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Exploring the Experiences of Contract Cheating and use of Chat GPT by Students as Encountered by University Teachers

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Abstract

This study's objective is to advance scholarly understanding of what is known about contract cheating in Pakistan and other nations. This study intended to raise awareness of contract cheating. This study also aims to explore teachers' experiences regarding students' contract cheating and their thoughts about it. This study followed qualitative paradigm using thematic analysis as its main design. Data collected from multiple universities of Punjab province Pakistan. Participants were encouraged to record an interview of minimum 40 minutes. A sample consisted of (n=20) participants both male and female. Data collected from university teachers of Pakistan who were currently serving. Sample was selected using purposive sampling technique. For this study Semi-Structured Interview was used to collect data. Thematic analysis method was used to analyze the recorded interviews and 8 super themes were generated out of that data. These eight super themes named academic misconduct, basis of contract cheating, teachers' assessing skills of contract cheating, consequences of contract cheating, effective controlling strategies of contract cheating, challenges faced by teachers, Chat GPT and the negative impact of students' contract cheating experiences on teachers' mental health.

Keywords: Contract cheating, Chat GPT, University, Teachers, Qualitative Research, Online resources, Thematic Analysis.



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Introduction

Universities are getting more international these days, which is pretty cool, but it's also causing some problems. One of those problems is that students are cheating more often, and it's happening all over the world. Academic dishonesty includes plagiarism, falsifying data, bribery, cheating, sabotage, professional misconduct, impersonation, collusion, conspiracy to cheat, and numerous submissions (NABET-Proceedings, 2018).

Contract cheating, also known as "ghostwriting," is when students pay someone else to do their homework for them and then pretend it's their own work. Basically, they hire a writer to create an assignment without giving them any credit. The student tells the writer what grade they want to get, like a top grade or a decent grade (Baird & Clare, 2017; Clarke & Lancaster, 2007).

Ghostwriting is a tricky thing for those fancy plagiarism checkers to catch, which is pretty concerning because more and more college kids are admitting to buying assignments (Ali, 2013; Lines, 2016; Wallace & Newton, 2014).

Contract cheating, a form of academic dishonesty, involves students paying experts to complete their assignments, which they then submit as their own work. This practice, predominantly online, is worrying for educators due to its difficulty to detect, higher dishonesty level compared to some plagiarism types, and its association with deeper systemic issues in modern higher education (Walker & Townley, 2012).

Contract cheating can occur via "family and friends; academic custom writing sites; valid learning sites (like file sharing, forum, and micro-tutoring sites); legitimate non-learning sites (such as freelancing sites and online auction sites); paid exam takers; together with pre-written essay banks" (Ellis et al., 2018).

The competence and expertise of the assessor, the knowledge of the student in question, and familiarity with patterns typical in contract cheating assignments all play a significant role in the ability to detect contract cheating. (Rogerson, 2017). The study documented the inconsistencies found in cases of contract cheating. Among these, contractual assignments frequently contained materials that were irrelevant to the task at hand and frequently failed to address the question or criteria for the assignment. (Rogerson, 2017). Student performance irregularities might be a significant indicator of contract cheating. (Draper, 2022) Knowing a student's writing style is, in fact, maybe the best approach to spot contract cheating; if linguistic shifts can be found, either inside a submission or between submissions, this could be a blatant sign that the submitted work is unoriginal (Draper, 2022; Rogerson, 2017).

Contract cheating is deliberate, premeditated, and intentional when money is exchanged. The harsh academic sanctions for contract cheating are intended to reflect this. The international higher education sector is gravely concerned about the payment for cheating services (Tennant & Duggan, 2008).

Apparently, there's been a ton of news about how more and more UK students are using essay writing services from third parties. They're calling it an "essay mill epidemic" and it's got universities shook."(Turner, 2017). So, up in Canada, there's been a rise in university students pulling off some sneaky moves called "contract cheating". " (Hunt, 2018). So, apparently more and more students are buying their essays from these online "essay mills". It's becoming a real problem, and the Australian government is stepping up to the plate. They're giving TEQSA a bunch of extra cash to tackle the issue head-on. (Dodd, 2018).

Contract cheating has been described as "premeditated deception" and "corruption of the learning process" in the literature (Eaton, 2020), and even as "morally reprehensible" (Bertram Gallant, 2016). Also, people have been calling it "organized crime" lately (Grue et al., 2021). They're saying it's not just academic misconduct anymore, but it's actually crossing into the territory of criminal behavior"(Steel, 2017).

There are many factors that influence why pupils decide to cheat. Amigud and Lancaster's (2019) study looked at the justifications given by students for farm out their academic work. These can be categorized into five groups according to their relative importance, and these are “persistence, self-discipline, theoretical capability, personal concerns, and competing goals”.

The majority of students engage with services provided by other organizations directly or indirectly through an application programming interface (API). Chat GPT, an AI chat bot launched in November 2022, quickly gained popularity, especially among students, including those in the International Baccalaureate program. Its widespread use for tasks like essay writing, despite warnings from tech leaders about AI risks (Kuhail et al., 2023), underscores the need for careful evaluation of its implications in education and beyond.

Kooli (2023) cautions that excessive dependence on technology, such as Chat GPT, could impede students' critical and creative thinking abilities, resulting in a state of passivity. Cotton et al. (2023) raise concerns over the potential for unfair academic advantage, which could compromise the impartiality of assessments. Farrokhnia et al. (2023) emphasize the risks associated with Chat GPT generating fabricated research data, underscoring the importance of being vigilant in upholding academic and research integrity.

Educating students on the effective use of Chat GPT is essential for its integration into classrooms and online sessions. As AI technology evolves and becomes more integral in education, it's important to guide students in its application. This includes incorporating courses into the curriculum that focus on evaluating and analyzing Chat GPT's outcomes, as suggested by (Sharma, S., & Yadav, R. 2023).

Previous research indicates that while the issue of contract cheating has been acknowledged, there's a notable lack of studies on effective solutions, particularly in Eastern countries (Shala et al., 2020).

Method

Research Design

The study employs thematic analysis for qualitative research, aiming to deeply explore and understand the subject by identifying patterns in the qualitative data. This approach provides detailed insights into the experiences and viewpoints of participants (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Participants

Male and female volunteers totaling 20 made up the sample. Data will be gathered from Pakistani university professors. It has previously been suggested by Clarke and Braun (2013) that in order to reach data saturation, qualitative research needs a minimum sample size of at least 12. The sample was selected based on specific inclusion and exclusion criteria from various universities located in the cities of Faisalabad, Sargodha, Gujrat, and Lahore in the Punjab region of Pakistan.

Inclusion Criteria and Exclusion Criteria

- This study would include university professors and lecturers.
- The study's participants would only include teachers who are currently providing services in universities.
- There are experienced educators present.
- College professors and school teachers would not be included as participants in this study.
- This study would exclude university professors and lecturers who are not currently offering services.
- Fresher of teaching field are excluded.

Measures

In this qualitative research, the researcher's role mirrors the instrument itself, a creative embodiment of the methodology that brings personal insight and depth to the study. For the investigation and data collection, a semi-structured interview based on questionnaire was designed to explore teachers' experiences of contract cheating and how do they encounter.

Procedure

The study explores teachers' strategies for identifying and addressing students' contract cheating. It involves 20 university teachers, selected purposefully, and employs a phenomenological design for qualitative analysis. Data collection, following consent from the Government College University Faisalabad, includes semi-structured interviews with participants, ensuring confidentiality. The study will analyze responses using qualitative methods and express gratitude to participants for their cooperation.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was performed to examine the participant's qualitative data. Studies that use thematic analysis are classified as qualitative research because of this. A realistic technique was chosen to depict the experiences and facts from the interviews, and the researcher stuck closely to the data and reflected participants' real experiences, which are independent of the impact of preceding theories and literature (Braun & Clarke, 2006). We followed the six main steps recommended for data analysis by (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The following are six steps:

Step 1: Become familiar with the data

An essential first step in any qualitative study is to thoroughly read and review the transcripts multiple times. Prior to proceeding, it is essential that you possess a thorough understanding of the entire dataset, commonly referred to as your data corpus, encompassing all interviews and any additional data you may utilize. At this point, it is advantageous to note down notes and document initial impressions.

Step 2: Generate Initial Codes

This stage involves systematic organization of data through coding, breaking it down into meaningful units. The study employed theoretical theme analysis to focus on specific research questions, selectively coding only relevant text using open coding, where codes were developed and modified dynamically during the analysis.

Step 3: Search for themes

A theme is a recurring pattern that effectively communicates significant or captivating insights about the data and/or research topic, as mentioned earlier. (Braun & Clarke, 2006) state that there are no rigid criteria for defining a theme. The significance of a theme is determined by its importance.

Step 4: Review theme:

During this step, the initial concepts identified in Step three are reviewed, changed, and further developed. Do they exhibit logical reasoning? Currently, it is advantageous to gather and organize all the information pertaining to each theme. (Bree & Gallagher, 2016).

Step 5: Define Theme:

The objective of this final iteration of the themes is to ascertain the fundamental nature or core concept of each theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006). What is the underlying message of the theme? How do subthemes relate to and interact with the main theme? What correlations exist between the themes?

Step 6: writing up:

An article for a journal or a dissertation is frequently the final product of study.

RESULTS

The findings are derived from a thematic analysis report and a thematic map, based on super themes and themes. Participant quotes were coded according to the interview transcripts, with "PT" denoting the participant, "P" indicating the page number, and "DU" representing the discourse unit.

After profound study of Contract Cheating this study came up with 8 super themes of Contract Cheating which includes academic misconduct, basis of contract cheating, teachers' assessing skills of contract cheating, consequences of contract cheating, effective controlling strategies of contract cheating, challenges faced by teachers, negative psychological effects of C.C. on teacher, and Chat GPT. Each super theme contains some main themes under it (see Figure 1).

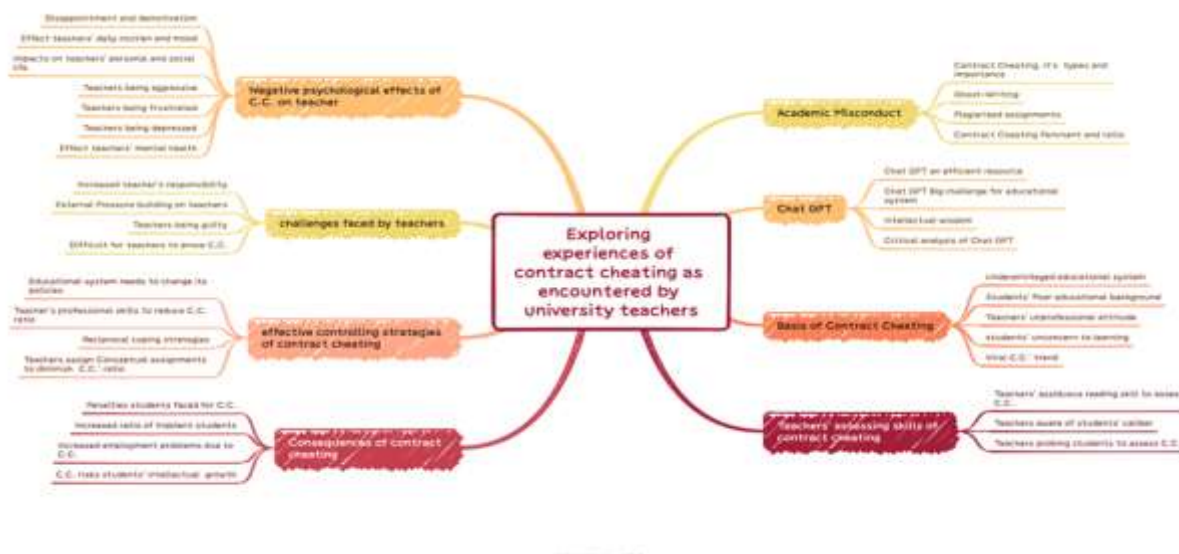


Figure 1: *Exploring the experiences of contract cheating and use of chat GPT by students as encountered by university teachers*

Table 1: Super themes and Themes of the study

No.	Super Theme	Theme
01	Academic Misconduct	Contract Cheating, its types and importance Ghost-Writing Plagiarized Assignments
02	Basis of contract cheating	Contract Cheating Penchant and ratio Underprivileged educational system Students' Poor educational background Teachers' unprofessional attitude Students' unconcern to learning Viral C.C.' trend
03	Consequences of contract cheating	Penalties students faced for C.C. Increased ratio of Indolent students Increased employment problems due to contract cheating Contract cheating risks students' intellectual growth
04	Teachers' assessing skills of contract cheating	Teachers' assiduous reading skill to assess C.C. Teachers aware of students' caliber Teachers probing students to assess C.C
05	Effective controlling strategies of contract cheating	Educational system needs to change its policies Teacher's professional skills to reduce C.C. ratio Reciprocal coping strategies Teachers assign Conceptual assignments to diminish C.C.' ratio
06	Challenges faced by teachers	Increased teacher's responsibility External Pressure building on teachers Teachers being guilty Difficult for teachers to prove Contract cheating
07	Chat GPT	Chat GPT an efficient resource Chat GPT: A Big Challenge for the Educational System Intellectual wisdom Critical analysis of Chat GPT
08	Negative impact of students' contract cheating experiences on teachers' mental health	Disappointment and demotivation Effect teachers' daily routine and mood Impacts on teachers' personal and social life Teachers being aggressive Teachers being frustrated Teachers being depressed Effect teachers' mental health

1. Academic Misconduct

Academic misconduct involves shortcuts students use to complete academic tasks. This super theme also identifies individuals who are more likely to engage in contract cheating or academic misconduct. This super theme consists of 4 themes describing below:

Contract Cheating, its types and importance

Most of the participants were aware of the concept of contract cheating but unfamiliar with the term before conducting an interview. According to them, it is the need of the hour to conduct research on such topics to raise awareness because it is an intellectual crime.

A participant said:

“Oh, you called this contract cheating. Actually, I was familiar with its concept, but the term was quite new to me.” (P37, DU 11)

Another participant said:

“Contract cheating is not just an unethical act that you pay someone to do your task; it's an intellectual crime too. Talking about contract cheating and spreading awareness about its consequences is just the need of the hour”. (P67, DU36).

Ghost-Writing

According to the participants in ghostwriting, one person, known as the ghostwriter, writes a piece of content on behalf of another person, who is usually credited as the author. So, this is also a form of contract cheating or academic misconduct.

A participant said:

“We can call contract cheating ghostwriting because, in ghostwriting, we also ask someone else to complete our academic task”. (P1, DU09)

Plagiarized Assignments

Participants reported that making plagiarized assignments is the most common practice among students. In an attempt to evade plagiarism detection software, students have employed various techniques.

A participant said:

“Once, my student used inverted commas of white color at the beginning and end of the thesis to mask plagiarism because software does not detect plagiarism within commas. And it is difficult to see with naked eye. I caught that student just because I was using screen reading software. So, software said louder begging white comma and I came to know what that student has done to his work”. (P39, DU27)

Contract Cheating Penchant and ratio

After composing participants' opinion this theme tells us about the individuals who are more likely to be involved in contract cheating.

A participant said:

“Government employees are more commonly involved in contract cheating, especially government teachers and police officers. They used to take advantage of their positions and ask their students and subordinates to write their academic tasks, respectively”. (P03, DU17)

2. Basis of contract cheating

Another super theme explores systemic issues in educational institutions. This super theme includes themes such as, underprivileged educational system, students' poor educational background, teachers' unprofessional attitude, students' unconcern to learning and viral C.C.' trend.

Underprivileged educational system

Participants reported that the underprivileged educational system has several lacunae in it that promote contract cheating. This ultimately hinders the overall growth and development of students.

A participant said:

"I felt that there is a dearth of ethical consideration regarding research in our schools, colleges, and universities, which is the biggest problem in the field of academia today". (P23, DU15)

Students' Poor educational background

This theme talks about students' primary education, where they just learn how to copy the content and cram. They have poor creative writing skills just because teachers don't make efforts to enable them to write by themselves.

A participant said:

"There is no concept of creative writing in our schools. Teachers used to ask students to copy the content from the book as it was written so they could get better marks". (P23, DU15).

Teachers' unprofessional attitude

Teachers' incompetency and short temper are another reason for students' tendency to do contract cheating. As participant stated that:

"Sometimes, being a supervisor, our behavior is quite rude; we don't give proper time to students, and we think that if we didn't give them time, we would be considered the superior supervisor". (P41, DU31)

Students' unconcern to learning

This theme tells us that students' attitudes are the basis for contract cheating. Participants highlighted students' problematic attitudes.

A participant said:

"The contract cheating ratio is increasing day by day as technology advances. Actually, students don't want to give their time to studying; they want to spend their time with friends and are more interested in making selfies and tiktoks instead of focusing on their academic responsibilities". (P42, DU33)

Viral C.C.' trend

Participants asserted that practice of contract cheating is more common these days due to the increasing availability of online resources and the pressure to excel academically.

A participant said:

"Freelancers have set up their setups online and in the market too, and they advertise openly by displaying flex and boards where it is written to help us with ready-made assignments. We will

make the document of your choice at an affordable price. When students see such advertisements, they will definitely get attracted to contract cheating, and they will feel burdened with assignments". (P28, DU33)

Consequences of contract cheating

In addition, contract cheating can also have long-term consequences for students' academic and professional reputation. This super theme has different themes, which are further explained below.

Penalties students faced for C.C.

Whenever students do contract cheating and are caught by teachers, they get sanctioned for contract cheating. Participants described that students faced financial losses, and they have to retake the semester.

A participant said:

"Students got sanctioned for contract cheating because they faced financial loss and loss of time". (P27, DU27)

Increased ratio of indolent students

Participants asserted that contract cheating increases the ratio of indolent students or spongers who don't like to work or put in an effort, even in their academics or at their workplace.

A participant said:

"Students who are doing a degree in social sciences have a degree without practical skills. So, if the student with an unskilled degree has educational gaps and doesn't have skills to deliver concepts, believe me, such students are just poison for society". (P69, DU44)

Increased employment problems due to contract cheating

This theme describes the other consequences of contract cheating; it increases employment issues. As participant stated that:

"Society is facing loss because of students with knowledge gaps and who are unskilled. They are unable to give any output to society, especially when students of social sciences face horrible consequences like becoming jobless and indulging in unethical activities, street crimes, and drug abuse". (P128, DU50)

Contract cheating risks students' intellectual growth

Participant claimed that contract cheating risks students' intellectual growth. Moreover, contract cheating also hinders the development of critical thinking and problem-solving abilities among students.

A participant said:

"When students rely on others for their assignments, it blocks their intellectual growth and creative skills, hindering their ability to think critically and come up with innovative solutions on their own". (P128, DU50)

4. Teachers' assessing skills of contract cheating

This theme is telling us teachers' skills that help them to assess contract cheating, which includes teachers' thorough and in-depth reading of assignments or thesis.

A participant said:

“As we have a thorough reading of the document, we gain a deeper understanding of its content and context. When they suddenly switch handwriting, like when an assignment is written by someone else but the cover page or initials are filled in by the student itself, there is a difference in their writing that makes the document suspect”. (P04, DU17)

Teachers aware of students' caliber

Teachers assess by having awareness of students' caliber and using various methods to gauge their understanding and progress. They know the document a student made is of his caliber or not.

A participant said:

“Students are not allowed to cheat in exams, so when we mark papers, we know the actual caliber of the students—their writing skills and vocabulary grip on the subject matter—and still, if they are coming with extra-ordinary assignments, this is an indication that this work is not done by the student”. (P41, DU34)

Teachers probing students to assess C.C

Another teacher's assessment skill is probing students, such as by cross-questioning students, and when students become voiceless about the content they have written in their document, it is a clear indication that this work is not done by them.

“Cross-questioning is a way to assess contract cheating in which students cannot defend themselves. Obviously, when they didn't do a work, how could they justify their answers, satisfy their supervisor, or prove their understanding of the subject matter?” (P43, DU40)

5. Effective controlling strategies of contract cheating

The super theme suggests that effective controlling strategies for contract cheating include changing educational policies, hiring professional teachers, employing reciprocal coping strategies, and assigning conceptual work over cramming to promote academic integrity. Themes under this super theme are explained below:

Educational system needs to change its policies

In order to control the contract cheating ratio, we need to change our educational policies and implement stricter measures to detect and deter academic dishonesty.

A participant said:

“I think the system needs to change teachers' ways of teaching, introduce updated teacher training programs, and teach them about research work as well. Here, students are done with their PHD and become teachers directly without any aptitude test or teacher training”. (P60, DU69)

Teacher's professional skills to reduce C.C. ratio

Another effective strategy to control the contract cheating ratio is teachers must be a role model for students.

A participant said:

“I used to appreciate students' efforts by saying whatever you have written and any mistakes you made are not a big deal. Go back home and try once again to correct your mistakes. We will make it together. I used to boost them up to this level by just getting quality work”. (P44, DU44)

Reciprocal coping strategies

The effectiveness of teacher-student class interaction plays a crucial role in controlling the rate of contract cheating.

A participant said:

“Class interaction is very important. Our students hesitate to ask questions and are afraid of insults as a result of asking questions. They think if they ask questions, teachers will consider them unintelligent and stupid”. (P101, DU38)

Teachers assign Conceptual assignments to diminish C.C.' ratio

Teachers assign conceptual assignments to diminish the contract cheating ratio and encourage critical thinking skills.

A participant said:

“I used to give assignments that were based on a pictorial view, and I asked students to write about this picture. So, students could practice their descriptive writing skills. They consult books of history and write about the historical context of the picture; I don't give them a chance to commit contract cheating”. (P30, DU41)

6. Challenges faced by teachers

A teacher has to face several challenges in term to assess and detect contract cheating. Themes under the super theme “Challenges faced by teachers” are written below.

Increased teacher's responsibility

The contract cheating trend just increased teachers' responsibility to detect and prevent academic dishonesty. Teaching is a very challenging profession that requires constant adaptation to new challenges and trends. Another challenge teacher used to face when they strictly evaluated a document and did not pass it affected teachers' reputations because the system questioned teachers' competency as they didn't produce a satisfactory result.

A participant said:

“Let's suppose I have 25, 30, and all are involved in contract cheating. If I disapprove their work or fail them, then the system considers it the teacher's fault that he didn't teach well. It negatively affects the teacher's reputation that I am not even able to produce a single student”. (P191, DU55)

External Pressure building on teachers

There are several external factors that build pressure on teachers, such as colleagues' sympathy and support for students.

A participant said:

“We are living in a society where students use references to pressurize teachers. Those students who do not work at the time of submission or result come up with the reference that we approve their work. An influential reference we can reject, but they use a reference of someone who is much closer to us. If we refuse to use them, our relationship will be affected, and it may have negative consequences for us. This is the biggest issue we are facing as teachers”. (P55, DU49)

Teachers being guilty

Participant recorded that when teachers are bound to proceed with ineffective students' work due to extraneous pressures on them, they feel guilty and frustrated.

A participant said:

“In such cases, it is very difficult to say no and disappoint them. Our mind and heart do not accept accommodating those students, but they create situations in which we are bound to proceed with ineffective work. This thing develops guilt and pinches us over time”. (P56, DU55)

Difficult for teachers to prove Contract cheating

It is difficult for teachers to prove contract cheating because it often involves subtle and sophisticated methods of deception. Whenever students caught on they emphasize that their intention was never to deceive or cheat, but rather to alleviate the academic pressure they were facing.

A participant said:

“Students know that at the end, it is the teacher who will proceed their work, and students get confused and are bound to confess that they did cheating in order to avoid the consequences. They apologize for academic misconduct and promise not to repeat that again in the future”. (P54, DU41)

7. Chat GPT

Another challenge that teachers are currently facing is documents generated by AI like Chat GPT. This super theme also talks about its aim, pros and cons. However, it is important to recognize that these models are not a substitute for independent research and analysis. Themes under the super theme “Chat GPT” are described below.

Chat GPT an efficient resource

Chat GPT is a time-saving resource that efficiently summarizes vast amounts of universal data, making it a valuable tool for humans seeking knowledge.

A participant said:

“Chat GPT is an effective resource in which you just complete your maximum work within a minimum amount of time”. (P32, DU49)

Chat GPT: A Big Challenge for the Educational System

There is currently no reliable plagiarism detection tool specifically designed for documents generated by Chat GPT, it is crucial for educational institutions to stay proactive and develop strategies to address this issue. A participant stated that:

“They want to minus human n they want to introduce machine”. (P103, DU48)

Intellectual wisdom

Participants asserted that Chat GPT may lack the depth of intellectual wisdom and the ability to discuss emotions, creativity, and personal experiences; it still serves as a valuable tool for accessing existing data.

A participant said:

“You can ask Chat GPT to write an essay on a certain topic; it will write within minutes, but it cannot write an experience full of emotions, feelings, and personal thoughts. It will tell you what river Ravi is, but it cannot tell you the stories or thoughts that I experienced being a human whenever I came across river Ravi”. (P102, DU46)

Critical analysis of Chat GPT

Whenever technology takes a step forward, people use to criticize. While every AI tool has its pros and cons, critics contend that ChatGPT specifically hinders creativity and is deemed ineffective in certain contexts.

A participant said:

“I found ChatGPT such a useless tool that I couldn't see any good thing in it. ChatGPT does not interpret research objectives; it just gives you word-for-word clarification. So, this tool isn't suitable for research”. (P79, DU46)

8. Negative impact of students' contract cheating experiences on teachers' mental health

Contract cheating negatively impacts teachers' mental health, job satisfaction, and burnout, leading to disappointments, demotivation, aggression, frustration, anxiety, stress, and depression. It also hinders effective communication with colleagues and loved ones. Themes under the super theme are explained below.

Disappointment and demotivation

In participants' eye teachers become disappointed and demotivated when they realize that some students are not valuing their efforts and are taking shortcuts to achieve academic success. As participant stated that:

“We, as teachers, become demotivated and demoralized and are compelled to think about the benefits of teaching them and putting the effort. As humans, we want to see the output or fruit of our efforts, and if you are unable to see any progress or improvement in our students, it can be disheartening. We don't feel good”. (P90, DU48)

Effect teachers' daily routine and mood

According to participants it is disheartening to see how prevalent contract cheating has become, as it not only affects our mood but also disrupts our daily routine.

A participant said:

“Such cases cause stress that affects our daily routine. Obviously, when your mind is disturbed, it will definitely affect your mood”. (P55, DU47)

Impacts on teachers' personal and social life

In participants' point of view, they see contract cheating cases and get stressed. This mental stress affects their social and personal lives as well and also develop trust issues.

A participant said:

“It's a fact that you just started experiencing personal and social issues just because you are stressed and projecting aggression on closed ones just like fighting with your wife and friends or scolding your children, and sometimes it has adverse impacts on one's life”. (P43, DU42)

Teachers being aggressive

Teachers experience a range of emotions after witnessing contract cheating. They may feel disappointed, angered, and betrayed by their students.

A participant said:

“Obviously, we become aggressive when students indulge in the unethical practice of contract cheating. Even when they choose a topic of their interest, they still don't want to work”. (P26, DU25)

Teachers being frustrated

Teachers find themselves increasingly frustrated with this growing tendency of contract cheating among students.

A participant said:

“If we talk about feelings after witnessing such cases, obviously we feel sad and disturbed. Students just tried to dodge a teacher, and that caused frustration”. (P41, DU31)

Teachers being depressed

The constant discovery of students engaging in such dishonest practices leaves educators questioning the effectiveness of their teaching methods and the value of their efforts. Students' habit of contract cheating makes teachers feel depressed.

A participant said:

“Teachers' mental health obviously affects them; they become stressed and depressed. Teacher suffers a lot due to all of this”. (P29, DU35)

Effect teachers' mental health

Seeing frequent cases of contract cheating negatively affects teachers' mental health and causes psychological problems. As participant stated that:

“Everything that happens in front of your eyes affects you mentally and physically, so witnessing contract cheating experiences definitely affects your mental health in significant ways, like irregular blood pressure levels and increased levels of stress and anxiety”. (P227, DU55)

Discussion

This study's findings and their relation to existing literature, offering insights that address research questions and objectives, and suggests future research directions.

This study investigates teachers' perspectives on contract cheating, analyzing themes like academic misconduct and contract cheating's basis. Teachers perceive it as a significant issue in academia, arising from various factors like educational system inadequacies, students' poor educational backgrounds, and teachers' unprofessional attitudes. The study references Walker & Townley (2012) for its discussion on the origin of academic dishonesty, Newton (2018) for its examination of its worldwide increase, and Lancaster (2018) for insights into the responsibilities of ghostwriters. Singh & Remenyi (2016) argue that innovative learning is necessary to mitigate academic dishonesty, however Perry (2010) observes a rise in plagiarism trends. Bretag et al. (2019) ascertain that language obstacles and unhappiness with the educational environment are among the elements that contribute to contract cheating. The study highlights the significance of

comprehending various viewpoints in order to build efficacious measures to combat contract cheating.

Teachers perceive contract cheating as resulting in scholastic repercussions such as receiving failing marks or being expelled, hindering intellectual growth, and posing difficulties in securing work. According to Erguvan (2022), students who are found cheating experience significant academic consequences. Additionally, contract cheating breeds indolence in students, diminishing practical skills and workplace competence. It also hampers students' critical thinking and problem-solving abilities, ultimately producing graduates who are ill-equipped for real-world demands and professional growth.

Teachers assess contract cheating through close examination of students' work, comparing it to previous assignments, and checking for inconsistencies in language and content, as supported by (Lancaster & Clarke, 2016; Stella-Maris & Awala-Ale, 2017). Control strategies include stricter penalties, academic integrity campaigns (Awdry & Newton, 2019; Harper et al., 2019), fostering supportive learning environments, advanced teacher training, and unique assignment design to encourage critical thinking (Mahmood, 2009; Rogerson, 2017). Bretag et al. (2019) emphasize enhancing the teaching and learning environment as a comprehensive approach.

The study identifies challenges teachers face with contract cheating, including integrating AI tools like Chat GPT into education. Sharma & Yadav (2022) note Chat GPT's benefits and limitations in education. Teachers struggle with assessing AI-generated content and face external pressures, including students using influence or blackmail. These challenges impact the grading process and the integrity of academic evaluation.

The study finds that teachers experience increased stress and feelings of inadequacy due to students' contract cheating, aligning with Friedman (2003) and Schonfeld et al. (2017) on the stress in teaching. It leads to decreased job satisfaction, motivation, and heightened risks of depression and anxiety, as indicated by (Mirowsky & Ross, 2003; Ross Catherine, 2003). Additionally, feelings of frustration and betrayal from contract cheating spill into teachers' personal lives, emphasizing the need for institutional measures to safeguard educators' well-being, as highlighted by Kyriacou (2001).

Conclusion

The study reveals teachers' concerns about contract cheating, attributing it to factors like inadequate education systems, lack of academic skills, accessibility of ghostwriting services, and unprofessional attitudes of some teachers. It discusses the severe consequences for students, such as academic penalties and damaged career prospects, and explores strategies to detect and prevent contract cheating. Additionally, it highlights the challenges faced by teachers, including detection difficulties and the need for their continuous education, while emphasizing the importance of an ethical learning environment. It also identifies the negative psychological impact on teachers, like increased stress and feelings of inadequacy.

Limitations and Recommendations

This study conducted on university teachers only. Merely those teachers were selected as participants who are currently providing services in universities. Participants were taken from only Punjab, Pakistan.

Expanding the scope of participants to include school and college teachers, as well as retired teachers, would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the topic. Additionally, conducting the research across different regions of Pakistan would allow for a broader

representation of perspectives and experiences. Conducting research at international institutions or collaborating with researchers from other countries could also offer valuable insights and comparisons on teaching practices and methodologies. This would enhance the overall validity and applicability of the research findings, making them more relevant on a global scale.

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