



Ethical Values and Academic Cheating in Tanzanian Higher Learning Institutions

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Abstract: Academic cheating remains a critical challenge to the credibility of higher learning institutions, affecting educational quality and the professional competence of graduates. This study examined the forms of academic cheating, the role of students' ethical values in reducing such practices, and the implications of cheating for future job performance, using the selected higher learning institution as a case. A mixed-methods approach was adopted, involving quantitative data from 390 students through structured questionnaires and qualitative insights from 30 academic and administrative staff via interviews. The findings showed that plagiarism, peer-to-peer copying, unauthorized use of mobile phones during examinations, impersonation, and alteration of academic records were common practices, often facilitated by inadequate enforcement and limited ethical awareness. Respondents highlighted that promoting integrity, accountability, fairness, ethical education, and role modeling by lecturers significantly contributed to reducing dishonesty. Cheating was also linked to diminished workplace competence, including poor decision-making, reduced problem-solving ability, lower confidence, unethical behavior, high turnover, and reputational risks for employers. The study concludes that ethical reinforcement and robust institutional mechanisms are essential to curb academic dishonesty and safeguard graduate performance. It recommends that higher learning institutions, in collaboration with the Tanzania Commission for Universities (TCU) and the National Council for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (NACTVET), strengthen ethics integration, enforce policies, promote peer accountability, and conduct compliance audits. Further research is recommended on emerging digital forms of cheating and their long-term impact on professional outcomes.

Keywords: Academic Cheating, Integrity, Ethical Values, Higher Learning Institutions, Students, Graduates, Cheating Techniques

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1. Introduction

Academic cheating remains one of the most persistent challenges facing higher education globally. It threatens learning outcomes, undermines institutional credibility, and diminishes public confidence in education systems (Mattar, 2022; Eaton & Turner, 2020). Evidence from developed countries shows that students often resort to dishonest practices under pressure. Such pressure ranges from the desire to succeed, compete, and to match the behavior of peers in demanding disciplines such as business, engineering, and health sciences (Mattar, 2022). The spread of digital technologies has only

deepened the problem. Online learning environments create opportunities for innovation, but they also open doors to new and more sophisticated forms of cheating, which are harder to detect and control (Eaton & Turner, 2020). Institutional weaknesses further exacerbate the issue. Ambiguous academic policies, inconsistent enforcement, and the absence of a strong ethical culture leave students more inclined to engage in misconduct (Harding, Mayhew, Finelli, & Carpenter, 2007; McCabe & Trevino, 2002). These realities make it clear that understanding the roots of academic dishonesty is not optional; rather, it is essential for developing strategies that preserve academic integrity worldwide.

Research shows that the prevalence of academic cheating is far from uniform across regions. Cultural norms, institutional frameworks, and educational traditions all play a role in shaping student behavior. In Scandinavian countries, the United States, and the United Kingdom, reported cases of academic dishonesty are comparatively low. By contrast, higher rates are consistently observed in Southern and Eastern Europe (McCabe & Trevino, 2002). Even within countries, the picture can be complex. McCabe, Butterfield, and Treviño (2017) note that in the United States, nearly 68 percent of college students admitted to some form of cheating during their studies, with plagiarism and unauthorized use of online resources becoming increasingly common. These patterns suggest that cheating is both a global and a context-sensitive phenomenon. Policies, enforcement mechanisms, and cultural attitudes toward integrity all interact to determine how widespread the problem becomes. Recognizing these variations is critical for designing effective interventions that can address academic dishonesty across different educational contexts.

Country-level evidence highlights how academic dishonesty takes different forms across contexts. In Canada, Pichette, Brumwell and Rizk (2020) reported that 25 percent of students admitted to misconduct in online learning, a figure that underscores how virtual platforms create unique vulnerabilities. The United States shows a different picture. Grimes (2004) observed that students there often regard academic cheating as less serious than dishonesty in professional settings, pointing to a cultural divide between academic and workplace ethics. These contrasts remind us that cheating is never only about rules; it is deeply shaped by cultural attitudes, institutional environments, and societal expectations of integrity.

Efforts to address academic cheating in developed countries have been in place for decades. The problem is recognized as a threat not only to learning but also to the credibility of higher education institutions. Universities have responded by tightening examination procedures, adopting plagiarism detection software, and running campaigns designed to build a culture of integrity (Mattar, 2022; Pichette *et al.*, 2020). On a wider scale, the UNESCO Declaration on Academic Integrity (UNESCO, 1997) called for honesty, fairness, trust, and responsibility as universal academic values. Yet cheating has not disappeared. Sendur (2022) observes that new technologies often make dishonesty more sophisticated, sidestepping rather than resolving the underlying ethical problems. Taken together, these developments point to the need for stronger institutional frameworks, continuous ethical education, and cultural shifts if academic integrity is to be meaningfully safeguarded.

In developing countries, academic cheating is influenced by a combination of socio-economic, cultural, and institutional factors. Research from West Africa shows that academic dishonesty is widespread. For example, the study by Ogunjemilua and Oluwadare (2021) found

that nearly half of students in Nigerian universities admitted to engaging in some form of cheating during their studies. Similarly, studies in other African nations highlight that limited resources, inadequate academic integrity policies, and intense academic competition increase students' propensity to engage in plagiarism and other dishonest practices (Anney & Mosha, 2015). In Ethiopia, Teferra (2001) noted that academic dishonesty is pervasive, with students often resorting to cheating due to pressures to succeed in a competitive academic environment. Teferra further noted that students frequently engage in academic dishonesty through cheating on exams and improperly exchanging answers when completing assignments. Additionally, research in South Africa revealed that over 1,400 students were found guilty of academic dishonesty in 2014 alone, whereby, 20 of them were expelled from the university (Teferra, 2001). These regional patterns underscore the need for contextually informed strategies to promote academic integrity and mitigate unethical academic behavior across diverse educational settings.

In African higher education, academic dishonesty is not the product of a single cause. Socio-economic pressures, institutional weaknesses, cultural practices, and technology all play a role (Ogunjemilua & Oluwadare, 2021; Anney & Mosha, 2015; Teferra, 2001). It has been noted that cultural background matters; in some collectivist traditions, knowledge sharing is seen as communal rather than a violation, which can clash with formal standards of academic integrity (Ogunjemilua & Oluwadare, 2021). Technology complicates the picture further. Digital platforms make dishonest practices easier, and universities often lack the resources to keep up (Sendur, 2022). Together, these cultural, technological, and institutional dimensions show how deeply layered the issue is. They also make clear that strategies to combat cheating must be grounded in local realities rather than imported wholesale from other contexts.

In Tanzania, academic dishonesty is a multifaceted issue. It is influenced by various socio-economic, cultural, and institutional factors. Building upon the regional patterns observed across Africa, studies have highlighted specific challenges within the Tanzanian context. Saana, Ablordeppey, Mensah, and Thomas (2016) in their study, found that graduate students often lack awareness of academic dishonesty policies, which increases the likelihood of unethical practices. This is compounded by socio-economic pressures, such as the need to secure employment, and environmental factors like peer influence and lenient institutional policies. The mentioned pressures were found to be significant drivers of cheating behaviors among students. Additionally, a study by Mbilinyi and Msuya (2018) noted that plagiarism has become a significant concern in Tanzanian universities, exacerbated by the increased use of online resources where students often copy and paste content without proper citation. The rise of digital platforms, as well, has made it easier for students to engage in academic dishonesty, often without adequate

detection mechanisms in place (Sendur, 2022). Furthermore, the lack of comprehensive academic integrity policies and the limited use of plagiarism detection software in many institutions contribute to the persistence of these unethical practices. These findings underscore the need for context-specific strategies that address the unique challenges faced by Tanzanian higher education institutions in promoting academic integrity.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Academic dishonesty continues to be a significant challenge in Tanzanian higher education, shaped by socio-cultural norms, individual ethical perceptions, and institutional factors. Many students engage in cheating as a way to cope with academic pressure, influenced by limited understanding of ethical standards, socio-economic challenges, peer behavior, and gender differences in ethical conduct (Mbilinyi & Msuya, 2018; Mirshekary & Lawrence, 2009; Perkins, Gezgin & Roe, 2020). Despite interventions such as integrity policies, awareness campaigns, ethics courses, and plagiarism detection tools, students still participate in misconduct including plagiarism, examination malpractice, and manipulation of assignments (Reedy, Wurm, Janssen & Lockley, 2021; Saana *et al.*, 2016). Factors such as inconsistent enforcement, varying academic workloads, and insufficient engagement with ethical principles further exacerbate the problem (Mwilongo, Kamugisha, & Kilugwe, 2024; Saana *et al.*, 2016) threatening the credibility, quality, and legitimacy of higher education institutions in Tanzania.

While some studies have examined aspects of academic dishonesty, significant gaps remain. Research studies (Amigud & Lancaster, 2019; Mattar, 2022; Saana *et al.*, 2016; Mchaney, Cronan & Douglas, 2026; McCabe *et al.*, 2017) highlights a lack of context-specific empirical studies that comprehensively link the common techniques and methods of academic cheating, students' ethical values, and the effects of cheating on graduates' future job performance in Tanzanian higher learning institutions. Specifically, the prevalent techniques and methods of academic cheating have not been systematically identified, the effect of students' ethical values on reducing academic misconduct remains unclear, and the impact of academic cheating on graduates' professional performance is underexplored. These gaps underscore the need for a study that simultaneously investigates academic behavior, ethics, and career outcomes.

1.3 Research Objectives

The current study specifically intended to examine the following research objectives namely;

1. To determine the common techniques and methods of academic cheating among students,
2. To examine the effect of students' ethical values on the reduction of academic cheating,

3. To assess the effect of academic cheating on the future job performance of graduates in Tanzanian higher learning institutions.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Framework

This study was guided by Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development (Kohlberg, 1981; Kohlberg, 1954) which provides a framework for understanding how moral reasoning shapes ethical behavior. According to Kohlberg, moral development occurs in three levels: pre-conventional, conventional, and post-conventional. At the pre-conventional level, behavior is guided mainly by self-interest and avoidance of punishment; students at this stage may engage in cheating for immediate benefits, such as higher grades. At the conventional level, individuals conform to social norms and institutional rules, avoiding misconduct to meet expectations of authority or peers. At the post-conventional level, actions are guided by internalized ethical principles, with students upholding integrity even without external oversight. Applying this theory allows the study to examine how students' ethical values influence their decisions regarding academic misconduct, providing insight into how integrity can be fostered and maintained within higher learning institutions.

2.2 Empirical Literature Review

Empirical studies reveal that academic cheating in higher learning institutions is manifested through multiple methods that evolve with technological and social changes. Amigud and Lancaster (2019) identify outsourcing of academic work as a growing form of dishonesty, where students engage third parties to complete assignments, reflecting both opportunity and motivational pressures. Similarly, Pike *et al.* (2025), Yavich and Davidovitch (2024) highlight plagiarism as one of the most prevalent cheating practices among higher education students, often facilitated by digital access to information without proper attribution. In addition, Sendur (2022) emphasizes that examination malpractice remains a persistent form of cheating, particularly in test-based assessment environments where students employ unauthorized materials or collaboration. These studies collectively indicate that academic cheating is not limited to a single behavior but involves a combination of traditional and technologically enabled practices shaped by institutional assessment systems and student coping strategies.

On the other side, it was demonstrated that students' ethical values play a critical role in shaping academic integrity behaviors. Maoz and Danino (2025) in concurrence with Koscielniak and Bojanowska (2019) found that personal values significantly predict students' likelihood to engage in or avoid dishonest academic practices, suggesting that stronger moral values reduce

cheating tendencies. Similarly, Kasler et al. (2023) report that students with prosocial values are less likely to engage in academic dishonesty, reinforcing the protective role of moral orientation. The theoretical foundation for this relationship is supported by Kohlberg's moral development theory (1954; 1981), which explains that individuals progress through stages of moral reasoning that influence ethical decision-making. In line with this, the Theory of Planned Behavior by Ajzen (1991) and its application by Harding et al. (2007) further demonstrates that attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control, many of which are shaped by ethical values, significantly influence intentions to cheat. Together, these studies confirm that strong ethical values and moral competence are key deterrents to academic dishonesty among students.

As well, research evidence suggests that academic dishonesty has long-term consequences on graduates' professional behavior and job performance. Fogarty and Holtzblatt (2025), along with the study by Mulisa and Ebessa (2021), establish a strong carryover effect of academic dishonesty into workplace misconduct, indicating that students who cheat are more likely to engage in unethical behaviors in their professional careers. Similarly, McCabe et al. (2017) argue that cheating in college fosters a pattern of ethical compromise that may extend into business and organizational environments. This is further supported by Grimes (2004), who highlights that dishonest academic behaviors are linked to future unethical decision-making in professional settings, especially when ethical standards are weakly internalized during studies. Collectively, these studies suggest that academic cheating not only undermines educational integrity but also threatens the development of trustworthy and ethically responsible professionals in the labor market.

3. Methodology

3.1 Study Approach and Design

This study adopted a mixed-methods research approach, which combined both quantitative and qualitative methods to provide a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between ethical values and academic cheating. The quantitative aspect, through structured questionnaires, allowed the collection of measurable data on the prevalence, forms, and impact of academic dishonesty among students. On the other hand, qualitative aspect, using interviews, generated deeper insights into students' ethical reasoning, cultural influences, and institutional practices. Building on this approach, the study employed a case study design, whereby, a selected higher learning institution was a central focus representing the studied issue in Tanzanian higher learning institutions. The case study design was suitable because it enabled an in-depth examination of academic cheating within its real-life context, capturing the complex interplay of ethical, socio-cultural, and institutional factors. This design not only provided

detailed, context-specific findings but also offered practical implications for strengthening academic integrity in higher education across Tanzania.

3.2 Study Area

The study was conducted at one selected higher learning institution in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. The institution was chosen because it was a prominent higher learning institution, providing a relevant context for exploring academic dishonesty in Tanzanian universities. This institution enrolls students from diverse socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. This offered multiple perspectives on ethical values and academic behavior. As well, its urban location also adds significance, as city-based institution often face intensified ethical challenges due to larger student populations, competitive academic pressures, and easy access to digital technologies that can facilitate misconduct. Furthermore, the selected institution emphasizes values such as integrity, discipline, leadership, and service, making it particularly relevant for examining whether these values are reflected in students' academic conduct. Together, these factors make the selected institution not only a practical choice for the study but also a symbolic one, where the gap between ethical ideals and real-world practices can be critically analyzed.

3.3 Population

The population for this study included both students and academic staff from the selected higher learning institution in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. The institution had approximately 15,000 enrolled students in 2024, making it a suitable context for examining issues related to academic dishonesty in higher education. Students were the main focus, given their direct involvement in academic activities and exposure to issues of dishonesty. Understanding their experiences was crucial for examining the prevalence, forms, and motivations of cheating, as well as how ethical values influence behavior. The study also included academic and administrative staff, such as deans, heads of departments, and examination officers, who play a key role in shaping policies, enforcing regulations, and modeling ethical standards. Including both students and staff allowed the study to capture diverse perspectives, providing a holistic understanding of how academic dishonesty was perceived, practiced, and addressed within the selected institution. This dual focus strengthened the reliability of the findings and aligned with the study's intention of linking individual ethical values with institutional efforts to uphold academic integrity

3.4 Sampling Procedures and Sample Size

The study used a combination of purposive and stratified sampling to select respondents from both students and academic/administrative staff at the selected higher

learning institution in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. Academic and administrative staff, including deans, heads of departments, and examination officers, were chosen purposively since they had a direct role in enforcing academic policies and fostering ethical standards. For students, stratified sampling was employed since it ensured representation across faculties, years of study, and sex. First, the student population was divided by academic programs. Then, each program was further grouped by year of study and sex. Respondents were finally selected proportionally from each stratum. This approach allowed the study to capture a wide range of perspectives on academic dishonesty and ethical values, ensuring that no key group was overlooked.

To determine the student sample size, Yamane's (1967) formula was applied:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e^2)}$$

Where n is the sample size, N is the total student population (15,000), and e is the level of precision (0.05). Substituting the values:

$$n = \frac{15,000}{1 + 15,000(0.05^2)} = \frac{15,000}{1 + 37.5} = \frac{15,000}{38.5} = 390$$

Therefore, a sample of 390 students was selected, proportionally distributed across faculties, years of study, and sex. Additionally, 30 academic and administrative staff members were purposively chosen to provide institutional perspectives, making a total sample of 420 respondents as shown in Table 1. This approach ensured that the study obtained comprehensive and reliable data, enhancing the validity of the findings and providing a holistic understanding of academic dishonesty and the role of ethical values at the study area.

Table 1: Sample Distribution of Students and Staff

Category / Program	Year of Study / Position	Male	Female	Total per Category
Education (Students)	1st Year	16	17	33
	2nd Year	16	17	33
	3rd Year	32	32	64
Social Sciences (Students)	1st Year	13	13	26
	2nd Year	14	14	28
	3rd Year	33	34	67
Leadership (Students)	1st Year	11	12	23
	2nd Year	16	16	32
	3rd Year	38	36	74
Subtotal – Students		196	194	390
Academic Staff	Lecturers	10	8	18
	Heads of Departments	4	3	7
	Deans	1	2	3
	Examination Officers	2	0	2
Subtotal – Staff		19	11	30
Grand Total (Students + Staff)		215	205	420

3.5 Data Collection Instruments

The study employed questionnaires and interview guides to collect quantitative and qualitative data, respectively. Questionnaires were administered to 390 students to gather data on the types, prevalence, and drivers of academic cheating, as well as to capture information on the role of ethical values in guiding behavior and reducing academic misconduct. The interview guide, on the other hand, was administered to 30 academic and administrative staff, including lecturers, heads of departments, deans, and examination officers, to explore institutional policies, enforcement practices, and perspectives on academic integrity. In both instruments,

complementary indicators were employed to examine academic cheating techniques, the role of ethical values in reducing academic cheating, and perceptions of the effects of academic cheating on the future job performance of graduates, thereby enhancing the depth and validity of the findings.

3.6 Validity and Reliability

To ensure the validity and reliability of the research instruments, several measures were undertaken. Validity was established through an extensive review of relevant literature on academic cheating, ethical values, and job performance to ensure that the questionnaire and interview guides adequately covered all key indicators of

the study objectives. As well, the study employed member-checks technique, whereby, instruments were reviewed by subject-matter experts in education and research methodology, whose reviews was used to refine the wording, clarity, and relevance of the items.

Regarding reliability, the internal consistency of the questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach’s alpha coefficient. The results indicated acceptable reliability level of 0.82, confirming that the instrument consistently measured the intended constructs. The reliability of qualitative data was strengthened through the use of standardized interview guides and consistent questioning across participants. Triangulation of data sources from students and academic staff further enhanced the trustworthiness and credibility of the findings.

3.7 Data Analysis

The study used two data analysis methods namely; descriptive and thematic analysis. Quantitative data from questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, while qualitative data from interviews were subjected to thematic analysis to identify key patterns, trends, and relationships. This integrated approach ensured a comprehensive understanding of ethical values and the effect to academic cheating.

3.8 Ethical Consideration

The researcher adhered to established ethical principles throughout the study. Prior to data collection, permission to conduct the research was obtained from the relevant authorities. Participants were fully informed about the purpose of the study and took part voluntarily after providing informed consent. Confidentiality and

anonymity were strictly maintained, with participants’ identities and responses kept private and used solely for academic purposes.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 The Common Techniques and Methods of Academic Cheating among Students in Higher Learning Institutions

The study examined the common techniques and methods of academic cheating among students in Tanzanian higher learning institutions. The findings, as shown in Table 2, revealed that academic cheating was widespread and manifests in multiple forms. Plagiarism in research and coursework was the most frequent, whereby, 44.9% of students reported it as often and 40.5% as very often. This highlighted persistent challenges in proper citation and academic writing skills. High prevalence was also observed in copying from peers during assessments (40.5% often, 37.2% very often) and use of mobile phones during examinations (39.2% often, 39.2% very often). This, as well, indicates that both traditional and technology-assisted cheating methods were commonly employed. Additionally, unauthorized materials and secret collaboration in online assessments were reported by roughly one-third of students as frequent or very frequent, reflecting the combination of conventional and digital avenues for dishonesty. Furthermore, results show that, hiring others to complete assignments or exams (33.6% often, 29.2% very often) demonstrates presence and rise of contract cheating. Though less common, altering official academic records or results (26.9% often, 22.6% very often), was as well, a serious threat to institutional credibility.

Table 2: Frequency and Prevalence of Academic Cheating Practices among Students

Cheating Technique	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very Often	Total
Use of mobile phones during exams	22 (5.6%)	18 (4.6%)	44 (11.3%)	153 (39.2%)	153 (39.2%)	390 (100%)
Copying from peers during assessments	13 (3.3%)	26 (6.7%)	48 (12.3%)	158 (40.5%)	145 (37.2%)	390 (100%)
Hiring others to complete assignments/exams	44 (11.3%)	35 (9.0%)	66 (16.9%)	131 (33.6%)	114 (29.2%)	390 (100%)
Use of unauthorized materials (“cheat sheets”)	26 (6.7%)	31 (7.9%)	57 (14.6%)	140 (35.9%)	136 (34.9%)	390 (100%)
Plagiarism in research/coursework	9 (2.3%)	13 (3.3%)	35 (9.0%)	175 (44.9%)	158 (40.5%)	390 (100%)
Collaborating secretly during online assessments	31 (7.9%)	26 (6.7%)	61 (15.6%)	145 (37.2%)	127 (32.6%)	390 (100%)
Altering official academic records/results	66 (16.9%)	57 (14.6%)	74 (19.0%)	105 (26.9%)	88 (22.6%)	390 (100%)

The findings show that plagiarism remains one of the most prevalent forms of academic dishonesty. This involved tendencies of students to frequently submit

their works copied from online sources or previous assignments. This unwelcomed practice is often driven by tight deadlines, insufficient mastery of research and

writing skills, and limited understanding of proper citation practices. One lecturer noted, *“Usually, many students are used to copy content directly from the internet without acknowledging sources, especially under pressure to meet submission deadlines.”* These observations from the current study are consistent with studies in Tanzania and other African contexts. Studies indicate that lack of awareness, inadequate guidance on referencing, and weak enforcement of academic integrity policies contribute to high rates of plagiarism (Mbilinyi & Msuya, 2018; Saana *et al.*, 2016; Chan, 2025). The current study’s findings are consistent with theoretical perspective, particularly the Theory of Planned Behavior. The theory suggests that students’ attitudes, perceived peer norms, and belief that plagiarism may go undetected increase the likelihood of engagement in this misconduct. These findings recommend that institutions operating under similar academic pressures and weak enforcement mechanisms may experience comparable patterns of plagiarism. The results imply the need for a combination of interventions, including structured training in academic writing and referencing, consistent use of plagiarism detection tools, and cultivating an institutional culture that values originality and ethical scholarship.

Copying from peers and the use of mobile phones during examinations continue to be widespread forms of academic dishonesty. Students often collaborate unnoticeably during assessments. Others share answers or consulting their phones to access unauthorized information. One examination officer observed, *“Many students are used to pass notes or quickly check their phones during exams. They think that invigilators may not notice what they are doing.”* Recent studies in the Tanzanian context confirm these behaviors. The study by Obed, Anangisye and Sanga (2025) for example, highlighted that peer-to-peer copying remains a common method of cheating, particularly in high-pressure courses. Besides, Ossai, Ethe, Edougha and Okeh (2023) in their study, noted that mobile phone usage has become a convenient tool for students to bypass academic rules. Such findings align with broader African studies, which indicate that exam-related dishonesty is often driven by academic pressure, peer influence, and insufficient monitoring (Ogunjemilua & Oluwadare, 2021; Mukasa, Stokes & Mukona, 2023). Taken together, the evidence indicates that examination dishonesty is likely to persist in environments where supervision is inconsistent and performance expectations are intense. By showing how peer-based and technology-assisted cheating operate together within Tanzanian higher learning institutions, this study adds context-specific insight to existing research. The findings highlight the importance of strengthening monitoring systems while simultaneously promoting ethical awareness and personal accountability among students.

The growing reliance on online assessment platforms has brought emerging challenges to academic integrity in Tanzanian higher learning institutions. Students increasingly use unauthorized materials or collaborate

secretly during examinations. One faculty dean explained, *“Online assessment is not much pupular but still emerging in our institutions. You cannot imagine that students often use multiple devices or even coordinate with peers through messaging apps during online exams just to succeed their cheating missions.”* Such cases have become frequent and concerning. Sendur (2022) and Koscielniak and Bojanowska (2019) observed similar trends. In their studies, they identified collusion and the use of unauthorized resources as dominant forms of academic dishonesty in virtual environments. Addressing these problems demands more than disciplinary action; it requires strong online proctoring systems, clear communication of integrity standards, and deliberate efforts to promote a culture of honesty and accountability. As in line with the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), students’ decisions to cheat are shaped by their personal attitudes, perceived peer norms, and sense of control over their behavior. Taken together, these patterns suggest that online cheating is likely to persist in institutions that rely heavily on digital assessments without adequate monitoring and ethical guidance. By documenting these behaviors in the Tanzanian context, this study provides new evidence on how traditional academic misconduct intersects with digital learning environments, which surely adds novel insights to the literature. These findings underscore the need for integrated strategies combining technological oversight, clear integrity policies, and ethical education to reduce online academic dishonesty.

Impersonation or hiring others to complete examinations and assignments, as well, remains a significant challenge in higher learning institutions. This practice undermines the credibility of qualifications as students bypass genuine learning and assessment. The findings are similar to those of Amigud and Lancaster (2019) who noted that contract cheating is increasingly facilitated by online platforms that offer paid services to students. Beyond impersonation, altering official academic records or results, though reported less frequently, represents one of the most severe forms of academic misconduct. Such acts, not solely compromise institutional integrity, but similarly erode public trust in higher education systems. Studies by Obed *et al.* (2025), Ardy and Fadila (2022) had similar observation from the current study’s findings. They highlighted that falsification of academic records, while less common than other dishonest practices, has long-term implications for institutional reputation and graduates’ employability. These results emphasize the importance of having stricter verification systems, the use of secure digital records, and ethical education campaigns that will deter students from engaging in these practices. Overall, these findings suggest that contract cheating and record falsification are likely to continue in institutions that lack robust monitoring and ethical guidance. By documenting these practices in the Tanzanian context, the study adds new empirical insight into high-risk forms of academic dishonesty and their consequences for institutional credibility. The evidence highlights the need for

coordinated strategies that combine secure systems, ethical training, and consistent oversight to uphold both academic integrity and public confidence.

4.2 The Effect of Students' Ethical Values on the Reduction of Academic Cheating in Higher Learning Institutions

The study sought to examine respondents' perceptions of ethical values in reducing academic cheating. Largely, the results revealed strong support across most variables. As shown in Table 3, out of the 390 respondents, 315 (80.7%) agreed or strongly agreed that cultivating a culture of academic fairness was essential in limiting cheating, while, 289 (74.1%) emphasized the importance

of accountability for academic actions. Similarly, 315 (80.8%) respondents highlighted the value of promoting integrity and honesty. Also, 297 (76.2%) respondents agreed that role modeling by lecturers and academic staff plays a significant role in shaping ethical behavior. In addition, 298 (76.4%) supported strict enforcement of academic integrity policies, and 281 (72.1%) recognized the importance of integrating ethical education into the curriculum. The lowest level of agreement was observed in peer responsibility and reporting, though still supported by 263 (67.4%) respondents. Overall, the findings demonstrate that respondents view fairness, accountability, honesty, and strong institutional measures as the most influential ethical values in reducing academic cheating.

Table 3: Respondents' Perceptions of Ethical Values in Reducing Academic Cheating

Ethical Value	Strongly Disagree f (%)	Disagree f (%)	Neutral f (%)	Agree f (%)	Strongly Agree f (%)	Total f (%)
Promoting integrity and honesty among students	13 (3.3%)	18 (4.6%)	44 (11.3%)	158 (40.5%)	157 (40.3%)	390 (100%)
Encouraging accountability for academic actions	9 (2.3%)	22 (5.6%)	48 (12.3%)	149 (38.2%)	162 (41.5%)	390 (100%)
Integrating ethical education into curriculum	22 (5.6%)	26 (6.7%)	61 (15.6%)	131 (33.6%)	150 (38.5%)	390 (100%)
Role modeling by lecturers and academic staff	18 (4.6%)	22 (5.6%)	53 (13.6%)	140 (35.9%)	157 (40.3%)	390 (100%)
Strict enforcement of academic integrity policies	13 (3.3%)	22 (5.6%)	57 (14.6%)	145 (37.2%)	153 (39.2%)	390 (100%)
Cultivating a culture of academic fairness	13 (3.3%)	18 (4.6%)	44 (11.3%)	153 (39.2%)	162 (41.5%)	390 (100%)
Encouraging peer responsibility and reporting	26 (6.7%)	35 (9.0%)	66 (16.9%)	131 (33.6%)	132 (33.8%)	390 (100%)

Ethical conduct among students plays a central role in minimizing academic dishonesty. It begins with personal conviction and extends through the influence of peers. Respondents underscored that fairness in assessment, integrity in behavior, and accountability in academic actions form the pillars of ethical decision-making. One lecturer remarked, *"In fact, when students see fairness in assessment and understand the consequences of cheating, they are more likely to make honest choices."* A Head of Department added, *"It is truly that students respect honesty and accountability when these values are consistently modeled in our classrooms."* Peer involvement, though less frequently emphasized, reveals the social dimension of ethics, where, students learn from one another, consciously or not. This aligns with earlier studies showing that internalized moral standards, clear ethical expectations, and personal responsibility discourage academic misconduct (Mattar, 2022; Teferra, 2001; But, Ahmad, Ali, & Iqbal, 2024). Ultimately, ethical awareness transforms compliance into conviction, helping students perceive academic integrity

not as a rule to follow but as a value to live by. Taken together, these findings suggest that fostering ethical behavior among students can have a wider impact across similar institutions, where role modeling and peer influence help shape a culture of integrity. The results further imply that initiatives promoting ethical education, consistent role modeling, and peer accountability can be effective in strengthening long-term academic integrity.

Institutional and structural measures also play an essential role in reinforcing these ethical values. Respondents emphasized that lecturers and academic staff serve as key role models, shaping students' attitudes through consistent behavior and guidance. As well, respondents pointed to the importance of enforcing academic integrity policies and embedding ethics education across the curriculum. One examination officer, for example, noted; *"Surely, consistent enforcement of policies and clear guidance on academic integrity, strongly sends a message to students about*

acceptable conduct.” A dean further observed, “Ethical education must be embedded in the curriculum. This is because it is not enough to punish misconduct. We have first need to teach integrity proactively.” These insights align with existing research showing that institutions with strong moral guidance, clear rules, and consistent enforcement are more successful in promoting integrity (Harding *et al* 2007; Pichette *et al* 2020; Mirshekary & Lawrence, 2009). When personal values are strengthened by institutional support, students receive continuous reinforcement of honesty, fairness, and accountability. The findings indicate that higher learning institutions can foster a lasting culture of integrity when ethical education and policy enforcement are combined with visible role modeling. By highlighting the interplay between institutional structures and individual ethical behavior, the current study contributes a deeper understanding of how organizational support reinforces student integrity. The results further imply that proactive ethics education, consistent policy enforcement, and leadership by example are essential for sustaining ethical conduct over time.

4.3 The Effect of Academic Cheating on the Future Job Performance of

Graduates from Tanzanian higher learning institutions

The study sought to examine respondents’ perceptions of the impact of academic cheating on the future job performance of graduates. The results in Table 4 indicate that a large majority acknowledged several negative consequences. Specifically, 306 respondents (78.4%) agreed or strongly agreed that cheating reduces graduates’ ability to apply knowledge in the workplace. Cheating also increases the chances of unethical behavior on the job as revealed by 307 (78.7%) respondents. Likewise, 267 respondents (68.5%) associated cheating with poor decision-making and problem-solving skills, and 276 (70.8%) linked it to lower confidence and competence at work. Additionally, 280 respondents (71.8%) reported that academic dishonesty contributes to high turnover due to underperformance. Again, 320 (82.0%) respondents considered cheating as damaging to institutional and employer reputations. Finally, 281 respondents (72.1%) agreed that academic cheating reduces innovation and productivity in professional settings.

Table 4: Respondents’ Perceptions on the Effect of Academic Cheating on the Future Job Performance of Graduates

Variable	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Reduced ability to apply knowledge in workplace	18 (4.6%)	22 (5.6%)	44 (11.3%)	153 (39.2%)	153 (39.2%)	390 (100%)
Increased chances of unethical behavior on job	13 (3.3%)	26 (6.7%)	44 (11.3%)	149 (38.2%)	158 (40.5%)	390 (100%)
Poor decision-making and problem-solving skills	26 (6.7%)	31 (7.9%)	66 (16.9%)	131 (33.6%)	136 (34.9%)	390 (100%)
Lower confidence and competence at work	22 (5.6%)	35 (9.0%)	57 (14.6%)	140 (35.9%)	136 (34.9%)	390 (100%)
High turnover due to underperformance	26 (6.7%)	31 (7.9%)	53 (13.6%)	136 (34.9%)	144 (36.9%)	390 (100%)
Damage to institutional/employer reputations	13 (3.3%)	22 (5.6%)	35 (9.0%)	158 (40.5%)	162 (41.5%)	390 (100%)
Decreased innovation and productivity	22 (5.6%)	26 (6.7%)	61 (15.6%)	140 (35.9%)	141 (36.2%)	390 (100%)

The first set of findings highlights the detrimental effects of academic cheating on graduates’ professional skills and competence. Many respondents noted that students who engage in dishonest practices often fail to acquire the knowledge and skills essential for effective workplace performance. This deficiency manifests in multiple ways. This includes reduced ability to apply knowledge, poor decision-making, limited problem-solving capacity, and low confidence in professional tasks. One dean observed, “When students cheat, they, in fact, graduate with papers but without the skills. This is why some of them struggle even in the simplest

professional assignments.” Such experiences resonance previous studies, which indicate that academic dishonesty undermines critical thinking and diminishes graduates’ preparedness for professional roles (Saana, Ablordeppey, Mensah & Karikari, 2026; Mulisa & Ebessa, 2021; Yavich & Davidovitch, 2024; Chala, 2021). The findings suggest that the impact of academic cheating extends beyond individual students, affecting institutional credibility and the perceived value of qualifications. By linking dishonest academic behavior with graduates’ professional competence, this study contributes to a clearer understanding of how academic

misconduct translates into workplace challenges. The results further imply that addressing academic dishonesty is crucial not only for safeguarding educational standards but also for ensuring that graduates are adequately prepared to meet professional expectations.

The second category relates to the broader workplace and institutional consequences of academic dishonesty. Respondents strongly associated cheating with unethical behavior on the job, higher turnover rates due to underperformance, damage to employer and institutional reputations, and reduced innovation and productivity. In strengthening the fact, one head of department explained, *“When employers realize that our graduates cannot deliver because they passed through shortcuts, the reputation of the entire institution suffers. It became a shameful situation to both a graduate and an institution. We cannot tolerate that to happen.”* These findings are consistent with research by McCabe *et al.* (2017) and Kasler *et al.* (2023) who argue that academic dishonesty is a predictor of unethical workplace conduct. Similarly, a recent study by Homayouni, Zare, Padam and Fereidouni (2024) reported that graduates involved in cheating were more likely to exhibit unethical tendencies and fail to adapt to professional standards. These findings highlight a clear link between student misconduct and professional readiness, emphasizing that academic dishonesty has practical repercussions that shape workplace performance and organizational trust. By investigating this relationship in Tanzanian higher learning institutions, the study provides new evidence on how academic behavior influences employability and institutional standing. The results imply that higher learning institutions must not only discourage cheating but also equip students with the knowledge, skills, and ethical mindset required to perform effectively and responsibly in their careers.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

5.1 Conclusion

The study revealed that academic cheating remains a persistent challenge in Tanzanian higher learning institutions. Students engage in plagiarism, collusion, impersonation, and the use of unauthorized materials. These behaviors persist largely due to weak internalization of ethical values, inconsistent enforcement of institutional regulations, and limited accountability. The consequences, however, extend beyond the classroom. Graduates struggle to apply knowledge effectively, make sound decisions, solve problems efficiently, and maintain confidence in professional tasks. Academic dishonesty also fosters unethical behaviors in the workplace, undermines institutional credibility, and threatens both employability and productivity. A notable limitation of this study is that it draws primarily on participant perspectives from selected institutions, which may restrict the breadth and generalizability of the findings. Collectively, these

findings highlight the urgent need for comprehensive interventions that strengthen ethical values and reinforce academic integrity at institutional and policy levels.

5.2 Recommendations

The study recommends that:

1. Higher learning institutions strengthen their institutional cultures by mainstreaming ethical education across curricula, promoting lecturers and administrators as role models of integrity, and rigorously enforcing academic integrity policies through transparent and impartial mechanisms.
2. Efforts should further encourage peer responsibility and reporting, supported by fair disciplinary frameworks.
3. At the policy level, it is recommended that the Ministry of Education, the Tanzania Commission for Universities (TCU), and the National Council for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (NACTVET) establish robust regulatory frameworks for standardizing integrity practices, accompanied by regular compliance audits across institutions.
4. Collaboration with employers and professional bodies is also recommended. This will ensure graduates are equipped not only with academic qualifications but also with the ethical competencies required in professional practice.
5. Moreover, the study recommends that future research explore emerging forms of dishonesty in digital and online learning environments and undertake longitudinal analyses to examine the long-term effects of academic cheating on graduates' professional performance, institutional reputation, and societal trust in higher education. As well, future studies should utilize multi-institutional cohort studies and mixed-method designs to capture both behavioral trends and contextual factors over time.

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