

FORMS, FACTORS AND CONSEQUENCES OF CHEATING IN UNIVERSITY EXAMINATIONS: Insight from Open and Distance Learning Students

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ABSTRACT

The present study narrated the forms, factors and consequences of cheating in university examinations by Unisa Open and Distance learning students from anecdotal data. The results showed that the perpetrators mostly used crib materials on paper, ruler and calculator cover. The factors that influenced examination cheating were gender, age range and regional locations of candidates. The consequences were monetary fines and suspension periods. The limitation of the study is that inferences are based on documented evidence only without verifications through interviews. The study provides some recommendations that may provide Registrars of universities with insight to tighten up examination regulations so that the credibility of degrees universities offer is upheld through awarding degrees to deserving students only.

Keywords: Forms; factors; cheating; consequences of cheating; university examinations; Open and Distance Learning Students

INTRODUCTION

Cheating in summative examinations is a malpractice that has pervaded all levels of assessment. The levels hardest hit are secondary school certificate examinations, university semester and annual examinations and professional advancement courses in the uniformed forces and the judiciary system. There are many examples of the worrisome but ubiquitous levels of cheating throughout the world. The Sun News (2010) reported 54% of the Secondary School Certificate Examinations candidates in Nigeria as having been caught cheating in the May/June 2010 examinations. Matoke (2010) reported of teachers' threats to boycott invigilating national secondary school leaving examinations due to start in October unless adequate security is put in place by the Kenyan government to curb massive cheating and leakages of examination papers before the day of writing. There was an increase of 27% in the number of General Certificate in Secondary Education and A-Level candidates caught cheating in England, Wales and Northern Ireland in the 2009 summative examinations (Paton, 2010).

The examination cheating offences are not only restricted to secondary school learners but are also rampant among university students. The University of Manchester, in the United Kingdom, reported 20 cases of students that were brought before the university's disciplinary committee after being caught cheating in summative examinations (Botero,2010).

Members of the uniformed forces have also been caught flouting their royalty oaths when found cheating in professional course acceleration examinations. Widespread cheating was also uncovered in the Royal Thai Police examinations when non-commissioned officers were writing commissioned examinations (Punyawan, 2010). A "significant number" of FBI agents writing a "test intended to measure their knowledge of recently introduced guidelines on procedures for conducting criminal investigations, national security probes and foreign intelligence collection" were found cheating (Domestic Investigations and Operations Guide, 2010).

Committing similar offence as the CIA agents in the USA were five sober district judges writing Master of Law (LLB) examinations at Kakatiya University in India (Orlando News, 2010). Some open and distance learning (ODL) students at the University of South Africa (Unisa) also contributed to the statistics on examination cheating in the October/November examination period similar to those highlighted above. When malpractices such as the scale on which examination cheating is taking are noticed, it is prudent to highlight the offence and the possible consequences that go with it in order to discourage some prospective offenders.

Cheating in examinations is a fraudulent behaviour that involves some form of deception in which a candidate's efforts or the efforts of other candidates are misrepresented (Prescot, 1989 as cited by (Symth & Davis, 2003).

Through cheating, a candidate seeks to obtain an unfair advantage which culminates in misrepresentation of the culprit's performance as well as those of other candidates in an examination. A study that investigates the forms, factors and consequences of the questionable practices of examination cheating may provide insight on how to reduce the practice from continuing unabated.

Such a study may address the research question: What are the forms and factors of cheating in university summative examinations and what are the consequences for committing such an academic offence? The answers to such a research question may be of interest to teacher educators, secondary and primary school educators as well as people in civil society who upholds the authentic merit that is given to the academically gifted in university entrance, job selection and civic leadership.

A study that analyzes the factors that influence university students' cheating and the possible methods they use when cheating may provide insight to school principals and university registrars on strategies that schools and universities can adopt to reduce student examination cheating.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Examination cheating is an unethical practice that some university students often make when they face a dilemma of failing an examination. Failing a summative examination is an awful experience that frightens university students because of the effects of the failure. For university students, failing a summative examination entails the repeat of a semester, discontinuation of student support grant or even getting expelled from a programme. Armed with these fears of failure some university students are sometimes filled with anxiety of how they would answer the difficult questions they assume will be asked (Peters, 2010).

Some university students anticipate the questions set in examinations to be too difficult for them to answer because they feel that their lecturers are cruel, heartless and want them to fail, but they do not realise that the questions become difficult because they are not prepared to answer them. In order to counter the perceived hatred that they feel their lecturers hold against their passing, they commonly look for a strategy that can help them to pass the examination (Peters, 2010).

Those university students who do not hold their lecturers as scapegoats for their failure also have reasons to appertain for their fear of failing. They sometimes make flimsy excuses for their lack of examination preparation (Botero, 2010).

Common excuses include social problems at home, illness, and theft of essential reading materials or death in the family. When the students who lie are not allowed to write the examination at a later date based on these flimsy reasons, they can engage in the academic dishonesty of cheating. Some of the students are so determined to have their reasons for being unprepared to write examinations on the scheduled date that they can bribe a medical doctor to write a report certifying that a student has been or is still unfit to write an examination due to ill health.

Students who request to be allowed to write delayed examinations believe that such examinations may be a repeat of the originally written paper or that they contain some repeat questions.

After the examination in which they were 'unfit' to sit for has been written, they consult their friends of the questions covered so that they prepare answers before they sit for their delayed examinations. They can design strategies to have unauthorised materials in the examinations for the difficult questions that they feel that they cannot do well in.

STRATEGIES USED BY STUDENTS FOR CHEATING IN EXAMINATIONS

The art of cheating in examinations is increasing in sophistication, ranging from physical possession of unauthorised materials to the use of technology (Clabaugh & Rozycki, 2009). The traditional crib notes is an ancient form of cheating in which students smuggle illegal materials into the examination room.

They are smuggled in the examination room in small pieces of paper, writing somewhere on their bodies, clothes, wrist watches and any other places that they think invigilators will not suspect to contain material that will give a candidate an advantage of using concealed unauthorised materials (Clabaugh & Rozycki, 2009). Common forms of crib by both male and female students is writing crib on the bottom of shoes, inside hats, inside a neck tie, belt, emptying the contents of a wrist watch and replacing it with crib notes and covering with a long sleeved shirt/blouse crib written on hands and arms.

Female students have extra places to hide crib notes on their thighs, where they cross their legs during writing and start reading them as well as writing crib notes inside false fingernails before attaching them to their fingers.

Cheats who use the methods unique to females believe that male invigilators will ignore them as they read crib materials written on their thighs because they believe that the male invigilators would think that they will be labelled as perverts or get an embarrassing title of female molesters.

Another form of cheating through having illegal materials before the day of writing has been labelled as leaking of examination papers (Miti, 2010). Leakages of examination materials can occur before and after writing. For the case of Uganda leaking can occur during the various stages of examination administration such as compiling of question papers, typesetting, proof reading, printing, packaging and distribution, examination centres, marking of scripts and awarding of grades (Miti, 2010).

These malpractices of leaking of examination materials sometimes emanate from personnel in the examination administration line selling papers to complement their low remuneration packages (Sosian cited by Matoke 2010).

Due to the high stakes associated with examinations, leakages can also be organised at government official levels. For instance, the OSYM conducts the national examinations whose results are used for admission to Turkish universities, employment in public institutions including state ministries and the police academies (Hurriyet Daily News, 2010). After revelations of rampant cheating in the State Personnel Examinations in Turkey, the central government's call for a shift from a central examination system to a decentralised system was perceived as having political implications that would influence partisan elections and appointments in the public service (Kihe as cited by the Hurriyet Daily News, 2010). When successfully decentralised there are great fears that politicians from the ruling party may use government arms to enable party cohorts to gain access to examination papers before the day of writing.

This is possible in Turkey because some of the breaches that resulted in the wholesome cheating in the State Personnel Examinations were selling of examination papers by OSYM and the employees of the company that prints them (Today's Zaman, 2010). Technology has also been found to complement existing forms of cheating in examinations.

Use of Technology in Examination Cheating

Technology has become an efficient tool for cheating in examinations. For instance, the non-commissioned officers taking the commissioned officer examinations who were caught cheating in the Royal Thai Police examinations used an elaborate scam of using expensive appropriate equipment to assist them in the cheating (Punyawan, 2010). These culprits used a telephone transmission system which enabled candidates to communicate examination questions to a third-party outside the examination venue who in turn transmitted the answers via the same device (Puttaya Daily News, 2010). Another sophisticated cheating technique that can be used is the use of watches that are fitted with tiny cameras to photograph examination questions which are solved by experts and then relayed to candidates (Today's Zaman, 2010). Hackers have not relaxed and watched the complexity of cheating technology develop. In Turkey hackers rented a house in front of the national examination body (OSYM) in Ankara and wiretapped the building to enable them copy the centre's computer files (Today's Zaman, 2010).

This literature review has provided an insight that can inform the design of the study and help to understand the context of the ODL students who provided data that was used to answer the research question.

CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

Data for this study were provided by students studying various undergraduate programs at Unisa. Unisa is one of the world's ten largest universities offering ODL (Thijs, 2002) to students in different parts of the world. As part of its quality control UNISA is explicit of the conduct of examinations at centres scattered all over the world.

When sending the examination time-table to students the Student Assessment Directorate encloses examinations instruction. Among other regulations, item 18(b) states that:

Candidates who, without authorization, take any book, document or object (such as tissue, ruler or pocket calculators with notes on it) that may help them in the examination and neglect to hand such unauthorised material to the invigilator before the first answer book or question paper is made available to candidates, are guilty of contravening regulations of the University and expose themselves to disciplinary measures as determined by the University Council (Unisa Examinations Regulations, 2010: 1).

Furthermore the Unisa Invigilators' Manual stipulates comprehensive guidelines on the invigilators' conduct during examinations. The manual states that each examination venue should have a Chief Invigilator plus two invigilators for the first 30 students and an additional invigilator for every subsequent 30 students.

In practice there are two invigilators for 0-30 students, three invigilators for 0-60 students and the pattern is repeated for additional 30 candidates thereafter.

This arrangement is a strategy to ensure that invigilators can devote their undivided attention on inspecting candidates' behaviour during the course of writing. During the time of examination writing, invigilators are expected to "inspect items such as rulers, calculators and pencil cases to ensure that no notes are written thereon that may assist candidates" (Unisa Invigilator Manual, 2010: 24). The examination conduct is clear and available to all students but some of them willingly violate them.

METHOD OF RESEARCH

A qualitative method of research was used to collect and interpret data for this article. The qualitative research design used "a naturalistic approach that sought to understand the forms, factors and consequences of cheating in ODL specific contexts in real world settings in which the researchers did not attempt to influence or manipulate the cheating that was done by students but seek to unveil the ultimate truth (Bashir, Afzal & Azeem, 2008).

Invigilators devised their methods of detecting students' use of unauthorised materials in the examinations conducted in the October/November 2009 examination period using the Unisa's code of conducting examinations. When an invigilator suspected that a candidate was copying he/she alerted the Chief Invigilator, who together with the invigilator, kept watching for signs of cheating from a strategic distance in order to catch the culprit red-handed. When caught red-handed, the culprit's unauthorised material was photocopied and a written statement describing how they caught the cheating candidate was produced.

The statement describing the misconduct was verified by the Commissioner of Oaths after the end of the examination. The culprit of misconduct also wrote a testimony of their misbehaviour.

The Chief Invigilator's or invigilator's written statement, the Commission of Oaths' testimonial, the photocopied illegal material and the culprit's self-written text explaining their misconduct are the documents that UNISA's Student Disciplinary Committee (SDC) uses to decide disciplinary action on a culprit. The documents of the SDC comprising of the agenda, photocopies of the evidence of misconduct bearing a candidate's registration number, assigned case number according to the order of the hearing, and minutes of the SDC's deliberations were the sources of data for this study.

The documents used as data sources assisted in understanding the social act of cheating in the October/November 2009 examination period to build a picture which aimed at reporting detailed views of the forms, factors and consequences of examination cheating (Leedy 1997).

A constructivist paradigm of qualitative research that views knowledge as socially constructed from the context of cheating in examinations was used for this study (Golafshani, 2003).

A constructivist paradigm was useful for this study for providing insight for viewing knowledge and any meaningful reality such as examination cheating as being contingent upon human practices that can be constructed in and out of interaction between people and their world and can be developed and transmitted within social contexts (Bashir, Afzal & Azeem, 2008).

Validity and Reliability

The techniques that were used to collect and interpret data were credible in the sense that they were conducted in a naturalistic environment by professional people undertaking their normal duties. The data is credible, neutral, can be confirmed, is consistent, dependable and transferable as the cases of cheating can be contested and similar conclusions be obtained using UNISA's code of conducting examinations. Continuous refinement of the data collection and interpretation techniques through invigilators' many years of invigilation experience and the SDC members' conducting of hearing cases at the end of each semester and year increased the validity and reliability of data used in this research (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). The validity and reliability of the data for this study is also high because there was no researcher bias as the data collection and interpretation was conducted without anybody aware that the results would be used for an academic paper. The data used for this article is credible because they reflect reality and are judged to be trustworthy and reasonable (Mukhola 2006). The Deputy Registrar proof read the first draft of the manuscript to assess content validity and accuracy of reporting.

The proof reading also improved the credibility and trustworthiness of the results and reporting of the study. Trustworthiness of the data was followed by ensuring that the research was grounded in ethical principles which are carried out fairly so that the findings thereof portray the reality as close as possible (Makhado, 2002). For ethical reasons permission to use the data was granted by the Deputy Registrar. In keeping with the ethical agreement made all materials reproduced for this study are anonymous in order to protect the identity of the culprits of cheating in the October/November 2009 examinations. Extracts of examples of cheating forms were taken from the book that contains the bound photocopies of offences and can be verified in case of replication of this study.

Data Analysis

Data analysis involved categorizing photocopies of offences of cheating bound together into book. The offences were named after the medium on which the illegal material was written on such as crib for notes written on plain or tissue paper or photocopies of reading materials, ruler, calculator cover, hand and multiple choice questions for students who exchanged MCQ papers during writing. Other offences are described as "swallowed" when a culprit swallowed the evidence, "refused" when a culprit dashed out of the examination room and flushed the evidence in a toilet, "send someone" when a culprit sent someone to write the examination on his or her behalf and "cell phone" when a culprit tried to use a cell phone to cheat.

The Offences Belonging

to each of these nine categories were summarized by frequency tables so that the mathematical processes become the analytical tool for making meaning of the numeric data (Bashir, Afzal & Azeem, 2008).

Thus, quantitative techniques were used to determine the prevalence of an examination cheating form.

The factors influencing a candidate to cheat in an examination were determined from content analysis involving analytic induction (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998).

Analytic induction was used to interpret the excerpts of the culprits' self-written narratives of the reasons that made them to bring illegal materials into an examination room.

Content analysis of the excerpts suited analysis and interpretation of qualitative data from the self-written reasons because it allowed sorting and making sense of the data by observing patterns on perspectives and putting them into themes.

The consequences of cheating in an examination were determined by the fine or suspension period preferred on a culprit by SDC. The fine and suspension period for each culprit was found in the minutes of the SDC meeting.

RESULTS

A total of 158 culprits who attended the SDC hearing provided data for this study. Some culprits did not attend the SDC hearing due to distance to travel to Pretoria, lack of financial resources and other personal reasons. Such culprits' cheating offences were not assigned a case number and were not part of the present study. Culprits were invited in writing to attend the disciplinary hearing and they responded also in writing indicating whether they would attend or not. The culprits who indicated that they would attend had their photocopied offences assigned a case number in the numerical order of the hearing.

The photocopied evidence of cases with assigned numbers was bound in a volume in numerical order indicating the sequence in which they were heard during the SDC's deliberations.

Firstly the forms of cheating offences are presented. We were informed by the literature review that examination cheating is influenced by factors such as gender, age of culprits and geographical location of a culprit among others (Smyth & Davis, 2003).

Forms of Cheating Offences

There were five different forms of crib mediums that were used for cheating by candidates in examinations namely crib on paper, ruler, calculator cover, hand and cell phone.

Three candidates sitting next to each other illegally exchanged multiple choice answer sheets so that they could compare answers of correct options.

One candidate used a cell phone for cheating whilst two candidates refused to surrender the cribs they had and flushed them in a toilet and swallowed respectively. One candidate sent someone to write an examination on his/her behalf. A summary of the cheating forms is shown in Table: 1 below:

Table: 1
Forms of cheating used by candidates

Freq	Offence									
	Paper	Ruler	Calc cover	Send	Hand	MCQ	Cell phone	Swallowed	Refused	Total
No	128	15	4	1	2	3	1	2	2	158
%	81	9.5	2.5	0.6	1.3	1.9	0.6	1.3	1.3	100

The most commonly used form of cheating was crib on papers which was used by 81% of the candidates. An example of crib on a piece of paper is shown in Figure: 1 below:

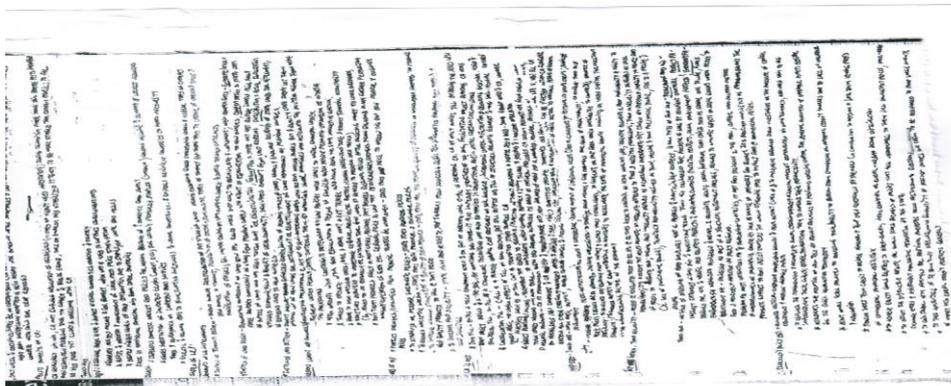


Figure: 1
Crib on a piece of paper

Other forms of cheating were crib on rulers (9.5%), calculator covers (2.5%) and hand (1.9%). Figure 2 shows examples of crib on a palm and tissue paper.

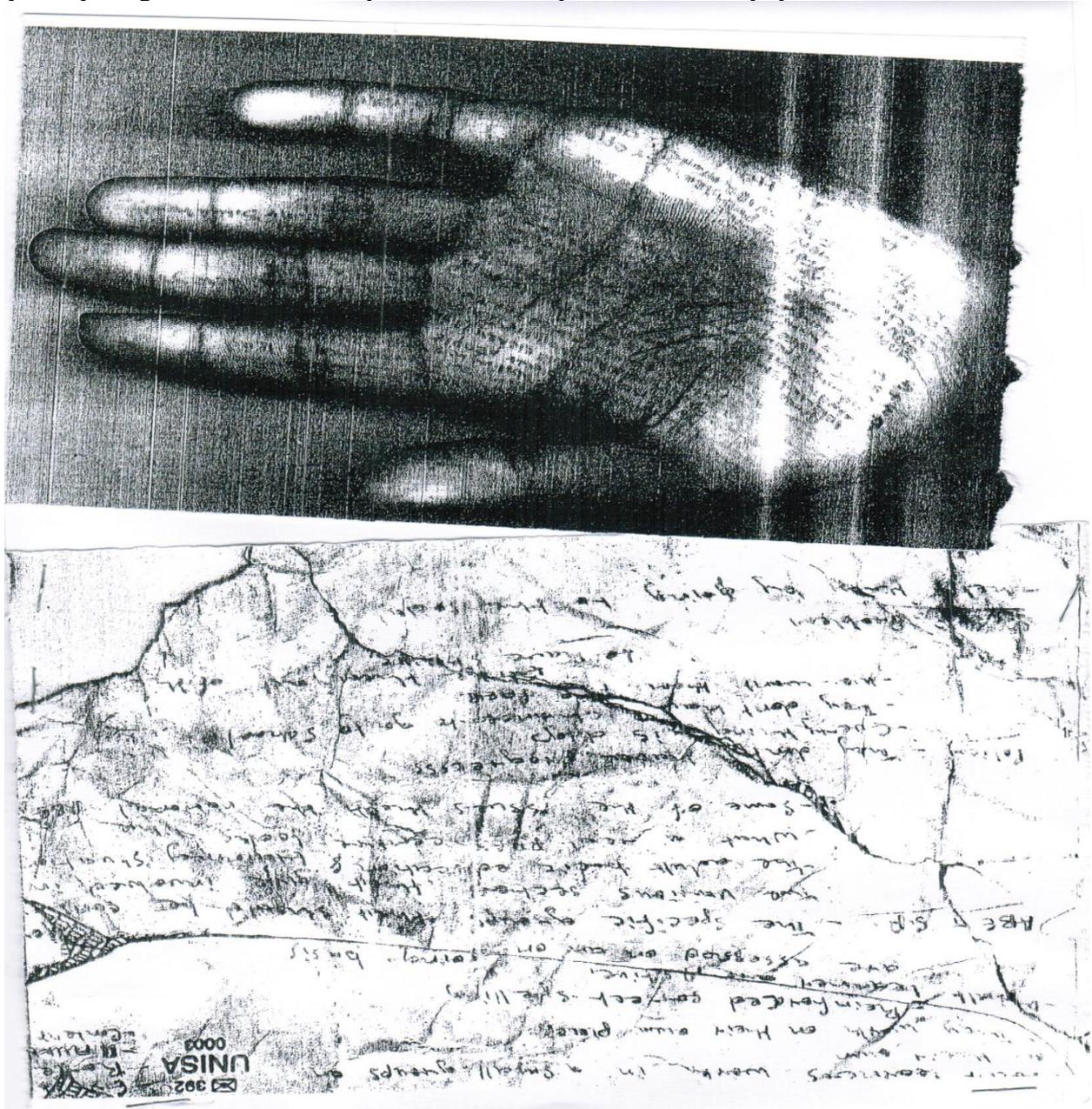


Figure: 2
Excerpts of cheating on hand and tissue paper

Factors Influencing Examination Cheating

After noting the forms of cheating that the candidates used in the October/November 2009 examination period it was necessary to analyse the prevalence of the misbehaviours by gender, age and geographical locations in order to begin to understand the factors that can influence the misdemeanour. Each of these factors is briefly presented below.

Cheats By Gender

It was necessary to analyze examination cheating by gender in order to know the gender that is most likely to cheat. Table 2 summarizes the statistics of examination cheating by gender.

Table: 2
Percentages of examination cheaters by gender

Frequency	Gender		
	Males	Females	Total
Number	40	118	158
Percentage (%)	25.3	74.7	100

Table: 2 shows that 74.7% of the examination cheaters were female candidates and 25.3% of them were males. In real terms these percentages reveal that in every hundred of Unisa candidates caught cheating in examinations 75% of them are females or in every four Unisa candidates caught cheating in examinations three of them are females.

Cheats By Age-Range

In terms of ODL studies it is important to know the age range that is prone to examination cheating in order to understand their motivations. Table 3 summarizes the pattern of cheating over the different age groups.

Table: 3
The pattern of examination cheating by age groups

Number	Age-range in years							Total
	< 20	21-25	26-30	31-35	36-40	41-45	> 46	
Frequency	10	17	20	28	36	24	23	158
%	6.3	10.8	12.7	17.7	22.8	15.2	14.6	100

Fully understanding that age is a continuous variable we decided to take it as a discrete function in order to conform to daily contexts because people use whole numbers to determine their ages rather than express it in years and months. Using this understanding the highest frequency of Unisa examination cheats or the modal class is the 36 to 41 age range with a proportion of 22.8%. Using 36 years as a boundary or median age, it is noted that 52.6% of the candidates who are 36 years and older are prone to cheating in Unisa examinations whilst the proportion of cheats 35 years and younger are prone to committing the offence is 47.4%.

Cheats By Province

It was necessary to analyze the cheats by province in order to determine whether the environment of candidates influences them to commit the offence. Table 4 summarizes the examination cheats by regional location.

Table: 4
Examination cheats by their regional location

Freq	Province									
	GP	EC	KZN	FS	MP	WC	Limp	NW	Others	Total
No	23	20	80	3	12	4	12	2	2	158
%	14.6	12.7	50.6	1.9	7.6	2.5	7.6	1.3	1.3	100

Key: GP – Gauteng, EC- Eastern Cape, KZN- Kwa-Zulu Natal, FS- Free State, MP- Mpumalanga
WC-Western Cape , Limp- Limpopo NW- North West, Others- Outside South Africa

Table: 4 show that more than half of the cheaters (50.6%) are from one province of Kwa-Zulu-Natal. Gauteng and the Eastern Cape are in the second and third position with 14.6% and 12.7% respectively. After being found guilty of cheating in an examination the candidates were penalised.

Consequences of Cheating

The consequences of being found guilty of cheating in an examination were three-fold. First, the results for a module in which cheating took place was cancelled. Secondly, the offender was fined an amount equivalent to the cost of registering the module in which the candidate was found cheating. Thirdly, the culprit was suspended for a period ranging from one to five years. Depending on their circumstances and their remorsefulness some culprits were suspended without paying fines whilst others had whole periods of suspension suspended.

Fines

Basically fines were determined by the cost of the module that a candidate was caught cheating. For instance, candidates caught cheating in a module whose cost is R875 they were fined the same amount, those caught cheating in a R1 750 were fined that equivalent and so on. Table 5 displays the fines and the frequency of students who were charged under them.

Table: 5
Percentages of culprits and the fines they paid

Frequency	Range of fine					Total
	No fine	< R1000	R1000-R1500	R1500-R2000	> R2 000	
	34	102	10	11	1	158
%	21.5	64.6	6.3	7.0	0.6	100

About 21.5% of the culprits were not fined for their cheating allegations whilst 64.6% of the culprits paid less than R1 000 for their offences. Usually a fine was followed by suspension from registration for various periods.

Suspensions

A suspension involved a student being suspended from registering for new modules at the university for a period varying from one to five years. During the suspension period a student is not allowed to enrol at any other university. Those who enrol at other universities will not have their credits transferred to their universities for them to be exempted from taking similar courses passed at Unisa. The distribution of suspension periods is shown in table 6 below.

Table: 6
Suspension periods of examination cheats and their percentages

Frequency	Suspension period						
	Suspended period	1 year	1.5years	2 years	3 years	5 years	Total
No	12	134	2	3	2	5	158
%	7.6	84.8	1.9	1.9	1.9	3.2	100

Most examination cheats (84.8%) were given one year suspension period as punishment. This means that they were not allowed to register for the 2010 academic year. Seven point six percent (7.6%) of the examination cheating culprits had their suspension periods wholly suspended. It looks like the SDC hearing considered the frankness and genuineness of the reasons that led to copying in an examination on waiving the suspension of students. A student who had a whole period of suspension suspended wrote to SDC:

*Due to some family problems my stress levels were high. I did not realise it but I had developed hypothyroidism and I was experiencing all the symptoms. I have faxed a list of the symptoms of hypothyroidism. A week after I finished writing my exams I made an appointment to see an endocrinologist and she sent me for a whole series of blood tests and my results confirmed that I have hypothyroid disease. This disease is caused by stress and it causes muscle aches, lack of concentration, brain freeze, low blood pressure, freezing hands and feet, a whole list of other symptoms and I was experiencing most of them. My last exam paper was a day after Eid which is a holy day for us just as Christmas is for Christians and I had a lot of cooking to do as a mother and I was unable to prepare for the examination. Due to desperation I resorted to making some notes that were found in my possession. I realised during the examination that it was not worth it because I did not know how to use them and they did not help me at all because this was not something that I had done before.*²⁷²

I was very nervous and fidgety and this led the invigilator becoming suspicious and finding those in my possession (Communication by a student to SDC, 4 January 2010).

Three point two percent (3.2%) of the students had a five year suspension period. This means that they will be allowed to register in order to continue with their studies in 2015. Students who were given a five year suspension term were usually rude and extremely abusive towards invigilators.

During a partial open book examination one such candidate "had a mass of reading materials on his desk" (Invigilator, 29 October 2009). When asked to remain with Unisa study guides without notes written in them and put away all other materials, the student became abusive and shouted "what the hell don't you understand... this is an open book examination" (Chief Invigilator's report, 29 October 2009).

A male invigilator was called to calm the candidate "but the student kept on making racist remarks and continued swearing in a loud voice. The SRC arrived but the student continued with his bad conduct assaulting and hitting me with his fist on my arm" (Chief Invigilator's report).

Three candidates who were in the same venue wrote testimonials alluding that the student had "severely disrupted the centre classroom of candidates. The person disrupted the examination venue by screaming, swearing and throwing his pens etc" (Candidate in the same examination venue). Based on the evidences from the Chief Invigilator, invigilator and three candidates writing in the same venue, the SDC resolved that the student "be denied the privilege to register again as a student at the University for a period of five years and then only with the permission of the Executive Committee of Senate" (SCR, 14 January 2010).

DISCUSSION

Findings from this paper show that examination cheating is a reality with Unisa students. As a large open university that enrolls students without restriction the more than 158 students who were caught cheating in the October/November 2009 looks frightening but when expressed as a percentage of the total students who wrote the summative examinations during this period the proportion will compare reasonably with other universities. The majority of the culprits (81%) of examination cheating were caught using traditional crib papers (Table: 1). This is a sign that more offenders can be caught if invigilators are helped by modern technology to detect the offences because some culprits may escape the hook. This is possible given that invigilators have to monitor a cheating scenario for a while before they can approach a suspected offender. A typical situation is described by this extract, "I saw a student reading something from inside her question paper. I saw her twice thinking that she was reading a question paper" (Invigilator: 24 November 2009). Chances are that some culprits can get away with it if they are spotted towards the last glance of their cheating.

Most invigilators exercised good professional ethics and conduct that they gathered enough evidence of a candidate's cheating before they accused him/her of the offense. For instance, the invigilator quoted above could not approach a candidate and accuse her of cheating. The invigilator had to monitor the situation for sometime until they caught a culprit red-handed. A common professional tactic that they used was going to the back row of a suspicious candidate's seat and studied the situation from a strategic point unnoticed by the culprit. In line with this strategy, an invigilator alluded that "I stood at the back of her row where she didn't see me. I noticed her looking again under the question paper and I saw a piece of notes between her book and the question paper. When certainly sure of the place where the unauthorised material lied I quickly snatched it" (Invigilator: 24 November 2009).

The predominant form of cheating using crib notes and tactic of mingling question paper, answer sheets and illegal documents are not unique to this study but were also reported for secondary school students in Nigeria (Sun News, 2010) and England, Wales and Northern Ireland (Paton, 2010). Other possible media that can possibly be used to smuggle illegal materials into the examination room are clothes, wrist watches and any other places that they think invigilators will not suspect to contain any material (Clabaugh & Rozycki, 2009). These forms were not found in the present study but cannot be ruled out because the humanly and professional conduct of Unisa invigilators are such that they can only keep an eagle's eye on materials on the table and cannot check what is underneath a table. Writing illegal materials on one's body was observed in this study on one's palms.

As noted by Clabaugh and Rozycki (2009) illegal notes can also be written on thighs and it is always difficult to detect copying from such hidden places. Only CCTV cameras can capture holistically behaviours of candidates cheating in examinations as they can capture the moments when a culprit is not aware. Some culprits who destroyed evidence through swallowing and flushing them in the toilet denied their offences believing that there is lack of evidence. For instance, a candidate who swallowed crib notes in front of other candidates, Chief Invigilator and invigilator refuted the action vehemently writing thus:

You have been told what happened, but unfortunately you were not there. I am already humiliated and insulted; I ended up seeing a doctor that day because I was stressed. A lot of people respect me too much. This is too much of an embarrassment and I am tired of talking about it now. How can I swallow the paper? Tell me, how can I do that? (Candidate: 4 January 2010).

Selfish and defensive claims such as this one may be difficult to handle given the emotional state of the candidate. Candidates such as this one who turns against the invigilators fully knowing that other candidates were witnesses show no remorse. The candidate is more concerned about her image in society as having been tarnished by her actions rather than regret the dishonesty that she displayed.

No amount of talking can make candidates such as this one accept their errors of judgement in order for them to apologise except when shown CCTV footage of their actions. Only when they are asked to comment on CCTV footage can candidates such as the above calm down and talk sense after seeing how dehumanising their actions were. That about 75% of the culprits caught cheating were women departs from literature from Western countries that found no significant differences between males and females in the majority of examination malpractices (Crown & Spiler, 1998). Excerpts from the culprits show that female students in ODL are overwhelmed by social problems as well as seeking financial independence through formal employment. An example of an emotional social problem is one extracted below:

My life has been in turmoil since August due to certain events that occurred to me. My fiancé whom I loved dearly and trusted whom I had brought home turned out to be deceptive. He lied to me and he led a double life. He already had a wife and three children. I am a divorcee and I had taken this badly as my daughter had gotten to get used to him. Everything began not to make sense. I found it difficult to manage, to cope, to continue with life...And then I started becoming rebellious, doing things that were not part of my character (Candidate: 31 December 2009).

Stressful situations like the one described above can prevent anyone from concentration in general and preparation for examination in particular leading one to smuggle disallowed materials into the examination room with the hope of copying and passing the examination. Frustrations of this nature may be added to a low paying position that students look forward to improve with graduate passes. In the good old times most married women were contented with being house wives and depend wholly on a husband's salary. Industrialisation has brought some social issues such as divorce or erosion of the value of one income in a family that dependency on it is no longer viable necessitating some women to have the desire to contribute economically. The following verbatim quote epitomizes such scenarios:

I am 42 years of age and a mother of 6. I embarked on this journey of educational studies not only because I am passionate about teaching but also due to financial problems experienced by my family. It has taken me a long time, through persistence and perseverance, to get to where I am today. My degree means the 'world' to me, my salvation. My future is dependent on your decision. I have erred, but kindly be considerate with your outcome. I and my family's future depend on this (Student: 5 January 2010).

Sentiments such as the ones stated above are touching in the sense that the cheating is not done out of greed but a genuine need to pass a degree in order to earn a decent graduate salary that can maintain a family. Most mothers can do anything for the sake of the family as it is a mother who knows what children have to eat and what they have to wear.

So, a mother like the above who noticed symptoms of failure in her examination resorted to cheating with the hope of achieving a desired goal of passing graduate studies and provides an up-to-date life style of the family. People's geographical locations have influence on their behaviours.

The geographical location of the students who were caught cheating in the October/November 2009 was considered as a useful factor that influenced their academic dishonesty.

As also noted by Symth and Davis (2003: paragraph 6) the "cultural environment is one of the primary factors that determine perceptions and therefore influence ethical judgements". The bulk of Unisa students are based in South Africa.

This explains why only 1.3% of the cheats were from outside South Africa (Table 4). In the present study the majority of the cheats (50.6%) were based in KwaZulu-Natal province. In the absence of data to explain the reason why so many students from this province were caught cheating it is not unreasonable to accept the psychological notion that behavioural motivations are influenced by one's perception of others' attitudes in the same environment towards the behaviour (Symth & Davis, 2003).

This means that in an environment where certain behaviour is not condemned people in that environment have no excuse for not performing the behaviour as they are not reprimanded. A further study may be necessary to investigate the influence of geographical location and academic dishonesty as this was beyond the scope of the present study.

The major reason that leads some students to consider cheating in examinations as a viable option was lack of preparation for them. Without adequate preparation and fear of failure some university students were filled with anxiety of how they would answer questions in an examination (Peters, 2010). In ODL studies lack of preparation is sometimes caused by genuine multifaceted events such as job commitment, ill health, death in family and personal social problems only to mention a few.

Fully cognisant of these issues Unisa allows deferment of writing examinations if the reasons for postponing the examination are genuine and supported by professional documents such as a medical report from a doctor. Candidates applying for aegrotats are expected to send e-mails to aegrotats@unisa.ac.za and if they qualify General Rule C9 is granted.

Candidates who meet the conditions of General Rule C9 are given permission to write the examination that they could not write in the next semester/annual examination at no extra cost. Students such as the one who alluded that "a series of blood tests and my results confirmed that I have hypothyroid disease, a disease that is caused by stress" (Student: 4 January 2010) could avoid cheating if they ask for permission to defer examinations that they are not fully prepared.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Students engaged in this study mostly used crib on paper, ruler, calculator cover and palm to cheat in the October/November 2009 summative examinations. They were spotted by the alert invigilators during the course of writing. The forms detected by the invigilators were restricted on noting unauthorised materials on candidates' tables.

The use of CCTV in examination venues could complement the invigilators' efforts to catch candidates cheating using other forms. To reduce the prevalence of cheating by these forms it is prudent for Unisa to provide examination materials such as rulers and calculators to candidates requiring them during writing so that personal items are disallowed in the examination venue.

Like the case of log books that were available at examination centres before the proliferation of calculators, the rulers and calculators that are the property of Unisa and used by candidates can be checked for any crib before distribution. On collection of these materials after an examination, candidates who write anything on them may be requested to replace the 'spoiled' material at their personal cost so that they can be used again in forthcoming examinations.

The major reason why some candidates resorted to cheating in an examination was lack of preparation due to some genuine reasons such as stress, illness and death in a family only to mention a few. These reasons which reduce one's cognitive alertness are commonly experienced by anybody. Fortunately Unisa accepts their existence and can allow students to postpone writing an examination upon production of a legitimate proof. Students do not seem to use this avenue for unknown reasons. We wonder whether students are aware of deferment of examinations. The effectiveness of UNISA's methods of disseminating information on General Rule C9 and why students force themselves to write examinations when they are not cognitively, psychologically and emotionally ready could form the agenda of future studies.

Of noteworthy is the age range that is prone to examination cheating. The study revealed that 52.6% of the candidates who were 36 years and older were prone to cheating in Unisa examinations (Table: 3).

People above 36 years of age are the current captains of commerce and industry as well as Principals in schools or officials in government departments and non-governmental organisations. It will be interesting to find out in future studies if the behaviour of cheating in examinations correlates with the professional conduct and decisions made by the cheats' work places. It is not possible for one study to reveal all the issues related to cheating in graduate examinations. At best a study like the present one can only unravel the situations on the ground so that future studies can amplify the forms, factors and consequences of cheating in university examinations. The present study was mostly narrative as it was based on anecdotal data.

This posed limitations of the study as there were no interviews to clarify some emerging issues that were necessary to produce a more analytical account. Despite the limitations and narrative nature of the present study it is hoped that university policy makers, particularly at ODL institutions may get insight on how to tighten examination procedures so that the degree programmes that they offer remain credible through awarding them to deserving candidates only.

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