



Influence of Students' Self-awareness on Academic Dishonesty in Public Secondary Schools in Makueni County, Kenya

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Abstract: *There is a universal worry about academic dishonesty especially in African nations. The key aim of this investigation was to examine the influence of students' self-awareness on academic dishonesty in public secondary schools in Makueni County, Kenya. The investigation used theories namely: Psychosocial Dynamic Theory and the Theory of Planned Behaviour. The research 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. The study utilized 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 analyzed using frequencies and percentages and presented through tables and figures. Inferential statistics was analyzed through linear regression and presented through tables while qualitative data was analyzed thematically and presented through narration and verbatim citations. The study findings were that self-awareness meaningfully influenced academic dishonesty. The research found out that there was necessity to enhance the students' self-awareness. It was suggested that integrating involvements like introducing capable, knowledgeable and qualified counsellors in schools was essential to eradicate academic dishonesty.*

Key Words: *Academic dishonesty, Examinations, Influence, Public secondary schools, Students' Self-awareness*

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1. Introduction

It is likely that when students experience pressure, they 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 don't care since all others are doing the same (Naliaka, Chumbe, Muthamia & Liambila (2015).

Though the origins of the vice of academic dishonesty is unknown, Mweru et. al (2014) dated it back to thousands of years ago. The first known reality was in Chinese public service exams where examinations were done in isolated

cubicles to avert candidates from peeping at the exam papers of their classmates. In this process, candidates looked for materials prior to entering the cubicles. Perry (2010) established that during the 19th and the 20th centuries, academic dishonesty became predominant in the United States of America. It was rampant at every level of education. In high schools in the US, it was perpetually increasing as an issue though it had jail terms for the offenders if found dishonest. In Pakistan for example, Nazir (2011) maintained that the examination structure was vigorous but the lack of morals in the culture of Pakistan caused many complications for the education system in that country.

In Nigeria, exam cheating swelled in the 1970s, when youths who were in the schools and campuses before the onset of the Nigerian civil war in 1967 were engaged in the army during the war. These came back after the war in 1970 and returned to learning to further their education (Saana, Ablodeppy & Mensah, 2016). Those youths only had ideas on guns and gunfire but not what came out from the mouth of their teachers. They suddenly grew psycho-emotionally disturbed and could not be ready for exams and pursued other means of success in the examinations such as bribing supervisors to authorize them to be entangled in academic dishonesty. There was for example, employment of impersonators who did examinations for them.

In Kenya, the extent to which academic dishonesty occurred in the school system was extremely perturbing. The end of year exam results reports indicated that academic dishonesty was extensive causing some institutions and candidates' exam results be cancelled each time an exam was done. 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 jeopardized the fairness and impartiality of examinations should be exposed, and if possible, diminished out (Kagete, 2018). Further, it was found 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 vigorously reported unceasingly for some years. In 2015, Makueni County recorded the highest number of candidates who were involved in academic dishonesty in the KCSE examination. The students whose examination results were annulled were 382 who sat their exams in 22 centers in the county (*Daily Nation*, 2016). In 2017, a total of 113 students had their results annulled and in 2019, Makueni County was amongst the counties that were under inspection for dishonesty in KCSE. In 2021 KCSE examinations, one police officer and three teachers were caught circulating Kiswahili paper 2 examination which were leaked and which originated from Ngungi secondary school in Mbooni East Sub County 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 in full while the remaining 37 got Y grades in Kiswahili. In the same year, the results of every

candidate in Nduluni secondary school in Makueni County were invalidated. The candidates admitted sneaking into examination hall with written answers stuffed inside belts, ties and underclothing. In Two Travelers Oasis Center secondary school in Makueni county, 2 students were detained having been found with a chemistry paper in their phones (Makueni County Education Report, 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.

Furthermore, 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 widespread 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 advanced 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 such as self-awareness on academic dishonesty 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.

In the year 2022, the education cabinet secretary, Hon. Ezekiel Machogu, claimed that there was no cheating. He was grilled by the parliamentary committee dealing with education matters in the parliament who claimed that there was massive cheating during that year (Owiti, 2023). This work examined the influence of students' self-awareness on academic dishonesty in Makueni county, henceforth filling the study gap.

2. Literature Review

Self-awareness is the capability to distinguish and identify individual's own limitations as well as strengths, feelings and emotions, as well as the ability to comprehend how these factors may influence one's performance. It is a cognitive ability that denotes a certain stage in an individual's self-development. Students who are aware of their abilities and emotions are more likely to be introspective, recognizing their current state of being and the causes for their emotional reactions (Dishon, Julian, Critchley & Kaufman, 2017). Moreover, improving one's self-awareness may help one to better recognize their unique strengths and limitations in a variety of areas, which can help students make better decisions and manage themselves. In addition, recognizing how one's ideas and emotions influence their behavior, may motivate one to make good changes in their life and adopt a fresh perspective on their own choices, interests, and actions. Self-awareness is an important skill because it not only promotes optimism and responsible decision-making, but also serves as a basis for forming and maintaining good relationships with others.

Brenner (2013) in a study on self-awareness and sojourner adjustment over time in USA, provided a broad overview of the relationship between self-awareness and attitudes towards academic dishonesty. The author noted that students have the capacity to control their academic dishonesty. Self-awareness may assist a person recall information while also diverting their attention away from academic dishonesty. The study used a descriptive survey approach with questionnaires as the primary data collection instruments. Findings from Chi-square tests indicated that self-awareness had a strong association with attitudes towards academic dishonesty. While that study used a descriptive survey approach, the current study used a mixed methodology approach.

A study in Portugal by Cristovao, Valentine and Rebelo (2020) reported emotional intelligence and self-awareness as two of the most fundamental students' characteristics needed to create positive effects on learning. The investigation was conducted on the backdrop of the emphasis on the need to equip students with critical thinking, creativity, and social-emotional management skills. The authors had observed that because self-awareness and emotional processes influence how and what students learn, emotions may either promote or hinder student's academic engagement, dedication, and eventual school achievement. The findings indicated that learning that focusses on self-awareness has a significant beneficial effect on both teachers and students. In the study, teachers observed significant changes in student motivation, interpersonal connections, and classroom atmosphere.

However, the study did not address academic dishonesty which was a research gap for the current study.

Emotional self-regulation is critical for establishing personal relationships, achieving success at school or work and sustaining physical health (Benjamin & Orodho, 2014). Students who are able to regulate their emotional experiences in emotionally charged learning situations are more successful in their peer interactions. In comparison, students who are often exposed to intense emotions without developing constructive coping mechanisms frequently engage in academic dishonesty. Portela-Pino, Teresa and Maria (2021) observed that students who lack emotional control were unlikely to think effectively and had a desire to learn or perform well in educational settings. Swain, Gray, Vella, and Denise (2019) conducted a study with the purpose of determining how self-awareness and other student and school-level factors influenced academic performance. The study was conducted with data from autumn 2010 to winter 2016. The collected data was used to examine the impact of self-awareness on student success using Hierarchical Linear Modeling. The results showed that self-awareness, such as self-management and competence, explained a significant amount of variability in students' mathematics and reading achievement. The current study used concurrent triangulation research design rather than longitudinal research design used in that study. Again, the current study focused on the association between self-awareness and academic dishonesty rather than the academic performance addressed in that study.

Ahmed, Hamzah and Abdullah (2020) did an investigation in Malaysia to establish how self-awareness affected students' attitudes towards learning. With 207 Junior Secondary School students enrolled in Form 3, a quasi-experimental pre-test post-test non-equivalent design was used. Two groups of students were formed: an experimental group and a control group. The experimental group received instruction using a self-awareness method that entailed self-management skills, whereas the control group received instruction through a conventional teaching style. The development of self-awareness competence was assessed using a questionnaire administered at the start and conclusion of each lesson. Students in the self-management learning method classroom showed significantly higher levels of learning motivation and self-awareness competence than students in the conventional teaching approach group, according to the findings of the analysis of covariance. The reviewed study left some contextual gaps, it was conducted in a developed country and its findings may, therefore, not be generalizable to students in a context like Makueni County in Kenya. While that study provided evidence of the relationship between self-awareness and attitudes towards learning, this current study was about the influence of self-awareness on academic dishonesty. Again, mixed methodology research design

was utilized in the current study rather than the experimental strategy used in that study as research gaps.

In the year 2021, cases of cheating and exam cancellation rose from 287 in 2020 to 441. These cases included: unauthorized materials, mobile phones, impersonation, collusion, and causing disturbance in examination room. In the year 2022, the education cabinet secretary reported that there were no dishonest cases. He was questioned by the parliamentary committee on education. It was claimed that there was massive cheating during that year (Owiti, 2023).

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 self-awareness. 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 non-numerical and numerical 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 non-numerical and numerical 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. Descriptive information was examined using frequencies and percentages and presented through tables and figures. Inferential statistics was scrutinized through linear regression and presented through tables while qualitative data was analyzed thematically and presented through narration and verbatim citations. Concurrent triangulation research design was further explained in the figure 1 below.

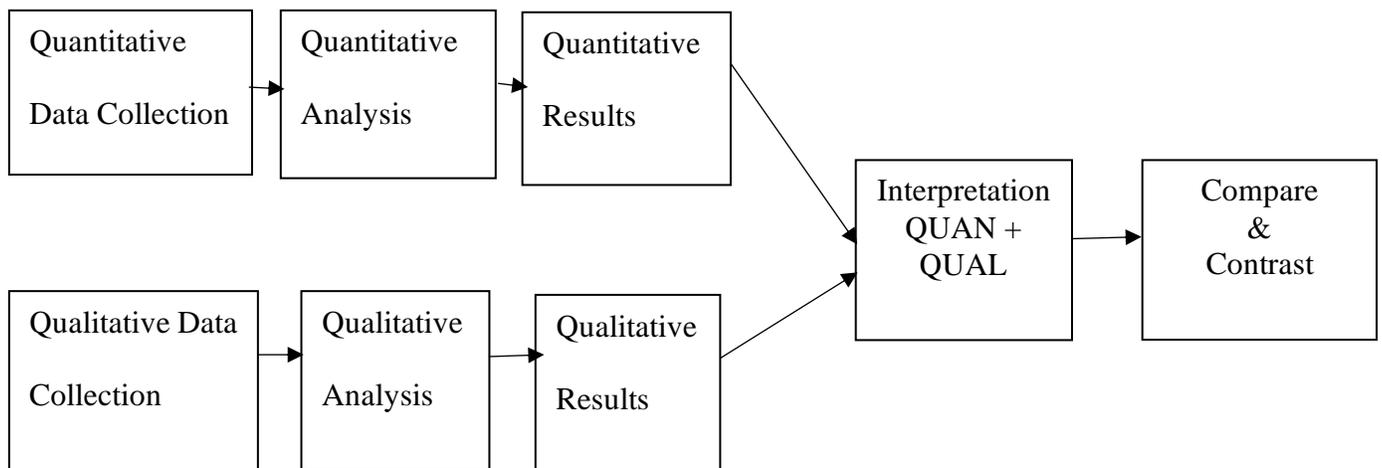


Figure 1: Research Design. Source: Adopted from Creswell, 2014

The targeted participants were 79,122. This consisted of 75,000 students, 3,865 teachers, 250 principals, 6 SCDEs and 1 CDE. 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 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 to gain a more complete understanding of the phenomenon being studied.

4. Results and Discussion

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

4.1 Descriptive Statistics Analysis

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' Self-awareness on Academic Dishonesty

Students' self-awareness statements		SD	D	U	A	SA
Students cheat in examinations after observing others doing so hence leakage in exams	N	1	7	1	14	13
	%	2.8%	19.4%	2.8%	38.9%	36.1%
Cheating in examination is evil, though the society does not mind quality grades obtained through leakages	N	2	0	2	12	20
	%	5.6%	0.0%	5.6%	33.3%	55.5%
Students cheat since they feel the chances of being caught in leakage are low	N	2	10	6	12	6
	%	5.6%	27.7%	16.7%	33.3%	16.7%
Students cheat through leakage since they inadequately prepare for exams	N	1	4	0	19	12
	%	2.8%	11.1%	0.0%	52.8%	33.3%
Poor timing for examinations drives students to leakage of exams	N	5	11	2	14	4
	%	13.9%	30.6%	5.6%	38.8%	11.1%
The challenging nature of some examinations lead to leakage of exams	N	5	7	3	14	7
	%	13.9%	19.4%	8.3%	38.9%	19.4%
Students cheat through leakage since there is a disconnect between examinations and reality of life	N	3	13	8	8	4
	%	8.3%	36.1%	22.2%	22.2%	11.1%
Some examinations are beyond the levels of the students hence creating the necessity for leakage	N	7	9	3	13	4
	%	19.4%	25.0%	8.3%	36.1%	11.1%
Some exam test items are abstract in reality leading to leakage	N	7	12	3	9	5
	%	19.4%	33.3%	8.3%	25.0%	13.9%

Source: The researcher, 2023

From the table, the fact that students cheat in exams after observing others doing so hence leakage in exams was

accepted by the participants as per 27 (75.0 %) and disagreed by 8 (22.2 %) with only 1 (2.85 %) made no

decision. There has been always the tendency of students copying what their peers do. To alleviate cheating in exams, there must be thorough counselling done to candidates and be informed that each of them is a unique individual different from all others. The students did not think the same in their responses probably since they were defending themselves on the issue of peer pressure. Leakages in exams have been found among students who don't mind the vice since they hunt for better results without caring for the ethics required.

It was acceptable that though dishonest in exams was evil, the society did not mind excellent grades obtained through leakages as per 32 (88.9 %) and disagreed by only 2 (5.6 %) and another insignificant 2 (5.6 %). According to the participants, academic dishonesty had become a necessary evil among the community members. Cases of parents giving huge sums of money to buy fake papers have been reported in the media. It has become part and parcel of the evil of corruption in the society.

It was agreed that students cheated since they felt that the chances of being caught in leakage was low as per 32 (88.8 %) who agreed with a mere 2 (5.6 %) disagreeing and another 2 (5.6 %) did not make decision. There have been sophisticated tricky ways of cheating making it difficult for any authorities to catch the dishonest candidates. However, no matter how careful the misdemeanors are, there have been very high chances of being caught since there have been keen invigilation and supervision during the exam period. There is no need to take the risk which costs cancellation of results for the students.

Students cheated through leakage since they inadequately prepared for exams as per 31 (86.1 %) in agreement, with 5 (13.9 %) in disagreement and no participant was undecided. Failure to prepare for exams could be the biggest cause for academic dishonesty. Normally, well prepared candidates have no place for academic dishonesty. They know what they are supposed to do and for this reason, leaking exams is a waste of time. To avoid cheating in exams, candidates should be thoroughly prepared and drilled to use their memory individually during examination period.

Poor timing for exams drove students to leakage of exams as agreed by 18 (50.0 %) and denied by a significant figure of 16 (44.4 %) with only 2 (5.6 %) undecideds. This had a mixed feeling. The issue of timing exams may not hold water. This is so since schools embrace syllabus coverage. Guess work may not be tolerated as far as exams are concerned. From these responses, it seems that proper preparation and frequent revisions were a must. This would enable candidates to avoid academic dishonesty during the exams.

The challenging nature of some exams lead to leakage of exams as agreed by 21 (58.3 %) with 12 (33.3 %) in disagreement and 3 (8.3 %) could not decide. More than 30% disagreed being, of course, a significant number. Exams have been done for years. Teachers and candidates have done revision on the past papers. Currently there are no new exams except the Kenya Primary Schools Education Assessment (KPSEA) which is a Competence Based Curriculum (CBC) exam to be done for the first time at the end of 2022. The KCSE had been in place for a very long period hence students have a clue of what is tested from the past papers.

The fact that students cheated through leakage since there was a disconnect between examinations and reality of life was denied by 16 (44.4 %) and accepted by 12 (33.3 %) with 8 (22.2 %) could not decide. There was a mixed feeling in this indicator. The responses here seem to indicate that there is some truth about the irrelevance of exams which detached students from the real-life situations. Before the introduction of the CBC system, there had been criticisms about the irrelevance of the existing structure of schooling which had failed to address the needs of the society, which could lead to academic dishonesty.

There were mixed feelings in that, some exams were beyond the levels of the students hence creating the necessity for leakage as 17 (47.2 %) could agree with almost similar number, 16 (44.4 %) disagreeing and an insignificant figure of 3 (8.3 %) was not able make any decision. May be some questions found in exams were not up to the standard of the candidates. This may happen rarely as the participants were almost divided on the issue. In most cases, exam items have been to the level of the candidates since there have been no many complains on this matter. The indicator below shows that there was no likelihood of getting absurd questions in the exams. At any case, this should not be an excuse for academic dishonesty.

Most participants did not agree that some exam test items were abstract leading to leakage as seen in 19 (52.8 %) who disagreed and 14 (38.9 %) in agreement with another 3 (8.3 %) making no decision. A slight majority supported this. There is a likelihood of getting some unexpected exam items possibly due to the level of ambiguity found in them. Language in exam questions may be an issue as candidates may interpret it wrongly. It is therefore, necessary for teachers to train students the exam language thoroughly to avoid any confusion during exams.

These findings from the principals and teachers were related to many other findings worldwide. For instance, the findings concurred with psychological findings done by Dishon, Julian, Critchley, and Kaufman (2017). In their findings, it was established that students who were aware of their capabilities and feelings were more expected to be

thoughtful, recognized their current state of being and the causes for their emotional reactions. Furthermore, it was seen that improving one's self-awareness could assist one to better identify their exceptional strengths and limitations in various areas, which could help students make better decisions and manage themselves. Again, distinguishing how one's ideas and emotions influenced their behavior could inspire one to make decent changes in their life and accept a fresh perspective on their own choices, interests, and actions. Self-awareness was significant skill since it

promoted optimism and responsible decision making. It likewise, served as a foundation for formation as well as and upholding good relations with other students.

Again, on self-awareness, the investigator collected facts from the students who filled 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 Self-awareness on Academic Dishonesty

Students' self-awareness statements		SD	D	U	A	SA
I cheat in exams because every other student cheats through exam leakage	N	519	116	28	23	45
	%	71.0%	15.9%	3.8%	3.1%	6.2%
Though cheating is wrong, the society doesn't mind leakage for quality grades	N	278	186	72	89	106
	%	38.0%	25.4%	9.8%	12.2%	14.5%
Though cheating is wrong, the risk of getting caught is low hence the leakage of exams	N	379	142	56	82	72
	%	51.8%	19.4%	7.7%	11.2%	9.8%
I rarely prepare well for exams, hence the cheating tendency through leakage of exams	N	430	125	56	64	56
	%	58.8%	17.1%	7.7%	8.8%	7.7%
I have inadequate time to tackle exams therefore I don't mind leakage	N	401	171	50	59	50
	%	54.9%	23.4%	6.8%	8.1%	6.8%
I tend to entertain leakage since exams are usually challenging	N	396	133	53	78	71
	%	54.2%	18.2%	7.3%	10.7%	9.7%
I tend to think that examinations are irrelevant to life and thus, I don't mind leakage	N	391	134	60	63	83
	%	53.5%	18.3%	8.2%	8.6%	11.4%
Exams tend to have difficulty tasks given thus; leakage is not evil	N	398	151	47	63	72
	%	54.4%	20.7%	6.4%	8.6%	9.8%
I support leakage since exams tend to test materials that are not covered in class	N	436	134	53	52	56
	%	59.6%	18.3%	7.3%	7.1%	7.7%

Source: The researcher, 2022

From the table, it was clear that the students could not agree that they cheated in exams because every other student cheated through exam leakage as seen in 635 (86.9 %) who disagreed as only 68 (9.3 %) accepted the idea with 28 (3.8 %) making no decision. This was contrary to what the principals and teachers thought. Basically, it is accepted that peer force is always inside candidates and they are likely to entertain leakage of exams following others. There was defense from the side of students either knowingly or unknowingly.

The majority of 464 (63.5 %) did not support the fact that though cheating was wrong, the society did not mind leakage for quality grades. The accepting side had 195 (26.7 %) which was significant since it was above a quarter of the participants and for this matter could not have been ignored. Those who failed to take sides were 72 (9.8 %). From these results, it seemed that the candidates were in favour of academic dishonesty. Obviously, this was to their own benefit and for this reason, they had no alternative but to support it. It also reflected the vice of exam cheating as being a community vice. It seemed that the end justified the means in this case.

Though cheating was wrong, the danger of being discovered was low hence the leakage of exams. The majority of 521 (71.3 %) disagreed with this statement with 154 (21.1 %) agreeing and another 56 (7.7 %) taking no sides. The sophisticated tactics used by candidates to cheat had impact such that it was not easy to catch them. However, still it was possible to catch them as the exam staff were aware of such tactics. As new methods of cheating were being used, new approaches were applied to make sure that the culprits did not go scot-free.

The students denied that they rarely prepared well for exams, hence the cheating tendency through leakage of exams as per 555 (76.0 %) who disagreed and with 120 (16.4 %) in agreement while 56 (7.7 %) were not decided. Looking at these responses, it could be seen that there was defense among the students. Failure to prepare for exams was established as a cause for academic dishonesty by the principals and teachers in their questionnaire. A well-prepared candidate might not have the time to cheat in examinations.

The majority of students denied that they had inadequate time to tackle exams therefore, they did not mind leakage as per 572 (78.2 %) with 109 (14.9 %) accepting and 50 (6.8 %) failing to take sides. Timing is normally done by the examining body which is the Kenya National Examinations Council. Each exam is given adequate time. It is not clear how cheating would alleviate the issue of insufficient time during the exams. Even academic dishonesty needs time.

The idea that students tended to entertain leakage since exams were usually challenging was not welcome as per 529 (72.4 %) with 149 (20.4 %) accepting and 53 (7.3 %) making no decision. The examining body has moderation of exams before they are printed. Exams measure set objectives amongst the candidates. They should be neither too tough nor too cheap. Furthermore, the pass mark depends on the performance of individual papers. The tendency is that if the performance is poor due to any reason, the pass mark would be lower. Thus, this is not a valid reason for cheating in examinations.

Majority of students denied that they tended to think that examinations were irrelevant to life and thus, they did not mind leakage as per 525 (71.8 %) in disagreement with 146 (20.0 %) accepting and only a mere 60 (8.2 %) who did not make decision. The fact is that whether the exams are relevant or not, they have to be done to assess the objectives. This means that students have to pass irrespective of the relevancy or irrelevancy. Exams do not become relevant to life after candidates become dishonest.

The fact that exams tended to have difficulty tasks given thus, leakage was not evil, was not acceptable as per 549 (75.1 %) with 135 (18.5 %) accepting and 47 (6.4 %) undecideds. The students wanted to justify that leakage of exams was not a bad thing considering the heavy task. Cheating could not solve this problem. It was not acceptable that students supported leakage since exams tended to test materials that were not covered in class as per 570 (78.0 %) and accepted by 108 (14.8 %) with another 53 (7.3 %) taking no sides. This cannot be true since this country has only one syllabus cutting across the regions. Teachers use this syllabus. The students can take a scape goat in the fact that there could be failure in syllabus coverage. Schools must complete the curriculum timely and allow time for revision.

These findings above concurred with the work of Cristovao, Valentine and Rebelo (2020) who established that emotional intelligence and self-awareness were two of the most vital students' characteristics desired to make optimistic impacts on learning. The investigators detected that since self-awareness and emotional processes influenced how learning took place amongst students, emotions could either encourage or deter students' school attainment. It was additionally found that learning that focused on self-awareness had a noteworthy useful effect on teachers and students. On the other hand, students seemed to use defense mechanisms in their responses on this objective as shown by the psychodynamic theory. This is a clear indication that when students' ego is threatened, they use defense mechanisms to avoid examination failure by engaging in academic dishonesty.

4.2 Inferential Statistics

Linear regression analysis for self-awareness and academic dishonesty was conducted. The linear regression analysis was conducted to assess whether self-awareness significantly predicted academic dishonesty. The results of the linear regression model were significant, $F(1,729) = 546.70$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .43$, indicating that approximately 42.85% of the variance in academic dishonesty is explainable by self-awareness. Self-awareness significantly predicted academic dishonesty, $B = 0.63$, $t(729) = 23.38$, $p < .001$. This indicates that on average, a one-unit increase of self-awareness will increase the value of academic dishonesty by 0.63 units. Table 3 summarizes the results of the regression model. The regression equation becomes $\text{academic dishonesty} = 0.53 + 0.63 \times \text{self-awareness}$.

Table 3: Inferential Statistics in Self Awareness on Academic Dishonesty

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	95.00% CI	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>			
(Intercept)	0.53	0.06	[0.42, 0.64]	0.00	9.19	< .001			
Self-awareness	0.63	0.03	[0.58, 0.68]	0.65	23.38	< .001			
<i>Note.</i>	Results:	$F(1,729)$	=	546.70,	<i>p</i>	< .001,	R^2	=	.43

Source: The researcher, 2023

These inferential statistics findings concurred with Brenner (2013) who investigated self-awareness and sojourner adjustment over time in America, gave a broad impression of the association between self-awareness and attitudes towards academic deceitfulness. It was established that students had the ability to regulate their deceitfulness in exams. Self-awareness could help students remember information while diverting their focus from exam-cheating behavior.

4.3 Thematic Analysis

There was preparation and thorough organization of information gathered through interviews. Interviewed by the investigator were the County Director of Education and a Sub County Director of Education in Makueni County. The information was summarized in narratives and verbatim citations as witnessed below.

According to the education officers, there could be leakage of exams as there could be cheating occurring as students watched others who were dishonest. This was confirmed by one of the officers who said,

Many students cheat because of seeing others do the same during the exams. They encourage leakages and therefore invite academic dishonesty in so doing. It should be understood that exams must not be allowed to leak at any cost (EO1).

There was agreement on the side of the educators that dishonesty in exams was seen as bad practice by the community members. However, these same people did not care if students passed well because of leakages in exams. This was lamented by one of the officers who said,

The community is much more aware that it is unethical to be dishonest in examinations. However, it is lamentable that there is that feeling that leakage can be justified if students score highly. This has been the cancer among the communities. They seem to say that the end should and must justify the means” (EO2).

There is a common belief that students can be dishonest during exams and go scot-free. It is a notion that the likelihood of being caught was very slim and in most cases, cheating occurred unnoticed as one of the officers noted,

People think that the methods they use to cheat are too sophisticated for anyone to discover whatever could be happening. The idea that a candidate can cheat and not be caught is not correct. The exam supervisors and invigilators have always been vigilant and for this reason, rare cases of cheating go unnoticed (EO1).

It is true to say that cheating is catapulted by the fact that candidates are not well prepared for the examinations. A candidate who has been thoroughly prepared and has also done good preparations may not be tempted to cheat like one officer observed,

Candidates are tempted to be dishonest especially if they are not well prepared psychologically and cognitively. The inadequacy brings with it a lot of fear while confidence is readily found in well prepared candidates. The students who know what they are supposed to do and have covered the syllabus in good time will not be likely to be dishonest in exams. Such students will have ample time to write the answers (EO2).

Sometimes candidates and their teachers make poor timing for exams. They even predict questions that are likely to appear in the question papers. Unfortunately, they concentrate on questions instead of practicing questions from the entire syllabus. When the prediction fails, it may lead to exam leakages. This was seen by one of the education officers who said,

It is unfortunate that certain schools tend to forecast questions that might come in the exam. Once these questions fail to appear in the papers, leakage of exams is witnessed since the candidates lose confidence in themselves (EO1).

In essence, examinations have been taking a particular trend which means that they may not be too difficult or too

easy. There has always been moderation of examinations before final questions are agreed upon as one officer said,

Those who set exams are qualified people who make sure that the questions are moderated. This ensures that examinations would not be too challenging or too easy. There is a limit in either side of the coin. The examiners have to balance the questions across the entire syllabus. There is no reason why candidates must be dishonest since there is assurance that the exams are commensurate with their level of knowledge (EO2).

For a very long period, there has been a criticism that the current system of education in this country has been irrelevant to a great extent to the needs of society. This, no doubt, has caused the Competency Based Curriculum (CBC) to be implemented and currently, (2022), is in grade 6 which is the last stage in the primary schools. One of the education officers was quick to say,

Definitely the current system of education does not address the candidates' competencies hence the birth of CBC though still too young. In coming year, 2023, the first batch of CBC will be joining junior secondary schools of their choice in the seventh grade. I believe that, to a certain extent, cheating can be caused by the disconnection between exams and the real-life situations. I hope that in CBC, this problem will be minimized (EO1).

Very rarely the exam items would be above the capacity and capability of the candidates. This reduces the temptation to leak examinations and preventing students from acting as though the tests were too difficult. The Kenya National Examinations Council has made arrangements that every year the pass mark in various papers is determined by the that year's performance as one education had this to note,

The Kenya National Examinations Council does not have regular and unchangeable pass marks. In each paper, a mean score is calculated as well as the standard deviation. For KNEC to get the accurate pass mark for each paper, they subtract the standard deviation from the mean. This means that results are always based on the annual performance (EO2).

Finally, it is very rare to find questions that are weird since there is moderation of test items before they are printed. However, sometimes there could be cases of test items which need further clarification hence causing fear among the candidates as one education officer said,

Kenya National Examinations Council makes sure that any ambiguity is removed from all the test items before they are finalized and printed. It is only by chance that some items may not be clear or may be ambiguous. Nevertheless, that

should not be a reason for dishonesty in the examinations. The candidates should answer the questions in accordance with their understanding. I believe that this can be worked out during the KNEC marking such that no candidate should be deprived of their marks for not interpreting questions in the anticipated manner (EO1).

These findings are congruent with Brenner (2013) results in a study on self-awareness and sojourner adjustment over time in USA, indicating that self-awareness has a strong association with attitudes towards academic dishonesty. The findings complement Dishon, Julian, Critchley and Kaufman (2017) who observation that self-awareness promotes optimism and responsible decision-making, but also serves as a basis for forming and maintaining good relationships that minimize academic dishonesty in learners.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

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

5.2 Recommendations

Based 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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