

Academic Dishonesty: Lived Experiences of Students Receiving Services from Online Academic Commissions



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ABSTRACT: Since online learning has become more common, academic dishonesty has become more pervasive. A trend of academic dishonesty had developed as a result of all the difficulties and challenges in this new educational system as well as the effects of the pandemic. By examining the actual experiences of students who utilize the services of the online academic commission, the observation intended to contribute to the existing body of literature on this trend. A qualitative, phenomenological study approach was employed to grasp the significance of the lived experiences of the students receiving services from online academic commissions. Snowball sampling was used in the selection of the participants and Collaizzi's seven-step technique analysis for the phenomenological approach was used in this study.

KEYWORDS: phenomenology, academic dishonesty, qualitative research, pandemic, online learning, Collaizzi's technique analysis

1. INTRODUCTION

The pandemic's onset caused significant challenges in the educational system. Online learning had proven tough for both students and teachers. According to Barrot, J. et al. (2021), the students faced a variety of online learning obstacles, both in terms of type and degree. Their home learning setting was the biggest challenge, whereas technical knowledge and competency posed the least amount of difficulty. While as claimed by Nambiar, D. (2020), many students experience difficulties in gaining access to the internet. This, in turn, causes problems with attendance and engagement in online activities sessions, making the implementation of online educational platforms difficult. As a result, student tend to keep up by accomplishing their assignments and completing term exams with the support and assistance of other sources.

While upon the delivery of lessons, teachers assess student learning to determine the learning outcomes through quizzes, projects and term examinations online evaluations are frequently used in online learning, which limits teachers to indirect monitoring of students and makes it hard to control and manage cheating (Arkorful & Abaidoo, 2015). The most common student techniques in the conduct of their performances in quizzes, projects and term examinations included resource management and utilization, help-seeking, improving technical aptitude, timekeeping, and learning environment management (Barrot et al, 2021). Academic dishonesty has become a major issue among high school and college students (Jensen, 2002). Their standards for what is and is not cheating frequently shift depending on the circumstances (Trautner & Borland, 2013). However, it is evident that peers have a significant impact on decisions about academic dishonesty. According to Diego, L. (2017), exam-related cheating is brought on by peer pressure. Regarding the incidence of academic dishonesty in the virtual class, there is a lack of empirical evidence. According to the findings of Black, E. et al. (2008), it is fair to assess if online learners define cheating in the same way as those enrolled in traditional learning settings. To assess this understanding, more research is required. Additionally, qualitative analysis should be used to develop a thorough understanding of the observable variables that may be included in a valid and reliable tool to determine academic dishonesty in online learning environments. However, the study of Aguilar, M. (2021), explored the academic servicing trade, which is thought to be a place where academic dishonesty is accepted and often used in the context of the new normal. Aguilar found out that academic servers are mostly educators who volunteer their services to help students with their academic responsibilities. They typically earn between Php. 1,500.00 and Php. 20,000.00 every week from their patrons, who pay an average of Php.

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500.00 for each task. Aguilar further revealed that unwillingness to independently study due to poor or no comprehension of lessons and insufficient assistance from teachers and parents, as well as laziness, peer pressure, and pressure to achieve excellent results, are the leading causes of academic dishonesty among students. While Bayaa, M. et al. (2016), claim that the primary factors of academic dishonesty were the desire for high grades, heavy academic loads, and the need to impress family and relatives. This disturbing trend of online academic commissions, which might have an impact on the quality of education, must concern the academic community. In order to determine how it may be minimized, this study looked at the actual experiences of students who use the online academic commission's services.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the most frequent services that students obtain through online academic commissions, and how do they receive such services?
2. Why do students use the services provided by online academic commissions?
3. What is the students' perception of online academic dishonesty?
4. How does using online academic commissions for assistance affect the quality of education?
5. In what way can this online academic dishonesty be prevented?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Several studies were conducted to establish the optimal application of the online learning system. Sun & Chen (2016) revealed that successful online education relies on curriculum that is well-designed and suited for the learners and teachers, a healthy student-teacher relationship, qualified teachers,

A welcoming virtual learning community, and also the rapid advancement of technology. While Joaquin et al. (2020) claim that perhaps the effective implementation of the e-learning system of education could very well depend on the capability of teachers, the state of the educational setting, network connectivity, availability of equipment, capacity of learners, as well as the accessibility of ways to deliver classes, Mobo & Sabado (2019) claims that it tends to promote efficiency as well as resulted to learners' performance in learning, but nevertheless requires improvement. The academic dishonesty, however, poses a significant obstacle to the effective and efficient delivery of teaching.

The results from the study of Sendag, S. et al. (2012) show that in the majority of the survey's predictor variables, undergraduate students were substantially more involved in e-dishonesty practices than graduate students. Additionally, the main area of research showed a substantial connection between participation in e-dishonesty and the justification for e-dishonesty. The least engagement in e-dishonesty was reported by students in the social sciences and education, while engineering and the physical sciences had the highest involvement.

While the study of Herdian, H. et al. (2021) demonstrates that collaboration-based academic dishonesty is widespread in online learning. Through many methods, student learning provides tactics for performing academic misconduct. An example is copying a friend's answer file from the online system and entering in with a default username and password which students need not alter. Additionally, rather than attempting to fill in the questionnaires, the student opted to act dishonestly by copying his friend's work by merely renaming. It has been revealed that students use the WhatsApp group chat feature to work together to commit academic dishonesty.

Another trend in the academic dishonesty has been investigated by Aguilar, M. (2021). The academic services sector, which is thought to provide as a site for academic dishonesty. Aguilar discovered that transactions start with academic servers advertising themselves through postings in social media, after which a student looking for someone to fulfill their academic requirement reads the post and contacts the academic server to inquire.

2.1 Summary

Since online learning has become more common, academic dishonesty has become more pervasive. A trend of academic dishonesty had developed as a result of all the difficulties and challenges in this new educational system as well as the effects of the pandemic. By examining the actual experiences of students who utilize the services of the online academic commission, the observation intended to contribute to the existing body of literature on this trend.

2.2 Conceptual Framework

To direct this research, a conceptual framework was developed based on prior analysis and primary data (see figure below).

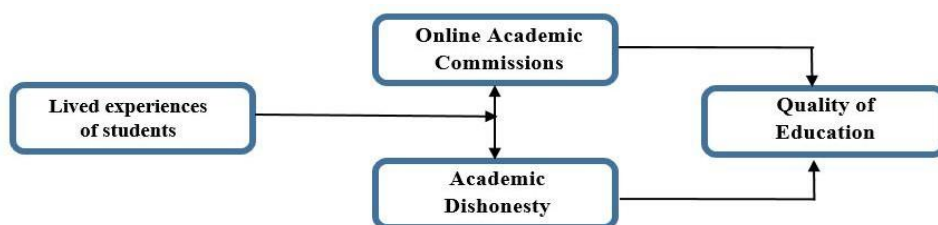


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Study

Lived experiences of students who received services from online academic commissions are regarded a sort of academic dishonesty, and both have an impact on the quality of education. Online academic commissions are online venues comparable to those used by Aguilar, M. (2021) academic servicing trade, which provides paid services such as assignments, projects, quizzes, thesis, term paper, research tasks, and so on. Several studies have found that academic dishonesty, such as this, has a significant impact on educational quality. According to Bachore, M. (2016), academic dishonesty decreases educational quality.

3. METHODS

A qualitative, phenomenological study approach was employed to grasp the significance of the lived experiences of the students receiving services from online academic commissions. Phenomenological study is an in-depth examination of what people's experiences mean to them. It is fundamentally concerned with the research of ordinary human events in order to discover people's common sense understanding and the meaning they construct of their own and others' experiences (Bliss, 2016).

3.1 Participants and Locale of the Study

The participants were chosen using the snowball sampling approach, in which one of the participants' friend, which is an online academic commissioner, recruited students who often used the online academic commission's services. The researchers determined that they were qualified since all individuals used a range of services from the same five online academic commissions on various social media platforms. The study took place at Bulacan, Philippines.

3.2 Data Gathering Procedure

In this study, data was gathered using a semi-structured interview guide question. Inquisitive questions were developed based on the participants' first replies to gain a thorough knowledge of their experiences. Snowball sampling was used in the selection of the participants. The one-on-one interview was conducted via Zoom and the questions asked were: (1) What are the most frequent services that you obtain through online academic commissions, and how do you receive such services? (2) Why do you use the services provided by online academic commissions? and (3) What is your perception of online academic dishonesty? Additional follow-up queries also were designed to gain an in-depth insight of the participants' experiences led by the participants' first replies, examples here include: "Do you think this is a form of academic dishonesty?" "Do you feel you can still gain knowledge and skills through this?" "Can you tell me more about it?" "What do you think can be done to avoid academic dishonesty?". Interviews were digitally recorded with the participants' approval to assist in correct transcribing then analyzed using Colaizzi's phenomenological technique. All participants provided e-signed informed consent to participate.

3.3 Data Analysis

Colaizzi's seven-step technique analysis for the phenomenological approach was used in this study. The data and themes was then analyzed by the researcher. Figure below illustrates Colaizzi's seven-step analytical approach

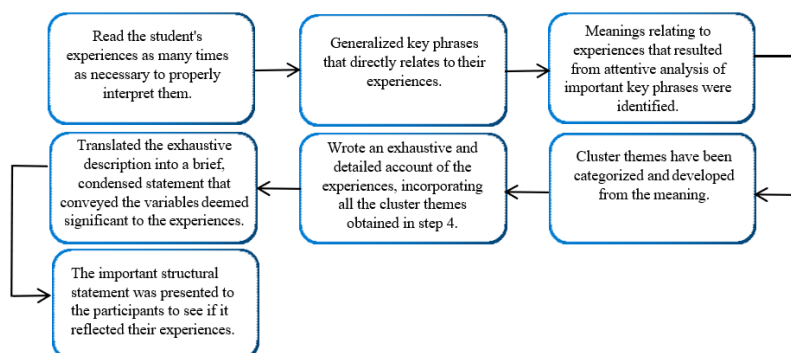


Figure 2. Colaizzi's Technique Analysis

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4. RESULTS

Ten students who are actively engaged in the services of the online academic commissions, were interviewed one-on-one via the digital platform Zoom in this phenomenological study. After then, the tapes were transcribed and evaluated.

By questioning a participant about the platforms of some of the online academic commissions and asking them for tips on the top 3 who frequently utilize their services, the researchers were able to identify the participants. Following that, the researchers got in touch with the candidates and, in a letter, described the study's purpose. Thirty possible participants were contacted, however only 10 responded and agreed to an interview via Zoom. They were assigned the numbers S1 through S10. The questions were as follows:

1. What are the most frequent services that you obtain through online academic commissions, and how do you receive such services?
2. Why do you use the services provided by online academic commissions?
3. What are the your perception of online academic dishonesty?

Table 1. Characteristics of Participants

Participant	Gender	Category	Major/Strand
S1	Female	Senior High School	STEM
S2	Male	College	Nursing
S3	Male	Senior High School	STEM
S4	Male	Senior High School	STEM
S5	Female	Senior High School	STEM
S6	Female	College	Psychology
S7	Male	Senior High School	STEM
S8	Male	College	Engineering
S9	Male	College	Engineering
S10	Female	Senior High School	HUMSS

Table 1 reveals that there are three female senior high school students, two of whom are studying STEM and one of whom is studying HUMSS, as well as three male senior high school students, all of whom are studying STEM. There were also one female and three male college students majoring in Psychology, Nursing, and Engineering. It can be noticed that the majority of students who are using online academic commissions are from the senior high school. It must be highlighted that Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics are the most prevalent strands of students who use the services, which is also connected to the courses or majors listed for college students that use the online academic services regularly. The data acquired were in agreement with the findings of Sendag, S. et al. (2012) wherein undergraduate students are more engaged in e-dishonesty practices than the graduate students.

Table 2. Services received by the participants at the time of the study

Services	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	S8	S9	S10
Assignment	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Project	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Quizzes/Exams	x		x	x	x		x		x	x
Thesis	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Term Paper	x	x							x	x
Other Research Tasks	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x

Table 2 demonstrates that all participants availed services such as doing their assignments, projects, thesis, and other research tasks such as looking for various articles online. However, only seven of the ten participants used the services of answering quizzes/exams, and only four of the ten participants sought help with their term paper. According to the evidence, practically all of the school activities were performed by others for payment and are regarded academic misconduct. This exemplifies what Herdian, H. According to et al. (2021), collaboration-based academic dishonesty is common in online learning.

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Table 3. Cluster Themes

Major Themes	Sub-Themes
● Online academic commission	➤ Services
	➤ Social media platforms
● Inability to cope with the pressures of student life	➤ Plenty of requirements
	➤ Time pressure caused by deadlines
	➤ Did not comprehend the lesson at all
	➤ Desire for higher grades
● Perception of Academic Dishonesty	➤ A natural thing
	➤ Not bad at all, it helps

Table 3 outlines the key topics that came up during the participants' one-on-one interviews. The majority of the themes that surfaced were consistent with the findings of Bayaa, M. et al. (2016), Aguilar, M. (2021), and (Barrot et al, 2021).

NARRATIVE OF EXPERIENCES

Open-ended questions were employed by the researchers to obtain participant responses on their personal experiences with online academic commissions.

For the first question, "What are the most frequent services that you obtain through online academic commissions, and how do you receive such services?"

S1: " I always avail their service for my assignments and projects. Also with our thesis and other research work. I first learned about it in Facebook, but now, most of transactions for my commissioned works are through Twitter.

S2: "Projects mostly, and also assignments like essay. There are times that I ask help for our thesis and searching for related literature. I send them message in Facebook and pay them through gcash and then they send me the finished work in my email."

S3: " Almost all of their services like assignments, projects, activities, research, and also I sometimes ask them to answer my exam in subjects that are very hard to comprehend. Well, I receive the work when they send it to my email. For exams, I send them the link and they answer it using my email address and I give them my password also so they can answer it.

S4: "Quiz, assignment, project, term paper, thesis, researching an article or movie reviews. I send them the instruction in messenger then they just do it and send me back."

S5: " I often avail their services for my assignments particularly essay and projects. But I also ask help for research paper, term paper, and quizzes. I DM (direct message) in Twitter."

S6: "Assignments like essays, projects, case study, even thesis and other research. I receive through email but I contact them through Twitter."

S7: "Mostly infographic and poster projects, researching for assignments, case study, and thesis.

By sending message in their Facebook page"

S8: " Essay, we always have an essay assignment and project, also term paper and other research works. I transact with them through Twitter and payments are made through gcash only."

S9: "Thesis, term paper, other research tasks, projects and most of the time, assignments.

Through their Facebook page."

S10: Film review, other projects also like poster making, infographics, and a lot of essays. I send it through messenger."

For the second question, "Why do you use the services provided by online academic commissions?"

S1: "Due to bulk of activities and assignments. As in everyday, it's like five to six tasks and more than five assignments. I cannot handle them all, if I cannot turn it before the due date, I will get low grade."

S2: "Many assignments and projects"

S3: "Too tiring and I cannot understand the lesson well because teachers are too fast in explaining."

S4: "I want to have high grades so my parent will be happy."

S5: "I ask help from academic commissioners because there are lot of assignments and projects and I cannot do it all at once."

S6: "I need to comply on time. I need to finish all those plenty of tasks in time."

S7: "Super as in overloading school works are the reason why I ask them to do it. But I am always looking for a cheaper commission fee."

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S8: " I don't understand our lessons most of the time because looking at the computer for several hours makes me sleepy and tired

S9: " So I can be included in the top 10 of the class, most of my classmates are doing it any way." S10: "Because of so many assignments everyday and deadlines are really scary.

For the third question, "What are the your perception of online academic dishonesty?".

S1: "It means cheating, like you are copying someone else exam or assignment."

S2: "It seems to be a natural thing nowadays because teachers can't really know who did our

S3: "It may be bad if you are cheating, but if you are just asking for help to have a good output, then it is not bad." S4: "Online academic dishonesty for me means cheating, like in exam, you copy from others or plagiarism is also a form of online academic dishonesty. But getting help from others like the academic commission, I think is not dishonesty, it's trying to survive."

S5: "It is plagiarism, like copying the work of others, but the online academic commission is not a form of academic dishonesty because students only ask for help and does not plagiarize."

S6: "It seems to be common specially now with online classes. Because it is easier to access anything through the help of the internet."

S7: "Most common is plagiarism but if you ask for the help of academic commissions, there will be no plagiarism. They give copy of zero plagiarism report for an essay task."

S8: "It has been happening in online classes and it has been becoming an acceptable thing."

S9: "Can't help being dishonest in online classes since there are many assignments and projects, students like me seek the help of others like the academic commissions."

S10: "Is it bad? No. Is it good? No also. I mean, online academic dishonesty depends on how you are being dishonest. If you are cheating, it's dishonesty, but if you are asking for help from others, it is not dishonesty."

5. DISCUSSION

Almost all of the activities in the online classroom such as assignments, projects, research activities, thesis, and others were obtained by participants through online academic commissions. It has been revealed that the most frequent services that they avail are essays as part of their assignments, and they typically obtain services through Twitter and Facebook. When asked why they utilize the services provided by online academic commissions, practically all of the participants said it is because they have plenty of schoolwork. The majority of them have the same opinion of online academic dishonesty, which they see as neither bad nor beneficial. However, they believe that the online academic commission is not a form of academic dishonesty, but rather a useful tool for surviving their course.

Academic institutions should be deeply concerned about the proliferation of online academic commissions. When students obtain services from an online academic commission, they do not learn or comprehend the subject matter since they were not the ones who completed the tasks; this has a significant influence on the quality of education. The battle against academic dishonesty is one that will likely remain challenging for some time. However, academic institutions may take significant steps to reduce unethical activities and guarantee that honesty predominates in the online classroom.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Since academic dishonesty is a complex and dynamic issue, there are several approaches that may be taken to address it. Creating and putting into place strict procedures to prevent it to lessen academic dishonesty is one. For instance, it is important to seriously penalize dishonest students in order to discourage others from becoming dishonest.

Teachers should also be creative in assessing students' performance. Cheating will be more difficult if students would be unable to forecast the kind of exams that will be administered in classroom. Aim for two items while preparing tasks like essays and term papers: originality and uniqueness. The likelihood that student is able to discover a pre-written paper on the internet that meets all the requirements decreases with the originality of the topic you pick and the accuracy of your directions. By revising paper themes each year, teachers can reduce the chance that students will submit papers from past years to be their own. You may consider about creating a rubric that provides a thorough discussion of the criteria you'll be using to grade the assignment. There are some students who breach ethical principles at class since they are unaware of the moral standards expected in the classroom. As a result, students must be motivated to maintain academic integrity. Furthermore, parents must instill ethical values in their children in favor of making them honest and conscientious. Students can help to reduce academic dishonesty since they are aware of dishonest students. Hence, they must be persuaded to share information on instances of academic dishonesty.

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