did not agree that exams were punitive and that is why they copied them. They refused to agree that they copied exams because they did not prepare adequately for them. They rejected that they did not have the capacity to attain the quality grades expected of them. Peer influence was also not accepted as well as the belief in academic ability.

An element of self-defense amongst the students could be seen from the results. There was a feeling that the students were being accused of academic dishonesty. For this reason, they answered the questions in a defensive manner. The principals and teachers had reality in mind. They were not bias. They gave a true picture of the situation on the ground. In essence the students were expected to deny any allegations that they had academic dishonesty. The views of the principals and teachers were backed up in the qualitative data from interviews of the education officers.

## **5. Conclusion and Recommendations**

### **5.1 Conclusions**

The study concluded that students' personality traits explained a significant proportion of variance in academic dishonesty. This is evident since students' personality traits significantly influenced academic dishonesty in schools in Makueni. This shows that the government and other education stakeholders need to put in context the improvement on aspects of students' personality traits such as hard work, integrity and honesty to curb academic dishonesty in secondary schools.

### **5.2 Recommendations**

Grounded on the study results, recommendations were done for the purpose of practice. The Ministry of Education should assist in hiring, promoting, training and development of qualified teachers and counselors 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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