

Academic Dishonesty from the Perspective of Primary School Teachers

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Abstract:

Introduction: Academic dishonesty is addressed by various experts in pedagogy and psychology who seek to preserve academic integrity in accordance with the moral and ethical principles of contemporary society.

Methods: The intention of the research was to find out how teachers evaluate different types of cheating by students during class, how they react to different types of academic dishonesty, and how they themselves were dishonest during their time in college. Teachers (N=272, mean age 40.85 years) responded on a 5-point Likert scale the attitudes towards morality, but also whether students cheated or self-reported their academic dishonesty when they were students.

Results: Factor analysis indicated the existence of 4 factors of teachers' moral beliefs (Trust in implicit morality, Teacher-given morality, Need for explicit rules, and Internalization of moral principles), which were correlated with students' assessment of academic dishonesty (Use of external resources, Cooperation) and with teachers' self-reported academic dishonesty (Utilitarianism, Unauthorized advantage, and Helping others).

Discussion: The research findings suggest that teachers should focus more on understanding their pupils' behaviour rather than condemning or punishing academic dishonesty and seek to develop their moral competence.

Limitations: The research sample size is not representative, also the research method is not standardized.

Conclusions: The role of teachers is to apply teaching strategies that will promote honest and responsible student behaviour.

Key words: academic dishonesty, students, teachers, primary school.

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Introduction

Academic dishonesty and school cheating are frequently discussed topics among the professional community (Arhin & Jones, 2009; Mudrock & Stephens, 2007; Preiss et al., 2013). As Bajtoš and Honzíková (2019) point out, this issue has been attracting the interest of scholars since the second half of the last century, and the fact is that research devoted to academic, or school cheating has been steadily increasing around the world. Abroad, Cizek (1999); Simkin and McLeod (2010); Kumar (2012); Eisenberg (2004); and Bernardi et al. (2008) have addressed this issue, and Clark (2008) has conducted research on electronic cheating. In the Czech Republic, the issue of school cheating has been addressed by Mareš (2005) and Vrbová and Stuchliková (2012). Vacek (2013) presents the results of research using the questionnaire and guided interview methods, which were used twice almost 20 years apart (1989, Vojtěchová 2008). The respondents of the research were students of the Faculty of Education, future teachers (in 1989 n=187, in 2008 n=120). In Slovakia, the issue of school cheating is dealt with by the authors Bajtoš and Marhevková (2016), who in their monograph have implemented a basic theoretical and scientific research input into the solution of the issue (Bajtoš & Honzíková, 2019). Honzíková et. al. (2021) is also currently dealing with cheating in the online environment among university students.

Cizek (2004, p.308, in Štambuk et. al., 2016) provided an expanded definition where academic cheating is defined as “any intentional action or behaviour that: (a) violates the established rules governing the completion of a test or assignment, (b) gives one student an unfair advantage over other students on a test or assignment, or (c) decreases the accuracy of the intended inferences arising from a student’s performance”.

1 Research methodology

The purpose of the paper and research was to find out what teachers' views on morality are, how teachers evaluate students' dishonest behaviour in the classroom, and how they reflect on their own dishonest behaviour during their studies. We hypothesize that teachers with more rigidly evaluated morality will judge students more strictly in the classroom and at the same time be less strict in self-reflecting their own moral behaviour during their studies.

1.1 Sample

A total of 272 primary school teachers from all regions in Slovakia participated in the research survey, of which 236 (86.8%) were female teachers teaching primarily at the primary level of education 43.4%. 21% of the teachers teach at both primary and lower secondary level of primary school (language teachers, education teachers - physical, music, ethics, and religious education) and 35.7%

teach only at lower secondary level of education 91.9% of the teachers of our research population teach at a state school, 5.9% at a church school and 2.2% at a private school. Demographic items except age ($Z=0.992$; $p=0.279$) were not normally distributed.

1.2 Instruments and procedures

Questionnaires were mailed to teachers by asking principals of randomly selected schools to email teachers in their school with a link to the questionnaire. In 2023, 342 completed questionnaires were collected. Responses to the questions on academic cheating, which were voluntary, were completed by 272 teachers (79.53%). The questionnaire consisted of several separate sections and took approximately 15-20 minutes of time. Nevertheless, the average time to complete the questionnaire was 40 minutes with some teachers completing the entire questionnaire in 9-13 minutes and the longest time to complete the questionnaire was both 5 hours and 43 minutes.

In the present analysis, the sections of the questionnaire that were included are:

- (a) Self-constructed part: statements regarding opinions about other people's moral behaviour (12 items) rated on a 5-point Likert scale. All items achieved a level of reliability as measured by Cronbach's alpha of 0.423. After conducting Factor Analysis and the reliability for each factor was as follows: Factor 1 - Trust in implicit morality 0.583; Factor 2 - Teacher-given morality 0.789, Factor 3 - Need for explicitly stated rules 0.524 and Factor 4 - Internalization of moral principles 0.220. Factors were determined according to the scree plot, cutoff eigenvalue > 1 , and meaningfulness of items building up each factor. Item selection was based on factor loadings ≥ 0.40 . Acceptable factorability of the correlation matrix was determined by Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test > 0.609 and significant Bartlett's test of sphericity.
- (b) Adapted items from the Academic Dishonesty Questionnaire (Klein et al., 2007; Preiss et al., 2013). From the original version of 12 statements, 8 were selected for student evaluation and 10 for teacher self-assessment. The items were rated by teachers on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Reliability as measured by Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the 8 items in the student dishonesty section was 0.875, and reliability for the 10 items tracking teachers' subjective admission of dishonest behaviour during their studies was 0.813. Factor analysis was conducted for both scales with KMO test > 0.809 and significant Bartlett's test of sphericity.

1.3 Data analysis

The data were descriptively and statistically analysed in IBM SPSS 20 (beta version) and graphically manipulated in MS Excel.

2 Results

Descriptive data from Likert scale (a) show that teachers most strongly agree that the role of teachers is to develop moral values ($M=4.61$; $SD=0.703$) and to be role models for students in both school and mainstream settings ($M=4.49$; $SD=0.056$) (Factor 2 - Morality given by the teacher), above the value of 4 they still agreed with the statement that the basis of morality is to follow the rule, to treat others the way they want others to treat them ($M=4.36$; $SD=0.932$). Teachers were also on average more likely to agree with the statement that if rules are established, they should be always followed ($M=0.37$; $SD=0.943$)

Teachers were more likely to disagree with the statements that contemporary films carry a moral message ($M=2.28$; $SD=0.051$) or that today's children have enough moral role models ($M=2.30$; $SD=0.057$). The other statements were in the middle range, i.e., between 2.5 and 3.6, with greater variability in responses. For all statements, the SD was above 1. Using exploratory factor analysis with Varimax rotation (excluding results less than 0.3), four factors were created from the statements: Factor 1 - Trust in implicit morality, Factor 2 - Morality given by teachers, Factor 3 - Need for explicitly stated rules, and Factor 4 Internalization of moral principles (Table 1).

Table 1

Factor analysis of teachers' views on morale

		<i>Component of factor analyses</i>			
		<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>
Trust in implicit morality $M=2.5239$ $SD=0.6545$	Today's children have enough moral role models.	0.821			
	Parents lead children to morality.	0.735			
	Contemporary films have a moral message in them.	0.583			
	Children are also capable of discriminating between right and wrong on their own, they don't need to be specially taught.	0.458			
Morality given by the teacher $M=4.6066$ $SD=0.7338$	The teacher should also develop the pupils' moral values.		0.872		
	The teacher should be a moral role model for pupils in the school environment and in everyday life.		0.834		

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Need for explicit rules M=3.7619 SD=0.6375	If rules are set, they should be always followed.	0.721	-0.308
	Children often behave immorally.	0.646	
	The basis of morality is to follow the rule: Treat others as you want others to treat you.	0.315	0.586
	People today are more prone to behave immorally.	0.542	
Internalization of moral principles M=3.7243 SD=0.7571	If a person steals food to feed the hungry, that is not immoral.		0.768
	The basis of morality is to follow religious precepts.		0.660

Teachers most agree with Factor 2 *Morality given by teachers* (M=4.61), then Factor 3 *Needs explicit rules* (M=3.76) followed by Factor 4 which we called *Internalization of moral principles* (M=3.72) and least agree with Factor 1 *Trust in the implicit morality of others* (M=0.25).

Based on the correlation analysis, it can be argued that there is a demonstrated relationship between the factor *Morality given by teachers* (need for control and self-affirmation) and the factor *Need for Explicit Rules* ($R=0.143$; $p\leq 0.05$), but also the factor *Internalization of Moral Principles* ($R=0.131$; $p\leq 0.05$). The *Need for Explicit Rules* factor also correlates with the *Internalization of Moral Principles* factor ($R=0.369$; $p\leq 0.001$). The *Trust in the Implicit Morality of others* factor does not correlate with any of the factors, and more than trust, indicates teachers' lack of trust in the moral settings of children and the world around them (parents, people, and the world).

Only the factor *Internalization of Moral Principles* was correlated with the variable Age ($R=0.144$; $p\leq 0.05$), which could indicate that with age there is a gradual transition from explicit rules to consideration of acting in terms of correct behaviour, although, not always supported by rules and norms.

In the *Analysis of Academic Dishonesty Scale*, the researchers investigated the extent to which teachers perceive dishonesty in students and the extent to which they subjectively assess it in themselves.

In the first part of the pupils' evaluation, two factors were found 1. Factor *Use of external sources* (copying assignments, papers, from a draught, from classmates, or allowing to write off). This factor explains 56.08%, with teachers agreeing with this behaviour in pupils (M=3.9; SD=1.02) The second factor is associated with not always allowed *Cooperation and mutual help*, when pupils work together on tasks that they should have done themselves or allow others to write off the tasks they have done (M=3.13; SD=0.92) (Table 2).

The second part looked at the *subjective perceived academic dishonesty of the teachers themselves* (Table 2). Teachers' responses produced three factors of dishonest behaviour namely 1. *Utilitarianism*, in which individuals seek assistance to achieve the highest grade whether through collaborative assignment development, seeking support when required to work independently, copying from others, or utilising a draftsman). Teachers do not admit to this form of behaviour in HE (M=2.17; SD=0.60) 2. *Seeking undue advantage* in the sense of getting information about what the questions will be like, revealing the content of the test to another student, copying sources without citation, which teachers disagree with the most (M=1.8; SD=0.73) and 3. *Cooperation and mutual help*, which means that teachers have helped a colleague on an exam, with assignments. Teachers are more likely to agree than disagree with this kind of sleeping (M=2.94; SD=0.05).

Table 2

Descriptive analysis of academic dishonesty factors

	<i>One-Sample Statistics</i>			
	<u>N</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Std. Deviation</u>	<u>Std. Error Mean</u>
<i>Use of external sources</i>		3.9038	1.01870	0.06177
<i>Cooperation and mutual help</i>	272	3.1268	0.92000	0.05578
<i>Utilitarianism</i>	272	2.1765	0.60432	0.03664
<i>Seeking undue advantage</i>	272	1.8027	0.73055	0.04430
<i>Cooperation and mutual help</i>	272	2.9485	0.78213	0.04742

The factor *Trying to get external benefits* was strongly correlated with the factor *Cooperation and mutual help* ($R=0.501$; $p\leq 0.001$). In the teacher self-assessment, the *Utilitarianism* factor correlated with the *Seeking Undue Advantage* factor ($R=0.418$, $p\leq 0.001$) as well as the *Helping Others* factor ($R=0.415$; $p\leq 0.001$). The *Seeking Undue Advantage* factor also correlated with the *Helping Others* factor ($R=0.325$; $p\leq 0.001$).

The relationship between the factors of cheating and academic dishonesty and between the factors of teachers' views on morality was examined using Spearman's correlation coefficient since the variables were not normally distributed. Only the Factor *Morality given by teachers* negatively correlated with the Factor *Utilitarianism* ($R= -0.168$; $p\leq 0.001$) and the Factor *Seeking undue Advantage* ($R= -0.155$, $p\leq 0.05$). The other factor of views on morality did not correlate with the factors of academic dishonesty.

3 Discussion

The results indicate a persistent mistrust of teachers towards pupils and the outside world, with teachers considering themselves as moral role models for pupils because they believe society is not morally set up enough. Teachers are most in favour of explicitly set rules and for them to be explicitly followed, but they are also interested in some possibility of correcting mis-set rules. It is as if teachers oscillate between the heteronomous and autonomous morality defined by Piaget. It can therefore be assumed that teachers are thereby reinforcing a lower level of moral development in pupils. Drawing on Kohlberg (1964), this is a stage of conventional morality, particularly stage 4, where a sense of duty, an orientation towards authority and showing deference to it is dominant (Kohlberg, 1964). This is because social order is only secured if social authorities (principals as well as teachers) are respected. Authority is given by norms and laws that are accepted as immutable.

It was also an interesting finding that teachers were least likely to agree with the Trust in Implicit Morality factor, where they were more inclined to the view that today's children are less able to distinguish between right and wrong and lack moral role models because even their parents do not guide them sufficiently towards moral behaviour. Teachers, on the other hand, are expected by society to be moral role models for children. And although teachers expect desirable behaviours from students, they do not practice these behaviours themselves (Velea & Farca, 2013). The factors of concern for morality that have been found can be compared with three specific schemas of moral reasoning that are detected by the DIT-2 test namely PI -the personal interest's schema, MN -the maintaining norms schema and P -the postconventional schema (Choi et al. 2020). While teacher-given morality is compared to the PI schema and goes hand in hand with some degree of Utilitarianism, the Need for explicit rules factor relates to the MN schema whereas the least stable factor in our findings (Internalization of moral principles) could indicate the postconventional schema, similarly to the Cooperation and mutual help factor, which, although it is about academic dishonesty, but in it students risk their academic dishonesty in an attempt to help others.

It appears that the occurrence of various forms of academic dishonesty is not uncommon in teacher education programs. DiPaulo (2022) focused his study on finding the prevalence of academic dishonesty in preservice teachers. He found that more than 80% of all participants admitted to engaging in at least one act of academic dishonesty during the previous two years. Only 12 of the 62 respondents in this study self-reported never committing any of the acts of academic dishonesty listed in the survey. Further, 68% of respondents self-reported engaging in serious acts of academic dishonesty, like cheating on tests or written assignments.

Teachers most frequently admit to dishonest behaving in their own behaviour while in college in terms of helping others (I'll take the liberty of writing off...). In Štrbáková's (2021) final thesis, which looked at the academic dishonesty rates of pre-service teachers versus the academic dishonesty rates of students in other majors, she found that pre-service teachers were the most susceptible to academic dishonesty, but there was no significant difference between students in each major in their own cheating during their college studies. The same finding was reported by Preiss et al (2013). Would this mean that teachers are more likely to evaluate the academic dishonesty of others and less likely to reflect it in their own behaviour? According to Klein et al (2007), the enactment of dishonest behaviour is often independent of an individual's evaluation of cheating, and this is also because an individual may be motivated to cheat for several reasons (Mudrock & Stephens, 2007), even if they are aware of cheating (Velliariis, 2016).

Our findings suggest that teachers in schools should focus more on acceptance and understanding of their pupils' behaviour, and not condemn or punish academic dishonesty, as pupils may also have serious reasons for resorting to cheating. They should seek to develop the internalisation of moral standards and universal ethical principles in their pupils, while not forgetting their own moral attitudes and actions.

Conclusions

The above research findings confirm that although academic dishonesty is not a new phenomenon, it is a serious problem that is constantly occurring in the school environment and needs to be addressed to a greater extent. From the empirical experience of university teachers, it is known that the most common forms of academic cheating include writing off classmates, passing off others' work as one's own, "ripping off" others' materials, collaborating on assignments where independence is required, or providing one's own materials to others. In our research, we also focused on these most common forms of cheating from the perspective of teachers. We were interested in how teachers evaluate student cheating and their own cheating during their studies. The results of the research showed that teachers' evaluations of their pupils' cheating differed, with teachers pointing to stricter adherence to the rules. They were more benevolent in assessing their own cheating during their studies. Therefore, in the future, when cheating occurs, it is important that teachers try to gather as much information as possible about individual incidents, have a dialogue with their pupils and then act fairly. The aim is not to detect dishonest behaviour and then punish it, but to prevent it.

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