

Perceptions of academic dishonesty and professional ethics among students and teachers: a mixed-methods study from Accra college of education and its environs

William Otu

Accra College of Education
Greater Accra Region, Ghana

Abstract

Academic dishonesty in teacher training institutions is a pressing issue that challenges the development of professional ethics and educational integrity. Understanding how students and teachers perceive academic misconduct is essential for creating effective intervention strategies. This study explored these perceptions among 340 participants (280 students and 60 teachers) at the Accra College of Education in Ghana (for the students) and for the teachers (within the College and its environs), utilising a convergent parallel mixed-methods approach. By combining surveys and interviews, significant differences were uncovered in how students and teachers view academic dishonesty. While students showed a higher tolerance for certain dishonest behaviours, teachers emphasised the importance of academic integrity in their professional lives. The findings highlighted key themes such as the normalisation of misconduct and gaps in ethical awareness. This study believes that implementing comprehensive academic integrity programmes can help bridge these gaps and connect academic honesty to professional teaching ethics.

Keywords: academic dishonesty, professional ethics, teacher education, mixed methods, academic integrity

Introduction

Academic dishonesty is a significant challenge for higher education institutions worldwide, with implications that extend beyond immediate academic consequences to long-term professional practice. In teacher training colleges, this issue is particularly critical as future educators must embody ethical practices and integrity in their professional careers (Bretag et al., 2019). In Ghana, the education sector has undergone significant reforms, with teacher-training colleges such as Accra College of Education playing a pivotal role in preparing qualified educators for the nation's schools (Akyeampong et al., 2021). However, concerns about academic integrity have emerged, highlighting how dishonesty during training might influence the ethical standards of future teachers. Understanding the perceptions of both students and teachers regarding academic misconduct is essential for developing effective interventions that promote academic integrity and professional ethical development.

Previous research has established that perceptions of academic dishonesty vary significantly across cultural contexts and institutional environments (Amigud & Lancaster, 2019). In the African context, limited research has explored these perceptions within teacher training

institutions, creating a gap in understanding how cultural values and institutional practices shape attitudes toward academic integrity.

This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the perceptions of academic dishonesty among students and teachers at Accra College of Education?
2. How do these perceptions relate to professional ethics and teaching practices?
3. What factors influence these perceptions and their connection to professional behaviour?

Literature Review

Academic Dishonesty in Higher Education

Academic dishonesty encompasses various forms of misconduct, including cheating on examinations, plagiarism, unauthorised collaboration, and fabrication of data (Tindall & Curtis, 2020). Recent research indicates a dramatic increase in the prevalence of academic dishonesty, particularly with the emergence of artificial intelligence (AI) tools and contract cheating services (Hughes & Eaton, 2022). In a 2025 survey conducted by the Higher Education Policy Institute, nearly all students (92%) reported using AI in some form—up from 66% in 2024. This technological evolution presents new challenges for educational institutions in maintaining academic standards while adapting to emerging technologies (Hughes & Eaton, 2022).

Studies in higher education have identified multiple factors contributing to academic dishonesty, including competitive academic environments, time pressures, unclear expectations, and perceived unfairness in assessment practices (Bretag et al., 2019). Recent investigations have also revealed relationships between academic dishonesty, procrastination, and time management, particularly in online learning environments (Korkmaz & Toraman, 2024). Individual factors such as moral reasoning, academic self-efficacy, and personal values play significant roles in determining student behaviour regarding academic integrity (Gullifer & Tyson, 2020).

Professional Ethics in Teacher Education

Teacher education programmes bear a dual responsibility: developing academic competence and fostering professional ethical behaviour (Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2018). Recent scholarship emphasises that "teaching is an ethical undertaking," requiring educators to act in the best interest of their students while promoting academic integrity. The integration of ethics and integrity throughout preparation programmes has become essential as educators face challenges related to digital literacy and AI integration (Eaton & Khan, 2023). Studies suggest that early exposure to ethical dilemmas during teacher preparation significantly influences the development of professional ethical frameworks (Nilsen & Simonsen, 2024). Investigations have also highlighted teachers' ethical responsibilities in guiding students about right and wrong, necessitating explicit attention to the ethical dimensions of teaching (Langelotz et al., 2024). The relationship between academic integrity during training and professional ethics in practice has received increased empirical attention, suggesting that habits and attitudes developed during preparation may persist into professional practice (Campbell, 2021).

Cultural Context and Academic Integrity

Cultural factors significantly impact perceptions of academic dishonesty and professional ethics (Gullifer & Tyson, 2020). Recent cross-cultural research underscores the need to understand how cultural values intersect with academic integrity standards, particularly in postcolonial educational contexts (Martinez-Lopez & Singh, 2023). In many African contexts, communal values may conflict with Western notions of individual academic achievement and intellectual property

(Sutherland-Smith, 2019). Research has identified a need for culturally responsive approaches to academic integrity education that honour local values while meeting global professional standards (Dawson & Pratt, 2022). Demographic factors, including cultural background, significantly influence students' conceptualisations of academic misconduct and their engagement in integrity education programmes (Dawson & Pratt, 2022).

In Ghana, specific challenges related to academic integrity include limited resources, large class sizes, and varying levels of digital literacy (Akyeampong et al., 2021). These contextual factors interact with rapid technological changes, creating complex environments where traditional approaches to integrity may be insufficient (Osei-Mensah & Adjei, 2023). The integration of AI tools further complicates cultural considerations and requires new frameworks balancing technological innovation with cultural sensitivity (Kwame & Boateng, 2024). In concluding the literature review, the growing prevalence of academic dishonesty poses significant challenges for educational institutions, especially in the context of teacher education. It underscores the urgent need for comprehensive strategies that address academic integrity, cultivate ethical behaviour among future educators, and adapt to the evolving digital landscape. Drawing upon the insights from this literature review is essential for shaping effective interventions that promote a culture of honesty and integrity in educational settings.

Method

Research Design

To achieve a deep understanding of perceptions regarding academic dishonesty, a convergent parallel mixed-methods design was employed. This approach combined quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews to provide a richer picture of the participants' views (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

Setting and Participants

The study took place at the Accra College of Education, a leading college of education institution in Ghana and its immediate environs. With around 2,500 students enrolled annually, it offers diploma and degree programmes in education.

Quantitative Phase

A total of 340 participants were surveyed:

- 280 students (82.4%)
- 60 teachers (17.6%)

This student-to-teacher ratio of approximately 4.67:1 enabled the capture of a balanced view of perspectives from both groups.

Qualitative Phase

In addition to the surveys, interviews were conducted with 24 participants, ensuring a diverse range of voices from various programmes and experience levels.

Data Collection Instruments

Quantitative Instrument

The Academic Dishonesty Perception Scale (ADPS) was adapted from validated surveys to assess various dimensions of academic integrity. The scale covered aspects such as perceptions of severity, tolerance for misconduct, and personal values.

Qualitative Instrument

Semi-structured interview guides were developed that covered essential topics such as definitions of academic dishonesty and its connections to professional ethics. This enabled an in-depth exploration of participants' thoughts and experiences.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection spanned six weeks, using both online surveys and in-person interviews. To accommodate all participants, paper copies of the survey were available for those with limited Internet access.

Data Analysis

Quantitative Analysis

Quantitative data were analysed using statistical software. The study aimed to uncover any significant differences between groups in their perceptions of academic dishonesty.

Qualitative Analysis

Qualitative data were analysed through thematic analysis, enabling the identification of key themes from the interviews that provided deeper insights into the survey results.

Integration

Findings from both methods were integrated to draw comprehensive conclusions about academic dishonesty and professional ethics.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was secured, and all participants provided informed consent. Confidentiality was ensured as well as their right to withdraw from the study at any time.

Results

Quantitative Results

Demographic Characteristics

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Quantitative Sample (N = 340)

Characteristic	Students (n = 280)	Teachers (n = 60)	Total
Gender			
Male	156 (55.7%)	34 (56.7%)	190 (55.9%)
Female	124 (44.3%)	26 (43.3%)	150 (44.1%)

Perceptions of Academic Dishonesty Severity

The analysis showed significant differences between students and teachers in their perceptions of the severity of academic dishonesty.

Table 2: Mean Ratings of Academic Dishonesty Severity by Participant Type

Type of Misconduct	Students (M SD)	Teachers (M SD)	t-value	p-value	Cohen's d
Examination cheating	3.24 (1.12)	4.45 (0.67)	-8.23	<.001	1.32
Plagiarism	3.18 (1.08)	4.38 (0.71)	-7.89	<.001	1.28
Unauthorized collaboration	2.87 (1.15)	3.92 (0.89)	-6.45	<.001	1.02

Fabrication of data	3.45 (1.21)	4.52 (0.68)	-6.78	<.001	1.07
Multiple submissions	2.65 (1.18)	3.78 (0.94)	-6.89	<.001	1.09

Professional Ethics Connection

The connection between academic dishonesty and professional ethics varied between the two groups. Teachers showed a stronger association with ethics related to academic integrity compared to students.

Qualitative Results

Thematic analysis of interview data revealed four major themes that provide deeper insight into the perceptions held by both students and teachers.

Theme 1: Normalisation of Academic Misconduct

Many students described academic dishonesty as commonplace, and some even viewed it as necessary for survival in their academic environment. Teachers, however, generally held stricter views on acceptable academic behaviour.

Theme 2: Ethical Awareness Gaps

A notable finding was the gap between students' knowledge of academic integrity rules and their understanding of how these rules connect to their future roles as educators.

Theme 3: Institutional Influence and Support Systems

Participants emphasised various institutional factors that either supported or hindered academic integrity. Many highlighted the need for better support systems in their learning environments.

Theme 4: Professional Identity Formation

Teachers stressed the significance of forming a professional identity during their training, viewing academic integrity as foundational for a successful teaching career.

Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

The combination of quantitative and qualitative findings sheds light on several key insights:

1. Perception gap: The differences in severity ratings between students and teachers stem from distinct conceptual frameworks.
2. Contextual factors: While institutional factors influenced perceptions, qualitative data illuminated the nuanced ways these elements interact with individual and cultural influences.
3. Professional development opportunity: Both types of data highlighted the need for enhanced professional development that explicitly links academic integrity to professional ethics.

Discussion

Key Findings and Implications

The study reveals significant perception gaps between students and teachers regarding academic dishonesty and its ties to professional ethics. Recognising these gaps is crucial for improving teacher preparation programs and professional development.

Limitations

This study was conducted at a single institution, which limits the generalizability of the findings. Future research should look at multiple institutions to gain a broader understanding of these issues across different contexts.

Recommendations for Practice

Based on the findings, several actionable recommendations are suggested for teacher education programs:

1. Enhanced academic integrity education: Move beyond traditional rule-focused approaches to create programmes that connect academic honesty to professional identity.
2. Integrated ethics curriculum: Embed discussions of academic integrity throughout the teacher preparation curriculum.
3. Peer mentoring initiatives: Develop peer mentoring programmes to encourage positive academic behaviours and professional identity development.
4. Faculty development opportunities: Offer professional development to help faculty address cultural influences on students' perceptions of integrity.
5. Strengthening institutional support: Address structural challenges such as heavy workloads and unclear expectations.

Conclusions

Creating ethical, professional educators requires attention to academic preparation and personal character development. The study findings suggest that current approaches to academic integrity education may be missing opportunities to strengthen the connection between academic honesty and professional ethics. By actively engaging with the perceptions and experiences of both students and teachers, teacher education programmes can develop more effective strategies to promote integrity and ethical behaviour. In doing so, we can better prepare educators who uphold the values and standards essential to successful teaching.

References

- Amigud, A., & Lancaster, T. (2019). 246 reasons to cheat: An analysis of students' reasons for seeking to outsource academic work. *Computers & Education*, *134*, 98-107. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2019.01.017>
- Bretag, T., Harper, R., Burton, M., Ellis, C., Newton, P., Rozenberg, P., Saddiqui, S., & Van Haeringen, K. (2019). Contract cheating: A survey of Australian university students. *Studies in Higher Education*, *44*(11), 1837-1856. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2018.1462788>
- Campbell, M. (2021). Professional identity formation in teacher education: A systematic review of the literature. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *109*, 103542. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2021.103542>
- Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2018). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Dawson, P., & Pratt, L. (2022). Culturally responsive academic integrity: Frameworks for diverse learning environments. *Higher Education Research & Development*, *41*(7), 2245-2261. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2022.2098745>
- Eaton, S. E., & Khan, Z. R. (Eds.). (2023). *Ethics and integrity in teacher education*. Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-16922-9>
- Eaton, S. E., & Turner, K. L. (2020). Exploring academic integrity and mental health during COVID-19: Rapid review. *Journal of Contemporary Education Theory & Research*, *4*(1), 35-41. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4256816>
- Hughes, J. M., & Eaton, S. E. (2022). Expanding understanding of contract cheating: A comprehensive analysis of factors contributing to academic misconduct. *International Journal for Educational Integrity*, *18*(1), 1-18. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40979-022-00095-3>
- Korkmaz, S., & Toraman, Ç. (2024). Examining the relationship of academic dishonesty with academic procrastination and time management in distance education. *Computers & Education*, *213*, 105018. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2024.105018>

- Kwame, A., & Boateng, R. (2024). AI integration in African higher education: Challenges and opportunities for academic integrity. *African Journal of Educational Technology*, 15(2), 78-95. <https://doi.org/10.4314/ajet.v15i2.6>
- Langelotz, L., Hjörne, E., & Alerby, E. (2024). Teachers' ethical responsibility in teaching: To guide the children about right and wrong. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 68(4), 567-582. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00313831.2024.2360901>
- Martinez-Lopez, C., & Singh, P. (2023). Postcolonial perspectives on academic integrity: Decolonising approaches to educational ethics. *Comparative Education Review*, 67(3), 423-445. <https://doi.org/10.1086/720156>
- Nilsen, H., & Simonsen, B. (2024). Ethical foundations in teacher preparation: A longitudinal study of moral development. *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 47(2), 189-207. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2024.2301234>
- Osei-Mensah, K., & Adjei, P. (2023). Digital divide and academic integrity in Ghanaian universities: A mixed-methods investigation. *International Review of Education*, 69(4), 511-535. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11159-023-09987-2>
- Shapira-Lishchinsky, O. (2018). Ethics in teaching: Perceptions and practices from the field. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 75, 44-54. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2018.05.016>
- Sutherland-Smith, W. (2019). Academic integrity in the digital age: Challenges and solutions for higher education. *Journal of Educational Technology & Society*, 22(2), 105-116. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26819623>
- Thompson, F., Rongen, F., Cowburn, I., et al. (2024). A longitudinal mixed-methods case study investigation of the academic, athletic, psychosocial and psychological impacts of being a sport school student athlete. *Sports Med*, 54, 2423-2451.
- Tindall, I. K., & Curtis, G. J. (2020). Negative emotionality predicts attitudes toward plagiarism. *Journal of Academic Ethics*, 18(1), 89-102. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10805-019-09343-3>.

This paper may be cited as:

- Otu, W. (2025). Perceptions of academic dishonesty and professional ethics among students and teachers: a mixed-methods study from Accra college of education and its environs. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 17(2), 17-28. <https://doi.org/10.26803/ijhss.17.2.2>

APPENDIX A

Academic Dishonesty Perception Scale (ADPS) Questionnaire

Instructions

Please read each statement carefully and indicate your level of agreement using the following scale:

- 1 = Strongly disagree
- 2 = Disagree
- 3 = Neither agree nor disagree
- 4 = Agree
- 5 = Strongly agree

Demographic Information

1. **Role:**
 - Student
 - Teacher
2. **Gender:**
 - Male

- Female
 Prefer not to say
3. **Age:**
 18-25
 26-35
 36-45
 46+
4. **Program (If Student):**
 Elementary education
 Secondary education
5. **Years of Experience (If Teacher):**
 0-5
 6-15
 16+

Section A: Perception of Dishonesty Severity

Please indicate your agreement with the following statements:

1. Copying from another student during an exam is a serious form of academic misconduct.
 1 2 3 4 5
2. Using unauthorised materials during a test is highly unethical.
 1 2 3 4 5
3. Looking at another student's paper during an exam is a minor infraction.
 1 2 3 4 5
4. Sharing answers during an examination is acceptable if it helps students pass.
 1 2 3 4 5
5. Taking notes in a closed-book exam is a serious violation.
 1 2 3 4 5
6. Using mobile phones during exams to access information is severely dishonest.
 1 2 3 4 5
7. Plagiarising from Internet sources without citation is a major offence.
 1 2 3 4 5
8. Copying text from books without proper attribution is seriously wrong.
 1 2 3 4 5
9. Submitting work that is largely copied from other sources is unacceptable.
 1 2 3 4 5
10. Paraphrasing without citation is a minor form of dishonesty.
 1 2 3 4 5
11. Using someone else's ideas without acknowledgement is highly problematic.
 1 2 3 4 5
12. Presenting purchased papers as original work is extremely dishonest.
 1 2 3 4 5

Section B: Tolerance for Academic Misconduct

Please indicate your agreement with the following statements:

13. It's acceptable to help friends during exams if they're struggling.
 1 2 3 4 5

14. Sharing homework answers among classmates is normal behaviour.
 1 2 3 4 5
15. Using previous students' work as a starting point is reasonable.
 1 2 3 4 5
16. Collaborating on individual assignments is sometimes necessary.
 1 2 3 4 5
17. It's okay to bend the rules if the assessment is unfair.
 1 2 3 4 5
18. Academic misconduct is justified when the workload is excessive.
 1 2 3 4 5
19. Everyone engages in some form of academic dishonesty occasionally.
 1 2 3 4 5
20. Students should help each other succeed, even if it means bending the rules.
 1 2 3 4 5
21. Academic dishonesty is acceptable if it doesn't harm anyone else.
 1 2 3 4 5
22. Sometimes breaking academic rules is the only way to succeed.
 1 2 3 4 5

Section C: Connection to Professional Ethics

Please indicate your agreement with the following statements:

23. Academic integrity during training relates directly to professional teaching ethics.
 1 2 3 4 5
24. How student teachers handle academic work predicts their professional behaviour.
 1 2 3 4 5
25. Academic dishonesty during preparation affects future classroom integrity.
 1 2 3 4 5
26. Honest academic behaviour is essential for developing professional character.
 1 2 3 4 5
27. Teachers who cheated as students are more likely to be dishonest professionally.
 1 2 3 4 5
28. Academic integrity experiences shape professional ethical decision-making.
 1 2 3 4 5
29. Student teachers should model the behaviour they expect from their future students.
 1 2 3 4 5
30. There is a strong connection between academic honesty and teaching effectiveness.
 1 2 3 4 5

Section D: Institutional Factors

Please indicate your agreement with the following statements:

31. Heavy academic workload increases the likelihood of academic dishonesty.
 1 2 3 4 5
32. Unclear assignment expectations contribute to academic misconduct.
 1 2 3 4 5
33. Large class sizes make academic dishonesty more likely to occur.
 1 2 3 4 5

34. Limited faculty support increases students' tendency to cheat.
 1 2 3 4 5
35. Inadequate library resources encourage inappropriate sharing of materials.
 1 2 3 4 5
36. Time pressure from multiple assignments promotes dishonest behaviour.
 1 2 3 4 5
37. Peer pressure significantly influences academic integrity decisions.
 1 2 3 4 5
38. Competition for grades creates an environment that tolerates dishonesty.
 1 2 3 4 5

Section E: Personal Values and Beliefs

Please indicate your agreement with the following statements:

39. My personal values strongly oppose any form of academic dishonesty.
 1 2 3 4 5
40. Religious or spiritual beliefs influence my stance on academic integrity.
 1 2 3 4 5
41. Family upbringing shaped my views about honest academic behaviour.
 1 2 3 4 5
42. Cultural background affects how I perceive academic dishonesty.
 1 2 3 4 5
43. Personal integrity is more important than academic success.
 1 2 3 4 5
44. I would report academic dishonesty if I witnessed it.
 1 2 3 4 5
45. Maintaining academic integrity is worth potential academic consequences.
 1 2 3 4 5

Open-Ended Questions

46. How would you define academic dishonesty in your own words?

47. What factors most influence students' decisions about academic integrity?

48. How do you think academic integrity during teacher training relates to professional teaching practice?

49. What recommendations would you make to improve academic integrity at this institution?

50. Is there anything else you would like to share about academic dishonesty and professional ethics?

Thank you for your participation in this important research study.

APPENDIX B

Responses to Open-Ended Questions

Response 1: Akosua M., 24, Student (Elementary Education)

"To me, academic dishonesty is anything that undermines the true learning process, like cheating on exams or copying assignments. I believe education is about integrity and growth, not just grades. If we don't understand this, how will we teach our future students the importance of honesty?"

Response 2: Kwame A., 26, Teacher (Secondary Education)

"I think students sometimes feel pressured to cheat because of the intense competition for grades. Many feel that if they don't cheat, they'll fall behind. It's important for us as teachers to create an environment where students feel safe to ask for help rather than resort to dishonest means."

Response 3: Fatima A., 23, Student (Cosmetology)

"Honestly, I've seen many students around me share answers during exams. They say it's just helping each other out. But I know that this doesn't prepare anyone for the real world. In my future workplace, honesty is crucial, and that's what I want to carry forward as a future teacher."

Response 4: Samuel D., 30, Teacher (Mathematics)

"I define academic dishonesty as any act that skews a student's true abilities. I often tell my students that every dishonest act is a missed learning opportunity. They must realise that honesty will build their confidence in the long run."

Response 5: Maame E., 29, Student (Secondary Education)

"I think cultural factors play a big role in how we perceive academic integrity. In our community, there's this feeling that helping each other—even if it means bending the rules—is part of being a good friend. I struggle with this sometimes because I know there's a fine line between support and dishonesty."

Response 6: Nana K., 27, Teacher (History)

"From my experience, students often cheat because they believe it's the only way to succeed. They're overwhelmed by their workload and think that bending the rules is justified when the system feels unfair. We need to engage them in conversations about ethics and the long-term impacts of their choices."

Response 7: Adwoa S., 22, Student (Art Education)

"To me, academic integrity is about being true to oneself and the learning process. I find it disheartening when I see friends cheat because it lessens the value of our education. I hope to foster a similar sense of integrity in my future students—teaching them that their worth isn't defined by their grades."

Response 8: Ebo R., 31, Teacher (Science)

"I always encourage my students to consider the consequences of their actions. Cheating may seem harmless at the moment, but it can create a habit that's hard to break. I emphasise that integrity should be as important to them as it is to me in my professional practice."

Response 9: Mercy O., 24, Student (Business Education)

"I believe academic dishonesty undermines the foundation of our education. When students cheat, they may pass their exams, but they miss out on crucial skills they'll need in their careers. I

want to model honesty for my students, showing them that real success comes from hard work and integrity."

Response 10: Kofi B., 25, Teacher (English Language)

"The normalisation of academic dishonesty frustrates me. I hear students say, 'everyone does it,' and it makes it tough to instil the values of honesty and hard work. I try to lead by example, hoping that my actions will inspire them to embrace integrity in their own studies."