



Influence of Students' Study Habits on Academic Dishonesty in Public Secondary Schools in Makueni County, Kenya

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Abstract: *Academic dishonesty is a growing concern in secondary schools globally, and Kenya is no exception. This study investigated the influence of study habits on academic dishonesty among secondary school students in Makueni County, Kenya. This study was informed by Psychosocial Dynamic Theory and Theory of Planned Behaviour. The investigator used mixed method concurrent triangulation model that combined linear regression model and phenomenology. The targeted populace for the study was 79,122 participants consisting of 75,000 students, 3,865 teachers, 250 principals, 6 SCDEs and 1 CDE. The researcher used stratified sampling technique to select schools participating in the study. The sample size was 802 which consisted of 750 students sampled randomly, 25 principals and 25 teachers sampled purposively. There was 1 SCDE and 1 CDE purposively sampled. The research tools utilized were surveys for principals, teachers and students, and interviews for SCDEs and the County Director of Education. The validity of the research instruments was guaranteed by the expert opinion of the supervisors. For reliability, test-retest technique was utilized with Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha worth 0.700 termed as dependable. Concurrent triangulation was utilized to guarantee credibility. A detailed interview was utilized to assess dependability of non-numerical tools. 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 poor study habits led to inadequate preparation, causing students to engage in academic dishonesty.*

Keywords: *Academic Dishonesty, Examinations, Influence, Public secondary schools, Students' study habits*

Citation

Kimanzi, L. M. (2025). Influence of students' study habits on academic dishonesty in public secondary schools in Makueni County, Kenya. *Journal of Research Innovation and Implications in Education*, 9(1), 1 – 13.
<https://doi.org/10.59765/yrh549t>.

1. Introduction

Academic dishonesty has a long history that can be traced back to ancient educational institutions, where students used unauthorized means to succeed in their studies. Studies showed that academic dishonesty began to be recognized as a widespread problem in Western educational systems during the early 20th century. Factors that contributed to academic dishonesty included the increased importance placed on standardized testing, the commercialization of education, and technological advancements that made cheating easier (McCabe et al.,

2001). With the rise of the internet, academic dishonesty became more prevalent as students gained easy access to information and resources for cheating (Fishman, 2016). Research highlighted the cultural underpinnings of academic dishonesty, noting differences in how it manifests across societies. For instance, collectivist cultures exhibited different patterns of dishonesty than individualist cultures, with collaboration sometimes seen as acceptable in contexts where individual achievement was less emphasized (Anderman & Murdock, 2007). The globalization of education and international mobility of students further complicated the issue, as academic norms

and ethical standards varied widely across countries and institutions.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, academic dishonesty was pervasive and was linked to systemic challenges within the educational sector. Factors such as inadequate funding, large class sizes, under-resourced institutions, and societal pressures for academic success created an environment where dishonest behaviors flourished (Bingab et al., 2016). High-stakes examinations, which determine students' future educational and career opportunities, contribute significantly to academic dishonesty. Cheating and exam leakage have been reported across the region, with some students and teachers viewing it as a necessary means to overcome systemic barriers (Munene, 2003).

Technological advancements have also influenced academic dishonesty in Sub-Saharan Africa. Mobile phones and social media have facilitated sharing of examination materials, making it easier for students to access unauthorized information. The lack of strict enforcement and accountability mechanisms within some educational institutions has further fueled academic dishonesty, leading to calls for more rigorous oversight and reforms to address the root causes (Odongo & Njiru, 2020).

In Kenya, academic dishonesty is a well-documented issue that has attracted significant public and governmental attention. The Kenyan education system is highly competitive, with national exams such as the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) and Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) determining students' progression and future opportunities. The high-stakes nature of these exams has led to numerous cases of cheating and exam malpractice. According to Nyamwange et al. (2013), academic dishonesty in Kenya can be attributed to the intense pressure on students to excel, societal expectations, and the desire for upward socioeconomic mobility. Several high-profile incidents of academic dishonesty in Kenya led to public outcry and reforms. For instance, in 2015, widespread examination leakage was reported, resulting in the nullification of results for numerous students and prompting a crackdown on examination malpractices by the Kenya National Examinations Council (KNEC). Subsequent reforms included increased security measures during exams and penalties for those found engaging in dishonest behaviors (Oduor, 2017).

In Makueni County, cases of academic dishonesty have been reported continuously for several years. In the year 2015, Makueni County had the highest number of candidates who were involved in academic dishonesty in the KCSE examination. The students whose examination results were cancelled were 382 from 22 centers in Makueni County (*Daily Nation*, 2016). In 2017, a total of 113 students had their examination results cancelled and in

2019, Makueni County was among the counties that were under scrutiny for examination dishonesty in KCSE. During 2021 KCSE examinations, a police officer and three teachers were traced circulating leaked Kiswahili paper 2 examination which originated from Ngungi secondary school in Mbooni East sub county in Makueni County. Out of 42 candidates who wrote KCSE in 2021 at St. Patrick's Kyamatheka secondary school in Makueni county, only 5 got their results in full while the remaining 37 got Y grades in Kiswahili. In the same year, the results of all the candidates in Nduluni secondary school in Makueni county were cancelled. The students confessed to having sneaked into examination hall with written answers stuffed inside belts linings, ties and underwear. In Two Travelers Oasis Center secondary school in Makueni county, 2 students were arrested with a chemistry paper in their phones (Makueni County Education Report, 2021). Therefore, research on the psychosocial factors which could lead to academic dishonesty was necessary to address the alarming rate of examination cheating in Makueni County.

Nyiva (2020) in her study on effects of professional code of conduct on examination management in schools in Makueni, used a cross-section survey design to determine if the professional code had an impact on how tests were managed in schools in Makueni. The outcomes indicated that there was a significant association amongst the code of conduct and exam management in schools. It was recommended that the Ministry of Education should scrutinize behaviour of teachers for efficient administration of examinations. However, the study did not address study habits on academic dishonesty which the current study addressed.

Moreover, Bifwoli and Momanyi (2020) used a descriptive research design to study academic dishonesty in Makueni County and found out that there was academic dishonesty which was rampant in the county. The researchers identified factors influencing cheating as pressure to get high grades, pressure to get jobs, laziness, and poor self-image. Makau (2017) in a study on factors influencing management of examinations in Makueni County reported that improper preparation for examinations by students, absence of learning skills, congestion of examination halls, inspiration to be dishonest by parents and teachers, weak supervision and lack of essential facilities were factors contributing to academic dishonesty among secondary school students in Makueni County. 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.

There is already rather a large literature on academic dishonesty globally and locally, much of it reporting some of the motives that give rise to the behavior and others focus on the correlates and remedies for the vice. 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). This study examined the influence of students' study habits on academic dishonesty in Makueni county, hence filling the research gap.

2. Literature Review

Ossai (2014) argued that learners who have virtuous learning behaviors were more likely to resist the desire to participate in academic dishonesty. Contrary, learners who have bad learning behaviors were more likely to participate in academic dishonesty. Learners who have high exam nervousness levels were more likely to have optimistic attitudes towards academic dishonesty as noted by the positive rate between exam nervousness and exam behaviour (Basse & Iruoje, 2016).

Most students also have poor reading or study habits. Most of them do not have the orientation of studying at home, which may be due to their family backgrounds and socio-economic status of their parents. Okesina (2019) found out that study habits that were effective could result in greatest attainment by learners in exams. However, Atisiaya and Maiyo (2015) opined that laziness of students caused academic dishonesty due to truancy, difficulty in studying, and spending more time chatting with friends or watching television or films. It was observed that even the intelligent ones looked for a way to engage in academic dishonesty during examinations because they could not prepare adequately for the examinations. These studies failed to clearly indicate how examination nervousness as a study habit influenced academic dishonesty which was a research gap for the current study.

Study behaviors have been connected to academic performance in numerous studies such as Sakirudeen and Sanni (2017) and Ossai (2014). The scholars established that virtuous study behaviors were contributing to high academic performance while poor study habits lead to poor academic performance. More importantly, it had been recommended that academic dishonesty was linked to bad study habits amongst Nigerian learners. The current study addressed study habits on academic dishonesty rather than performance.

According to Ibrahim (2014) fruitful achievement in studies was founded on interpreting and applying concepts.

It consequently depended on one deciding on why they wanted to study, either to acquire new concepts or to discover association among issues that were different. The researcher reported robust association between study behaviors and academic attainment of learners in high schools. Sakirudeen and Sanni (2017) confirmed the necessity of study skill training as a component in test nervousness treating programme. The researchers reported that reducing test nervousness was no assurance of enhancement in academic performance when the level of study practice and competence was overlooked. These studies did not reveal how truancy and laziness influenced academic dishonesty which was a research gap for the current study.

Whereas Abba *et. al* (2014) established that taking notes led to overall better performance and retaining of materials that were new, other studies have also had opinion that, less skillful reading was characterized by a limitation in short-term memory capacity in addition to inefficient word identification (Mwaniki & Aluko, 2015). According to Bentil, Kweku and Ghannesy (2018) the extent of learning depended on the quantity of time the learner was enthusiastically involved in the activity of learning. The time consumed in study assisted learners in retaining the information learned, which finally boosted the learners' performance outcomes when taking examinations. The reviewed studies however, had inconsistencies in their findings hence the current study confirmed or refuted the findings using public secondary school students in Makueni County and a mixed methodology approach which none of the reviewed studies had used.

There is a noteworthy connection between study habits and students' character to academic honesty. One of the most common reasons for academic dishonesty is unproductive or insufficient study habits. Insufficient preparations for examinations could be one of the chief aspects that contribute to dishonesty in exams. Good study habits include finding a quiet location to study, taking breaks, settings goals, and taking practice tests (Okey, 2020).

The significant factor to becoming an effective learner is learning how to read smarter, not harder. There is no need to make efforts cramming all materials during a single session; short periods are preferred. There is a need to plan when to read and making a daily routine is equally important with specific measurable goals each time a student studies. Procrastination is never encouraged and always learners should begin with difficult items and avoid any distractions, not forgetting that study groups are very necessary and constant reviewing of notes is equally important (Bachore, 2020). A study by Alarcon and Edward (2013) found that students who procrastinate are more likely to cheat, possibly as a way to make up for time lost due to delays in studying. Similarly, inadequate time management led to increased stress and anxiety, which

made students more susceptible to cheating as a way to manage academic pressures. While research has examined various causes of academic dishonesty, including peer influence, individual personality traits, and institutional policies, a notable factor that garnered attention was students' study habits which this study investigated.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

The investigation was directed by Psychosocial Theory and Theory of Planned Behaviour. The theories addressed students' study habits (independent variable) and academic dishonesty (dependent variable) respectively.

Bandura's (1977) psychosocial theory suggests that behavior is learned through the interaction of environmental and personal factors, particularly through observational learning, imitation, and reinforcement. In the context of study habits and academic dishonesty, Bandura's concepts of observational learning and self-efficacy play crucial roles. According to Bandura, people learn behaviors by observing and imitating others, especially those they see as role models. In an academic setting, if students observe peers engaging in dishonest behaviors without facing consequences, they may be more likely to imitate these behaviors. This observation could influence their study habits negatively by leading them to prioritize quick solutions, such as copying assignments or cheating on tests, rather than engaging in effective, honest study practices.

Students with higher academic self-efficacy are more likely to develop positive study habits, believe they can succeed through honest efforts, and therefore have less incentive to engage in academic dishonesty. In contrast, students with low self-efficacy might resort to dishonest practices because they doubt their ability to perform well through conventional study methods. Enhancing students' self-efficacy can, therefore, encourage more effective study habits and reduce reliance on dishonest behavior. Through Bandura's Psychosocial Theory, educators can understand that promoting positive role models and helping students build self-confidence in their academic abilities could encourage honest study habits and reduce academic dishonesty.

The Theory of Planned Behavior by Icek Ajzen (1991) examines the role of attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control in influencing behavior. TPB suggests that if students have a positive attitude toward academic honesty, they are less likely to engage in academic dishonesty. Good study habits can foster a positive attitude toward learning, as students experience satisfaction in mastering content and achieving academic goals through their own efforts. Conversely, students with poor study habits might develop negative attitudes toward honest study efforts, making dishonest behavior seem like

a more appealing shortcut. Subjective norms refer to the perceived social pressure to perform or avoid a behavior. If students perceive that their peers, instructors, or academic environment implicitly condone or overlook academic dishonesty, they may feel pressured to engage in it as well. This can undermine the value of honest study habits. Positive subjective norms, on the other hand, can encourage students to engage in ethical study practices, knowing that their academic community values integrity. Perceived behavioral control relates to students' perception of how easy or difficult it is to perform a behavior. When students feel that they lack the ability to control their academic success through legitimate study methods, often due to poor study habits or inadequate preparation, they might resort to academic dishonesty. Enhancing perceived behavioral control by teaching effective study strategies and time management skills can help students feel more capable of succeeding honestly, reducing their reliance on dishonest practices. By applying both Bandura's Psychosocial Theory and the Theory of Planned Behavior, educators and researchers can better understand and influence how study habits impact academic dishonesty, leading to more effective interventions that support both academic success and ethical behavior.

3. Methodology

The study examined how students' study habits influenced academic dishonesty public secondary school students in Makueni County using 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 study applied the concurrent triangulation model that combined linear regression and phenomenology methods.

The targeted participants were 79,122. This consisted of 75,000 students, 3,865 teachers, 250 principals, 6 SCDEs and 1 CDE. The study targeted all public secondary school students, teachers, and principals, SCDEs and the CDE in Makueni County. This was informed by statistics indicating that most academic dishonesty occurred in public schools (Makueni County Enrolment Returns, 2016). Makueni County has 6 constituencies namely, Kaiti, Kibwezi East, Kibwezi West, Kilome, Makueni and Mbooni. The county has two hundred and fifty (250) public secondary schools. These schools have a total population of 75,000 students. The County has 3,865 secondary school teachers and 250 principals (Makueni County Enrolment Returns, 2018). The study also targeted the six (6) SCDEs and 1 CDE in the county. There were 802 participants in the sample which included 750 students selected randomly, 25 principals purposively sampled, 25 form three class

teachers purposively sampled, 1 CDE and 1 SCDE purposively sampled.

The study used interviews and questionnaires for data collection. Quantitative and qualitative information were gathered by closed-ended questionnaires and interviews respectively. The study used Likert-type scale questionnaires to assemble quantitative information from students, form three class teachers and principals as per the objective of the study. Interviewing schedules were utilized to gather qualitative information from the SCDE and the CDE. The research instruments were verified through piloting which was like pre-testing. The instruments were given to selected persons, who were equivalent to 10% of the study sample. Validity of the quantitative tools were 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. Internal consistency reliability method was used to determine the reliability for questionnaires. Cronbach Alpha Reliability Coefficient was used to calculate the reliability. Test-retest method was used to determine reliability for academic dishonesty questionnaire. A

construct composite reliability co-efficient (Cronbach alpha) of 0.7 or above, for all the constructs, was adequate for this study. The researcher used triangulation method to establish credibility and conducted an inquiry audit to establish dependability of the instruments.

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. Ethical considerations were observed to avoid causing harm because of publishing the results of the research. The purpose of integrity in the study was to guarantee that nobody was hurt or suffered adverse consequences from study activities.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

The researcher requested the principals and teachers to fill in the questionnaire. The data was put into consideration reflecting the indicators for independent and dependent variables accordingly. The results were tabularized and made available in Table 1

Table 1: Principals' and Teachers' Responses on Students' Study Habits on Academic Dishonesty

Students' study habits statements		SD	D	U	A	SA
Exam phobia drives students in smuggling answer scripts into exam halls	N	0	4	3	20	9
	%	0.00%	11.1%	8.3%	55.6%	25.0%
Fear to fail examinations drives students into smuggling answer scripts into exam halls	N	1	2	0	20	13
	%	2.8%	5.6%	0.0%	55.6%	36.1%
Many students detest and fear exams leading to smuggling answer scripts into exam halls	N	1	2	2	20	11
	%	2.8%	5.6%	5.6%	55.6%	30.5%
Fear of disappointing teachers and parents leads to smuggling answer scripts into exam halls	N	0	3	1	21	11
	%	0.0%	8.3%	2.8%	58.3%	30.5%
Students cheat in exams due to absenteeism and they end up smuggling answer scripts into exam halls	N	2	5	2	18	9
	%	5.6%	13.9%	5.6%	50.0%	25.0%
Students cheat since they don't work hard and therefore, smuggle answer scripts into exam halls	N	6	14	7	6	3
	%	16.7%	38.9%	19.4%	16.7%	8.3%
Students engage in examination cheating since they are lazy and so smuggle answer scripts into exam halls	N	7	17	5	6	1
	%	19.4%	47.2%	13.9%	16.7%	2.8%
Students cheat since they feel that the teachers have not adequately guided them thus, smuggling answer scripts into exam halls	N	9	15	2	9	1
	%	25.0%	41.7%	5.6%	25.0%	2.8%
Students cheat due to lack of guidance by smuggling answer scripts into exam halls	N	4	18	4	9	1
	%	11.1%	50.0%	11.1%	25.0%	2.8%

From this table, exam phobia drove students into smuggling answer scripts into exam halls as agreed by the majority of 29 (80.6 %) with 4 (11.1 %) in disagreement and 3 (8.3 %) did not make any decision. There has been always unknown anxiety among candidates when it comes to examination period. This has been serious among less prepared students who find out too late that time has elapsed and there is nothing they can do about it. They end up looking for ways and means of being dishonest to make ends meet. Candidates who have been properly guided and have had simulations of exam papers have nothing to worry. Best performing schools ensure thorough preparation of their candidates to eliminate such fears caused by unpreparedness. This addresses the issue of academic dishonesty.

It was agreed that fear to fail examinations drove students into smuggling answer scripts into exam halls as per 33 (91.7 %) who agree so and 3 (8.3 %) in disagreement and none of the participants was undecided. No student wants to fail as failure in exams is quite unfortunate. Anything that can be done to ensure good performance must be done. However, academic dishonesty is not the solution to pass exams. In the past, students have performed well without engaging in any type of cheating.

Many students detested and feared exams leading to smuggling answer scripts into exam halls as agreed by 31 (86.1 %) and disagreed by 3 (8.3 %) with 2 (5.6 %) making no decision. Judging from the responses, students are not friendly to exams. It may be unreasonable to say that students enjoy exams. They sit for exams as compulsory part of education which is not popular with them. Many students worry during exams and if asked, they would not prefer to do any exams. However, testing is the only way students can prove that they were in school.

Fear of disappointing teachers and parents led to smuggling answer scripts into exam halls as agreed by 32 (88.9 %) and disagreed by 3 (8.3 %) with only 1 (2.8 %) who made no decision. Parents and teachers do their best to ensure that there is no reason why good performance should not be seen in the schools. Some parents purchase bogus exams because they have too high expectations for their kids. The students are obligated to please their parents and teachers by performing well academically.

Students cheated in exams due to absenteeism and they ended up smuggling answer scripts into exam halls as per 27 (75.0 %) who were in agreement and 7 (19.4 %) in disagreement with only 2 (5.6 %) making no decision. Students who fail to attend lessons should not expect good results and as such are prone to academic dishonesty. Students who are undisciplined frequently absent themselves from schools. There has been correlation between discipline and performance over the years and so

the principals and teachers were aware of this having stayed in exam atmosphere for long periods of time.

The fact that students cheated since they did not work hard and therefore, smuggled answer scripts into exam halls was not agreed by the majority as 20 (55.6 %) disagreed but agreed by 9 (25.0 %) with 7 (19.4 %) who were undecided. Schools ensured that candidates work hard for exams to avoid the shame of poor performance. Candidate classes are taken care of by the principals and teachers such that even extra teaching is offered to them. From this data, there was hard work and if students were dishonest, then it was not due to the fact that they did not work hard.

The fact that students engaged in examination cheating since they were lazy and so smuggled answer scripts into exam halls was disagreed by the majority of 24 (66.7 %) with 7 (19.4 %) agreeing and 5 (13.9 %) undecideds. Normally when a candidate reaches this stage of taking exams, they must have come a long way in the system. The system ensures that they are not lazy by making them work hard. Laziness was not the cause of academic dishonesty.

Most participants 24 (66.7 %) denied that students cheated since they felt that the teachers had not adequately guided them thus, smuggling answer scripts into exam halls. Those who agreed were 10 (27.8 %) with 2 (5.6 %) making no decision. It seemed that schools in the study county took time to counsel and guide their candidates in exam matters. Some have been known to invite experts who talk to their candidates on exams matters. Similarly, the assumption that students cheated due to lack of guidance by smuggling answer scripts into exam halls was disagreed by 22 (61.1 %) with 10 (27.8 %) agreeing and 4 (11.1 %) made no decision.

These findings concurred with other findings globally. Such findings were for example that of Ossai (2014) who argued that candidates who had righteous learning manners were more expected to resist the craving to partake in academic deceitfulness. On the contrary, students who had bad learning manners were more likely to participate in academic dishonesty. Learners who had high exam anxiety levels were more likely to have positive attitudes towards academic deceitfulness as noted by the positive rate between exam nervousness and exam behaviour (Bassey & Iruoje, 2016).

Students' Responses in Students' Study Habits on Academic Dishonesty

The researcher collected data from the students who filled part of their questionnaire. That data addressed indicators for independent and dependent variables as indicated in the questions. The results were figured and presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Students' Responses in Students' Study Habits on Academic Dishonesty

Study habits statements		SD	D	U	A	SA
I can cheat in exams by smuggling answer scripts into exam halls since I fear to fail	N	341	92	33	121	144
	%	46.6%	12.6%	4.5%	16.6%	19.7%
I fear and hate exams and that is the reason for smuggling answer scripts into exam halls	N	431	167	48	43	42
	%	59.0%	22.8%	6.6%	5.9%	5.7%
I am absent from school often times and that is why I smuggle answer scripts into exam hall	N	315	152	54	94	116
	%	43.1%	20.8%	7.4%	12.9%	15.9%
I don't have time to study, that is why I smuggle answer scripts into exam halls	N	461	159	50	27	34
	%	63.1%	21.8%	6.8%	3.7%	4.7%
I don't work hard and that is why I smuggle answer scripts into exam halls	N	404	139	43	62	83
	%	55.3%	19.0%	5.9%	8.5%	11.4%
I cheat in examinations since I don't work hard and I can smuggle answer scripts into exam halls	N	479	140	46	24	42
	%	65.5%	19.2%	6.3%	3.3%	5.7%
I cheat because the teachers fail to guide us hence smuggling answer scripts into exam halls	N	509	119	39	12	52
	%	69.6%	16.3%	5.3%	1.6%	7.1%
I cheat in exams since I don't study well therefore, smuggling answer scripts into exam halls	N	442	158	58	29	44
	%	60.5%	21.6%	7.9%	4.0%	6.0%
Students in our school are lazy and so smuggle answer scripts into the exam halls	N	530	106	43	24	28
	%	72.5%	14.5%	5.9%	3.3%	3.8%

The fact that students could cheat in exams by smuggling answer scripts into exam halls since they feared to fail was denied by 433 (59.2 %) and accepted by 265 (36.3 %) with 33 (4.5 %) not making decision. Though the majority denied this, there was an element of acceptance seen in more than thirty-six percent of the students. This caused mixed feelings among the participants to this extent. There was that anxiety that the students may fail which was acceptable to a certain point. However, it should be noted that there was always anxiety when it came to examinations. This has been the fear of the unknown outcomes.

It was not acceptable that students feared and hated exams and that was the reason for smuggling answer scripts into exam halls as per 598 (81.8 %) who had that opinion and 85 (11.6 %) accepting with another 48 (6.6 %) undecideds. Contrary to the principals and teachers, there was a denial that fear did not encompass candidates such that they were tempted to smuggle answer scripts into the exam halls. There was confusion in the above indicator as the participants seemed to contradict themselves. However, in the first case, it seemed that fear of exams caused cheating. In the second case there was fear and hatred to exams causing academic dishonesty.

The participants denied that they were absent from school often times and that was why they could smuggle answer scripts into exam hall as indicated by 467 (63.9 %) and accepted by 210 (28.7 %) with another 54 (7.4 %) not making decision. Truancy can cause cheating since there is continued absence from school. Most likely this did not happen in the case of schools investigated. The participants painted their picture whereas common knowledge has it that candidates who register for exams and stay home only to come to sit for them do not do well. Likewise, students who are on and off schools due to fees or indiscipline cases may not do well in exams and are prone to cheating in exams to compensate their absence.

It was not true that students did not have time to study, that was why they smuggled answer scripts into exam halls as seen in 620 (84.8 %) who denied and only 61 (8.3 %) agreeing with 50 (6.8 %) who failed to make decision. Naturally, no student would like to be told that they did not study for exams. It seemed that there was always time available for studying and then it means that academic dishonesty was not caused by lack of study time. There was all time to study according to the students. This may mean that lack of time to study may not have caused academic

dishonesty among the secondary schools in Makueni County.

The participants did not agree that they did not work hard and that was why they smuggled answer scripts into exam halls as per 543 (74.3 %) who disagreed with 145 (19.8 %) agreeing and only 43 (5.9 %) who did not make decision. Under normal circumstances, candidates would work very hard to achieve good grades. Though there might be an element of defense among the students, the fact is that failure to work hard can cause exam cheating. Thus, academic dishonesty may not have come due to failure of hard work. It was totally disagreed that students cheated in examinations since they did not work hard and that is why they could smuggle answer scripts into exam halls as per 619 (84.7 %) who disagreed so and 66 (9.0 %) in agreement with 46 (6.3 %) not making any decision.

It was vehemently denied that students cheated because the teachers failed to guide them hence smuggling answer scripts into exam halls as per 628 (85.9 %) with 64 (8.8 %) agreeing and 39 (5.3 %) did not make decision. It seems that there was proper guidance for exam handling among the students. What they did not know was that without this guidance, there would be likelihood of cheating. If they cheated, it was not that they were not guided well.

It was not true that the participants cheated in exams since they did not study well consequently, smuggling answer scripts into exam halls as seen in 600 (82.1 %) with 73 (10.0 %) disagreeing and 58 (7.9 %) not making decision.

This indicated that there were good study habits among the students. Cheating may be possible with candidates who do not study well. It was not acceptable that students in schools were lazy and so smuggled answer scripts into the exam halls as per 636 (87.0 %) and 52 (7.1 %) agreeing with 43 (5.9 %) making no decision. Laziness was not a cause for academic dishonesty. While this was the view of the students, only lazy candidates would be associated with academic dishonesty. Therefore, laziness may have contributed to academic dishonesty in a way or another.

The findings from the students in this objective of the study concurred with many other studies. Okesina (2019) established that effective study techniques could lead to students achieving their highest possible exam results. Sakirudeen and Sanni (2017) reported virtuous study behaviors contributed to high academic performance while poor study habits influenced academic dishonesty. Nevertheless, Atisiaya and Maiyo (2015) were of the view that laziness caused academic dishonesty owing to absenteeism. This implies that poor reading or study habits contribute to academic dishonesty.

4.2 Inferential Statistics in Students' Study Habits on Academic Dishonesty

This section discusses the inferential statistics of students' study habits and academic dishonesty. Linear regression was done to assess whether students study habits significantly influenced academic dishonesty.

Table 3: Linear regression model for study habits and academic dishonesty

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	95.00% CI	<i>B</i>	<i>T</i>	<i>P</i>
(Intercept)	0.55	0.06	[0.44, 0.66]	0.00	9.83	< .001
Study habits	0.65	0.03	[0.60, 0.70]	0.66	23.65	< .001

Note. Results: $F(1,729) = 559.55, p < .001, R^2 = .43$

The results of the linear regression model were significant, $F(1,729) = 559.55, p < .001, R^2 = .43$, indicating that approximately 43.42% of the variance in academic dishonesty is explainable by study habits. Study habits significantly predicted academic dishonesty, $B = 0.65, t(729) = 23.65, p < .001$. This indicates that on average, a one-unit increase of study habits will increase the value of academic dishonesty by 0.65 units. The regression model becomes;

Academic dishonesty = $0.55 + 0.65 \times \text{study habits}$.
The results concur with Sakirudeen and Sanni (2017), and Ossai (2014). The scholars established that academic

dishonesty is linked to bad study habits. The results also complement Okesina (2019) observation that study habits that are proactive and effective in minimizing cheating tendencies could result in greatest attainment by learners in exams. The findings further concur with Atisiaya and Maiyo (2015) opinion that laziness of students causes academic dishonesty due to truancy, difficulty in studying, and spending more time chatting with friends or watching television or films. This shows that virtuous study behaviors contribute to high academic performance while poor study habits lead to poor academic performance, that eventually allow academic dishonesty.

4.3 Thematic Analysis in Students' Study Habits on Academic Dishonesty

According to the education officers interviewed, anxiety could make candidates smuggle answer scripts into exam rooms. It was not certain that this is always what happened. Nevertheless, one officer had this to say,

“One reason for smuggling answers into examination rooms is, of course, the fear for the uncertainty. The forms of cheating in this county includes answer scripts that find their way into the examination halls. Candidates with bad study habits panic during exams and for this reason can do anything to save themselves the shame of failing in exams” (EO1).

Candidates have always shown fear during examinations. However, this fear comes in various degrees in various candidates. The fear has been known to be a cause of academic dishonesty for example by bringing in foreign documents into examination rooms as one officer observed,

“We cannot underestimate the role played by fear and anxiety during the exams. I think a lot of guidance and counselling before the exams should be applied at least to minimize the anxiety. Little anxiety is normal, psychologically speaking, but too much of it is dangerous and may compromise academic honesty” (EO2).

Normally, candidates do not celebrate during exam period. There is that hidden fear among them and the dislike of exams. This being the situation, there is likelihood of cheating in exams through any method for example, by smuggling answer scripts into exam rooms as one officer said,

“Education minus exams would be very palatable among the students. It has never been an easy thing for the students to go through the exam time. If they were asked to choose, they would avoid all forms of examinations” (EO1).

It has been a tradition that always parents and teachers wanted excellent results from their children. Actually, this has contributed to academic dishonesty more often than not. The candidates have an obligation to please their parents and teachers as one officer said,

“There comes a time when students want to perform well not for any other reason but just to make their parents and teachers proud. If this is allowed to continue, exam dishonesty may not cease easily. Nobody should demand good results from the candidates. Students must be allowed to achieve their results as per their ability” (EO2).

There is no magic formula that allows absentee pupils to suddenly become the top performers. Constantly remaining

in school is the best way to achieve better results without having to be dishonest in the exams as one officer said,

“It is not possible for candidates to stay home and come to do exams just because the government has paid exam fees for them and expect to perform well. Frequent attendance to classes is paramount if good performance is going to be seen. The contact hours between the students and teachers are very vital for better performance” (EO1).

Exam cheating among Kenyan students may not have resulted from their lack of effort on their part. Students have always been keen on their work and teachers have the obligation to cover the syllabus in good time. Success always comes due to hard work as one officer said,

“I do not believe that students do not work hard. I believe that most students not only work hard but also are well prepared by their schools. There is no way one can do well in exams without sweating. However, I do not mean that cheating cannot occur among the candidates even though they may work hard. All I know is that failure to work hard can cause academic dishonesty” (EO2).

Secondary school students taking exams may not cheat due to the fact that they are lazy. Most students are hard working. They fear to fail, so laziness may not be entertained amongst themselves. While it is acceptable that academic dishonesty can be practiced among lazy students mostly, it may not be the case in the study county as one officer said,

“Laziness amongst the candidates may not be an issue in this county. Boys and girls have been preparing for exams adequately and actively. The issue of laziness may be attributed to academic dishonesty but I think to the best of my knowledge, it has not been prevalent here” (EO1).

Students may not have cheated due to poor guidance from the schools. Principals and teachers prepare and guide their candidates properly. There is a lot of competition among the schools in this country such that each individual school must guide their candidates for better performance as one officer noted,

“We do not take it for granted that the students know how to conduct themselves before and during the exams. There is a lot of guidance from the teachers to ensure that there is maximum performance amongst the candidates. A lot of time is spent in guiding the students on how to handle exams. Thus, academic dishonesty may not be associated with the fact that candidates are poorly guided” (EO2).

The findings from the inferential analysis concurred with the findings from Ibrahim (2014) who established that productive accomplishment in studies was grounded on the interpretation and the application of perceptions. It therefore, depended on one making decision on why they want to study, either to attain new concepts or to discover association amongst matters that are different. The

investigator established vigorous association between study habits and the academic attainment of students in the secondary schools.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

The study concluded that study habits explained a significant portion in academic dishonesty among students in Makueni county. The findings showed that approximately 43.42% of the variance in academic dishonesty is explainable by study habits. This calls for inculcation of virtuous study behaviors on learners in order to contribute in curbing academic dishonesty and increasing academic performance. Schools should foster an academic culture that values honesty, hard work, and integrity. This can be achieved by establishing and promoting clear, consistent policies on academic honesty, as well as recognizing and rewarding students who demonstrate ethical academic behavior.

5.2 Recommendations

From the results of the study, the following recommendations were done:

1. Education stakeholders and management of public secondary schools should promote virtuous learning behaviors in students to enable them to resist the desire to participate in academic dishonesty.
2. Study habits that promote cheating in examinations such as exam nervousness, truancy and laziness should be substituted with virtuous ones like integrity, truthfulness, time consciousness and honesty.
3. Regular refresher training of teachers should be organized to equip them with skills and experience that enhance transfer of positive study habits on students.

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