A Phenomenological Study on Academic Cheating behaviors Exhibited by Visually Impaired College Students

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ABSTRACT

Students with visual impairment are academically disadvantaged due to visual impairment that lets them indulge in academically dishonest behavior cheating. Academic cheating at the college level demolishes the personality and moral values of any individual. This study intended to explore academic cheating behavior in visually impaired students at the college level. This study was qualitative in approach and exploratory in nature. The sample of the study included 20 teachers working in colleges in the Lahore district that were selected from the larger group of the population for this study. A self-developed semi-structured interview was used as a tool for data collection. The validity of the instrument was assured by the experts' opinions related to the field of special education. The reliability of the questionnaire was confirmed through an extensive literature review and pilot testing. Data were analyzed through thematic analysis. Three major themes were drawn from the thematic analysis i.e., teachers' perception of academic cheating, the nature of academic cheating, and remedies to eliminate academic cheating. The findings of the study revealed that the maximum number of respondents were females who reported that visually impaired students do cheating if they get the opportunity. Additionally, the majority of the respondents stated that visually impaired students are involved in various academic cheating styles due to prevalent corruption in society. The study recommended special moral training lectures by the veteran of motivation and counseling to visually impaired students at the college level periodically. Moreover, teachers at the college level should promote academic integrity in their respective classes.
1. Introduction

Academic cheating is one of the sensitive elements of academic dishonesty which is existing in all types of academic institutions with varied scales. Working with honesty during study or in exams means doing your tasks or attempting your paper fairly with your intellectual capabilities and efforts without demanding any undue favor from the stakeholders. The risk of cheating is extremely reduced by the personality traits of conscientiousness and agreeableness (Harvey et al., 2020). The students who have a high score in personality traits determine low cheating tendencies and can control their behavior (Peled et al., 2019; Malesky et al., 2022).

According to Morris (2018) studies Academic Integrity can be promoted by developing the AI strategy, reviewing related policies and practices, and faculty professional development. It builds the character of the student with visual impairment, teachers, and other members of the institution. Teachers of students with visual impairment play an important role in the life of students with visual impairment. Commonly, once the instructors define clearly the way learners’ understand and their interaction with society then they have a long-lasting effect on their students (Han and Xu, 2020).

Promoting and maintaining academic honesty is an important concern in the literature (Chugh et al., 2021; Eshet et al., 2021). In the same way, students with visual impairment work honestly then their learning also increased which will be helpful for their future in their practical life. According to Ballantine et al., (2018), for working more ethically in the workplace teaching students about workplace ethical dilemmas. Quality of education youth receiving directly affected by the process of teacher training (Albar and Southcott, 2021). In this case, teachers of visually impaired students proved to a role models. So, teachers of visually impaired students are the main characters who comply the academic integrity and teach the students with visual impairment to follow academic honesty.

Qualified teachers of visually impaired students are necessary who have a positive impact on students’ success and apply proper guided training (Yenen, 2021). If the teachers are responsible and well-mannered they will be able to build a good character for the students with visual impairment. Studies showed that the impact of teachers is appreciable in the development of creative thinking skills of the youth children (Albar and Southcott, 2021).

Academic cheating is part of Academic dishonesty. The student’s behaviors that are not coordinated with the reason, ethical standards, and values of the given culture, and these behaviors can be increased and grow in higher education is called Academic Dishonesty (AD) (Krou et al., 2021). Today, many teachers are also responsible for this kind of behavior because they provide help to students in the exams just for money which encourages these students. Academic Dishonesty is highly influenced by the acceptance of cheating behaviors among peers, reduced fear of getting caught, and assumed behaviors of faculty to cheating (Ives & Giukin, 2020).

The rationale of the study is based on the viewpoint of the teachers teaching at the college level to visually impaired students who declare that visually impaired students do cheating with the help of their writer or computer during exams. Academic cheating spoils the foundation of any education system especially when the matter to producing effective and independent citizens for the country. According to Chala (2021), most cheating behaviors are perceived much serious by students but cheating is actively done by the students.

Visually impaired college students who do not perform in their normal daily classes, perform
well during the exam. This was significant to explore academic cheating by visually impaired college students. The objectives of the study were to:

1. Explore the perception of teachers about academic cheating by visually impaired students.
2. Identify the reasons for academic cheating among visually impaired students.

The questions of the study were:

1. What is the perception of teachers about academic cheating by visually impaired students?
2. What is the nature of academic cheating by visually impaired college students?
3. What are the reasons for academic cheating among visually impaired students?

The study is unique because academic cheating is a phenomenon that is not addressed in the field of research. This study will be beneficial for teachers at the college level to understand academic cheating, its nature, and its existence with students with visual impairment. Additionally, this study will give a comprehensive understanding to find out the reasons for academic cheating by visually impaired college students.

This study is useful for students with visual impairment to overcome academic cheating. Furthermore, this study will be beneficial for the Government and other policymakers and stakeholders to arrange accordingly all those safety measures which could protect visually impaired college-level students to prevent the phenomenon of academic cheating at the college level. The study was limited to Punjab only due to limitations of time and financial constraints. The study was delimited to teachers of special education degree colleges in special education department due to ground reality of the research problem. The researcher used a self-made interview protocol due to the unavailability of standardized instruments.

2. Literature Review

Traditional academic integrity policies are replacing with educational and restorative justice approaches by many researchers and practitioners (Benson, et. al., 2019; Sopcak & Hood, 2022). Moral issues are included in academic misconduct (Jamieson & Howard, 2019). On the other hand, not all teachers feel that teaching academic integrity is their responsibility which depicts unwillingness due to workload (Peters, et. al., 2019). The administration can provide the required resources to ensure academic integrity (Hunter & Kier 2022). A low percentage of students engage in cheating indicated by recent studies (Curtis & Clare, 2017). 3.5% of students reported contract cheating and in large-scale studies, 2.2% of students reported that they submitted completed assignments as their own (Bretag, et. al., 2018).

Cheating is a major problem in the past and present. Cheating cases have significantly increased during online learning by using technology (Dendir & Maxwell, 2020). Various studies have found emerging and critical topics that contain deeper investigation into academic integrity (Eaton & Dressler, 2020). There is a critical need for students to consider the implications and importance of academic integrity as currently, the literature highlights the issue of academic cheating (Younis & Gishen, 2019). Cheating and relative practices of cheating depend on cultural backgrounds according to the different perspectives of students (Ewing et al., 2019). To work as a professional in the workplace there is also a need of developing such ethical and moral behaviors (Keefer et al., 2020). According to Morris (2018) studies Academic Integrity can be promoted by developing the AI strategy, reviewing related policies and practices, and faculty professional development.
Evidence suggested that some assessments increased plagiarism in students and some assertive assessment designs reduced cheating and academic misconduct by focusing on learning and engagement rather than the final result (Ellis, et al., 2020; Jansen & Nicole, 2017). For the last two decades, it had been analyzed that students’ honesty can be encouraged by students’ active learning which is considered a central element for positive development (McConnell et al., 2017).

Different forms of unethical behaviors have been engaged the students by the provision of technology during the exam (Fawns, 2019). Yorke et al., (2020). If teachers ARE failed in the struggles to reduce cheating then academic integrity will likely be more breached (Packalen & Rowbotham, 2022). The writing behavior which is acceptable to students has received different types of messages from teachers and institutions about this (Sutherland-Smith, 2018). The use of creative and conversational language to guide students and staff in a discussion on the policy of academic conduct (Reedy, et. al., 2021). To learn academic integrity different chances and a long time is required ( Stoesz & Eaton, 2020). Educators have the strong responsibility of maintaining academic integrity (Eaton, 2022). By increasing the number of enrolments academic conduct cases of international students increased and had seen inaccuracy among international students about these automatic associations (Fass-Holmes 2017). Eaton (2020b) goes further that all international students cheat more, or that students from a certain country cheat more, which amounts to systemic racism. To play role in the academic integrity of staff, studies have been conducted on racism and academic cheating or integrity (Alberta Council on Academic Integrity, 2020).

The community was built in a place of cheating or misconduct 'aspirational language of integrity' should be used (McNeill, 2022, p.494). Academic cheating is inversely related to the actions of professors regarding academic misconduct which is the student’s perception founded (Yu et al. 2018). For the act of cheating among young adults and for this kind of behavior a strongest predictor subjective norm is proved than any other norm concluded by Kam et al. (2018). For academic dishonesty, peers are the strongest supporters (Maloshonok & Shmeleva 2019). To focus on the impact of unethical behaviors on children, professional courses are required for teachers and professionals (Malone, 2020). The literature revealed the ways of preventing academic cheating or academic dishonesty (MacLeod and Eaton 2020, p. 11). Moreover, the academic staff does not access or read academic integrity policy papers without the support of practices of the society until the solution of the issue which they are confronted(MacLeod and Eaton 2020).

3. Methodology
The study was performed through the naturalistic method of qualitative inquiry.

3.1 Research Design
This was a qualitative inquiry with its exploratory type of research. This type of study helped the researchers to find out the most relevant findings of the research problem. The participants were teachers of students with visual loss teaching in the training and degree colleges of special education departments from various cities of Punjab. The interpretive phenomenological approach was used to analyze the data. Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) is a qualitative approach that aims to provide detailed examinations of personal lived experiences (Smith & Osborn, 2015). It produces an account of lived experience in its terms rather than one prescribed by pre-existing theoretical preconceptions and it recognizes that this is an interpretative endeavor as humans are sense-making organisms. IPA is a particularly useful methodology for examining topics that are complex, ambiguous,
and emotionally laden. Exploring teachers’ opinions about academic cheating is a sensitive and complex phenomenon.

3.2 The population of the study

The population of the study comprised the teachers of students with visual impairment teaching at colleges of the special education department.

3.3 Participants of the study

The sample of the study included 20 teachers of students with a visual impairment from different colleges of the special education department and educational backgrounds. A matter of consideration is size determination because numerous guidelines are followed by researchers for assessing the appropriateness of their research sample (Rusu, 2020). Among 20 teachers, 13 were from the Lahore district, whereas 7 were from different cities of Punjab including Rawalpindi, Faisalabad, Multan, and Dera Ghazi Khan. The purposive sampling technique was used to collect data for this study. The tool for data collection was a self-developed semi-structured interview protocol. In-depth interviews were the primary method of data collection. The validity of the interview protocol was assured by the expert opinion (N=03). The reliability was confirmed through an extensive literature review.

4. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed through coding and thematic analysis. Four broader themes were generated based on codes and categories. Similar answers were ascribed in proper alphabetical codes. The codes were then merged and categories appeared. The patterns between the codes were identified and global themes were applied based on associated categories. I, as the first author, do repeated readings throughout the procedure of data analysis. We approach the participants of the study with great effort. Being a female the second author approached the participants of the study. It took three weeks to contact and get the consent of all of the respondents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: Demographics of respondents.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean= 38.7 (minimum 25, maximum 46)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Males (45%), 11 Females (55%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 M.A (60%), 8 M.Phil (40%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minimum 5 years, Maximum 15 years</td>
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4.1 Establishing trustworthiness

Reliability and conformability of the study were ensured through review and confirmation of the findings by the participants and approval of the results by the study co-author and three external researchers, respectively. The main themes of the study were given to 4 participants and they confirmed that the findings were true regarding them. To confirm transferability, the details such as the method of coding and formation of categories from raw data were explained to observers and external researchers to judge about transferability of the data in other areas. The participants were selected from different colleges of special education and different levels of education. We as researchers tried our level best to remain neutral and control the element of researcher bias. The data was collected only through the interview technique, other methods like observation or document analysis have not been used.
4.2 Ethical Considerations

Ensuring ethical considerations is a basic element of any research. We have taken the consent without any pressure on the participants. The participants were ensured that all of their personal information and data will be kept confidential and their information will be used only for research purposes. The participants were allowed to leave the study at any stage and refuse the answer to any question. We did not ask for any unnecessary secret information from the participants. Due to the sensitivity of the topic the anonymity of the participants has been strictly observed by the researchers.

5. Qualitative Data Analysis

5.1 Coding and Thematic Analysis

This part of the study deals with data analysis of the study. The responses of the participants were transcribed for coding & thematic analysis. Four major research questions curtail the transcribed data into categories, sub-themes, and then four major themes based on the conceptual outcome of the research questions and their categories. This part of the study contains data analysis of coding and thematic analysis.

Research Question 1: What is the perception of teachers about academic cheating by visually impaired students?

Theme 1: Teacher’s Perception

This theme has emerged from the categories i.e high marks, behavioral issues, and poor teaching strategies. This theme reflects the perception of teachers about academic cheating (Peled et al. 2019; Stiles et al. 2017).

Category 1: High Scoring

Thematic analysis of the interview transcription revealed that less than half of the participants responded that academic cheating is the way to obtain high marks or high grades during the exam. In this way, academic cheating is the only source for getting high scores during the exam by students with visual impairment. One of the participants said that through cheating even without too much hard work the students can get high marks.

Category 2: Behavioral Issues

Fewer participants stated that lying with teachers, bunking in attendance, and behavior in class are related to academic cheating. Students with visual impairment are involved in various types of academic cheating-related behavioral issues. However, one of the participants said that academic cheating has many types.

Category 3: Poor Teaching Strategies

Fewer participants responded that teachers do not understand that students with visual impairment work hard. Teachers do not show their energetic behavior to develop as per requirement those teaching strategies that students with visual impairment consider best for themselves. Additionally, one of the participants said that some of the teachers believed that cheating is not any special issue and they think that children will not pass without cheating.

Research Question 2: What is the nature of academic cheating by visually impaired college students?

Theme 2: Facets of Academic Cheating

This theme has emerged from the categories including writer’s support, and opportunity-based
cheating. The theme depicts the nature of cheating by visually impaired college students. The rise in contract cheating is concerned with that work is claimed by students to their teachers as their own but was completed by a 3rd person (Eaton et al. 2019).

Category 1: Writer’s Support
Thematic analysis of the interview transcription revealed that some of the students with visual impairment at the college level take help from their writer and they do cheating with the help of the writer. The writer is prepared before the exam accordingly. However, they also said that if the writer is selected as per set rules then the problem of cheating can be reduced. Moreover, One of the participants reported that there should be a proper pool of human resources appointed as a writer for the visually impaired students.

Category 2: Opportunity-Based Cheating
Interview transcription of this category revealed that few students with visual impairment cheat when they find an opportunity. If they find an opportunity then they do otherwise they don’t do cheating. One of the participants also said that in my view opportunity matters a lot for any unusual activity and mostly visually impaired students do cheating if they find an opportunity.

Theme 3: Reasons for Cheating
This theme has emerged from the categories mentioned below. They show the reasons for cheating done by visually impaired college-level students. A significant threat in higher education around the globe is the completion of assignments through outsources or completed by others (Erguvan, 2022).

Category 1: Language Barrier
Few participants reported that visually impaired students have a language barrier at the college level. All the content and papers are in English which these students feel is difficult. Additionally, fewer participants in the study responded that students with visual impairment do cheating because of poor concept clarification which is the result of the language barrier. Moreover one of the participants said that they have a language barrier and all the content is in English. They feel difficulty with spelling problems and sentence making.

Category 2: Non-supportive System
Thematic analysis of the interview transcription revealed that the majority of the visually impaired students do cheating because of the non-supportive system of education, family, and culture. However, the majority of the participants also reported that the system develops the habit of cheating among visually impaired students at the school level. Additionally, one of the participants said that the problem of cheating is raised due to our system’s problem.

Category 3: Considering as normal
This category showed that according to some of the respondents, visually impaired students consider cheating as a normal act, and teachers’ ignorance of this act strengthens this faulty belief. One of the respondents narrated that.....

*cheating is not a significant thing to discuss, our teachers also ignore our such kind of behavior

The respondent further added that

*Sighted students also do cheating ..it is not a new thing.*
Category 4: Social
This category highlighted the need to bring an overall change in society to enhance the moral and ethical values of society as students of college or any institution are the representation of the local society and the social trend of corruption is one of the major reasons for prevailing students' academic cheating. One of the respondents expressed that

"We are not the only ones who are cheating, everyone is cheating in society in one or another way, and until society will not brings change there is no way to eliminate cheating in an academic institution."

Research Question 4: What are the remedies to eliminate academic cheating among visually impaired college students?

Theme 4: Preventing measures
The theme reveals certain remedies that can prevent visually impaired college students from cheating. This theme is based on the categories of moral education, proper assessment & evaluation mechanisms, and technological support (Rundle et al., 2019).

Category 1: Moral Education
Thematic Analysis of the study revealed that there should be ethical and moral education for the teachers' training programs either pre-service or in-service training institutes. Regular education colleges should also teach moral values to develop the highest moral values in society at large. students with visual impairment.

"First of all, college-level teachers should arrange opportunities for moral, and ethical training for students with visual impairment in addition to teaching content."

Category 2: Proper Assessment & Evaluation Mechanism
This category has highlighted the need for an appropriate assessment and evaluation system to reduce the element of cheating among visually impaired college students. This will include the implementation of the rules and regulations for the exam of visually impaired students. One of the participants of the study stated that

"We need to make strong our assessment and evaluation system for students with visual impairment."

Category 3: Technological Support
Some of the participants of the study responded that the provision of free assistive technology to students with visual impairment will reduce the problem of cheating by making learning convenient and accessible for them. One of the participants said that

"We can overcome this phenomenon by making learning easy through the support of the latest technology specific to visually challenged persons."

"Mostly students with visual impairment have a problem working on technology which reduces their independent learning opportunities and increases their dependency on other options."
6. Discussion

As the present study was conducted on the unusual academic misconduct of students with visual impairment which is academic cheating. Although the phenomenon of academic cheating is a sensitive one and difficult to properly assess, perhaps we being special educators have tried to portray it by conducting a small-scale study. Visually impaired students at the college level study for a better future. The teachers of visually impaired students perceive academic cheating as academic cheating is a way to obtain high marks or high grades during the exam. Children are put under pressure due to their parents' attitudes toward higher grades than average (Backman, 2019).

The study highlighted the nature of academic cheating that is happening within the presence of a writing assistant. Although there are certain rules for appointing a writer for the exam, somehow they are not properly followed by the concerned institutions. According to Ellis et al., (2018), involvement in the sale of academic resources by another person who has unacknowledged usage is defined as contract cheating.

The study has explored various reasons for cheating by visually impaired college students during exams. Passing the grade, language barrier at the college level because the content and papers are in the English language, visually challenged students face difficulty attempting the paper on their own (Fluck, 2019). The element of copy and paste for the completion of projects has also been explored by the study (Hawes, 2020).

There is a dire need for the ethical and moral training of society at large including teachers and students both in the colleges of special education and higher education so that they could able to develop the highest moral values among students with visual impairment. Professional practices can be brought through values and they keep our practices in the right direction (Strudwick, 2018).

7. Educational Implications

This study is exclusive because academic cheating is a common phenomenon found in higher education institutes around the world. This study can be implemented at the college or university level to give a complete understanding of academic cheating and the involvement of visually impaired students in it. The findings of this study can be implemented to eliminate the phenomena of cheating by strengthening the academically honest behavior of the students and teachers in the institutes. The implementation of this study ensures the implementation of high moral values including appropriate rules and regulations while opting the writer for visually impaired students and papers attempted by visually impaired students at the college level.

8. Conclusion

The study concluded here that college level is higher education level where students with visual impairment are to learn professional manners and academically honest behaviors. Students with visual impairment are also supposed to contribute to the country regardless of their disability. Teachers of visually impaired students are also expected to change their perception by putting their best in making and developing good citizens for the nation. There are following recommendations:

1. Appropriate moral training must be provided to teachers and students with visual impairment at the school level to make a firm moral foundation.
2. Proper Assessment and evaluation mechanisms at the college level should be introduced and implemented for visually impaired students.
3. Assistive technology should be provided during the exam only to visually impaired students to eliminate the chance of cheating.

4. Exams through the Braille system should be conducted to reduce the risk of cheating through the writer.

5. The writer of the visually impaired should be provided by the institute after proper scrutiny as per set rules and regulations.

References


Eaton, S.E. (2022) New priorities for academic integrity: equity, diversity, inclusion, decolonization


