

Exploring Students' Perception and Experience of Ghostwriting and Contract Cheating in Nigeria Higher Education Institutions

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Abstract

Ghostwriting and contract cheating constitute serious facets of academic misconduct in Nigerian Higher Education Institutions (NHEI) of learning. Management of these practices have remained elusive as they are impervious to traditional anti-plagiarism techniques. However, despite the prevalence of these practices, gaps in knowledge remain regarding how they are perceived by NHEI students. Most of the existent knowledge is based on untested theories and beliefs but it is imperative that, for an educational system to be successful, there is a need to have an in-depth understanding of their students. The research involves the use of surveys and interview of participants with experiential knowledge, and the purpose of this paper is to provide an insight to student perceptions on ghostwriting and contract cheating in NHEI. The consequence of the findings of this study is the information it provides the NHEI as they attempt to understand, evaluate and manage the occurrence of these practices. This paper concluded that the initial perception of contract cheating and ghostwriting by the Nigerian student is that it is an ethical practice with significant ramifications. However, this view is distorted due to two factors which have caused participating Nigerian students to believe it is a practice that is worth partaking in.

Keywords

contract cheating, ghost-writing, motivation, perception/insight, qualitative research, student experience

1. Introduction

There has been a consensus amongst academics that plagiarism has become entrenched in higher education institutions globally. Not only has it become a norm, it is rarely challenged for fear of admitting its existence in the Higher Education Institutions (HEI) (Devlin, 2003; Mammen & Meyiwa,

2013, p. 99). Thus, it has become a bane to the progress of the academic environment. This consensus is reflected in the increased amount of existent literatures, which aim at understanding and developing methods to curb plagiarism (Culwin & Lancaster, 2001; Park, 2004; Devlin, 2006; McGowan & Bretag, 2013).

In recent years, coinciding with the advances in telecommunications technologies, there has been a shift in academic focus. In lieu of the traditional aspects of plagiarism such as cut and paste which is largely detected by electronic text matching software (such as Google or Turnitin.com), there is a focus on the steadily increasing and more elusive forms of non-traditional types of plagiarism such as contract cheating and ghostwriting (McGowan, 2005, p. 287; Weber-Wulff, 2014; Curtis & Clare, 2017). Both concepts are similar in that they both constitute outsourcing a work to a third-party (ghostwriter or a contractor) who is paid while the original produced work is attributed to the client only (Lancaster & Clarke, 2007, p. 1; Clark & Lancaster, 2006; Exposito et al., 2015, p. 9; Singh & Remenyi, 2016, p. 2).

However, the slight difference between the two concepts lies in the level of involvement of the client and the mechanism in which the academic work is outsourced. First of all, with respect to ghostwriting, the client and ghostwriter may collaborate to produce a complete work. This is in contrast to contract cheating whereby the work contracted out is completed solely by the contractor. Secondly, the mechanism of outsourcing in contract cheating usually involves the student placing a work online which is bid upon by several contractors wherein the student picks the most appealing bid. In contrast, in ghostwriting, the work is not bid upon, rather, the ghostwriter can approach the student or vice-versa (Sivasubramaniam et al., 2016, p. 2).

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Emergence and Consolidation of Contract Cheating and Ghostwriting in Higher Education Institutions

While plagiarism may have originated in 17th century England, ghostwriting and contract cheating are relatively recent developments appearing in the 1990s as noted by Lines (2016). Having identified the development of these non-traditional forms of plagiarism and having ascertained them to be the “most important plagiarism related problem of the modern age”, Clarke and Lancaster (2006) contributed to knowledge with respect to contract cheating by examining what the practice entails and how it occurs. Their study involved the investigation of the website—Rent A Coder which serves dual functions as both a website where computer users seek answers to computer related problems and as a website where students can outsource their assignments. From their findings, the authors concluded that the practice of contract cheating was increasingly becoming rampant and thus, there is the possibility of a common practice on similar sites like Rent A Coder. In line with this finding, a google search for “Essay writing websites” will readily produce options such as essaytyper.com, grademiners.com, bid4papers.com/write-my-essay.html.

While Clarke and Lancaster (2006) highlight the prevalence of the practice in the sciences, Mammen and Meyiwa (2013) observes that just like traditional aspects of plagiarism (cut and paste), the practice of contract cheating and ghostwriting is prevalent in all field from Information Systems, Arts, Humanities to Creative Writing. McCrostie (2009) gives an insight into the varied forms the ghostwriters take. The author delineates the different levels of ghostwriting or different degrees in which a work can be ghost written. In some cases, a famous writer replaces the actual writer of the paper, that is, the actual writer is not acknowledged and is the ghostwriter. In some other cases, the famous author receives more recognition than the actual writers whose name are printed in small caps. By examining the emerging forms of plagiarism, Walker and Townley (2012) opine that while contract cheating remains elusive and problematic, it could steer the educational instructors from their purpose. Rather, focus should remain on supporting the “honest students and good academic practice” (2012, p. 27). The authors conclude that such support would not only enhance the honest student’s development but it will encourage honesty in students.

2.2 The Motivation behind the Practice of Contract Cheating and Ghostwriting

Conducting what they describe as the first empirical economic investigation regarding the decision to cheat by university students and what influences their willingness to participate in the essay market as well as their valuation of the paper, Rigby et al. (2015) come to very telling conclusions. By investigating reasons and influences on student demands using hypothetical scenarios, they found that certain factors will influence a student’s propensity to take risks and such factors includes: the enrollment of a student in a non-native language country, the believe that the student will attain lower grades, the probability of detection and the potential penalty for contracting. More importantly, the authors note that a perceived need to keep up with other cheaters also influences students to engage in the essay market.

These findings offer a dimension on what motivates students to engage in contract cheating which is seemingly deeper than the findings of Lancaster and Clarke (2007) who revealed that the willingness of a student to engage in contract cheating is due to their moral bankruptcy (2007, p. 1). This variation in the findings is not unrelated to the diversity in location, year of research and sample. Furthermore, a different notion in the discourse on why students decide to engage in plagiarism in the form of contract cheating or ghostwriting was cited in the paper by Devlin and Gray (2007). Engaging in a qualitative study aided by the use of group interviews, the authors aimed at uncovering the primary reasons for this behaviour. Their study is premised on the notion that present attempts to deter and detect situations of plagiarism is based on assumptions only and is thus limited. They concluded that a wide and disparate range of possible contributing reasons for engagement in contract cheating or ghostwriting includes: institutional admission criteria; poor student understanding of plagiarism; poor academic skills; a range of teaching and learning factors; personality factors (laziness) and external pressures.

A focus on the monetary value aspect of contract cheating and ghostwriting as a medium for comprehending the motivation behind these practices was adopted by Hu and Wu (2013) and Osipian

(2012). In performing an empirical analysis, Hu and Wu (2013) focused on questions relating to the quantity and monetary value of ghostwriters in China in order to create what they hope would be a foundation for policy making regarding ghostwriting in the future. The findings of these authors reveal that despite the fact that the amount of ghostwritten work in 2011 (8,000) represents a minute amount of the total number of written works, the ghostwriting industry still generated huge amounts in that year (4.46 million US dollars).

Similarly, Osipian (2012) addressed the issue of the monetary value of ghostwriting in Russia as an inroad to understanding the problems of corruption in doctoral education and the broader higher educational system. The author discovered that although the annual revenue of the ghostwriting industry may be significant, it pales in comparison to the corruption complex in the country. The author concludes that the cost of the dissertations to society market extends far beyond its monetary expression. He argued that “Fake doctorates undermine the credibility of real, earned doctorates, and erode the gold standard of quality in research and scholarship” (Osipian, 2012, p. 82).

Employing the use of interviews in addition to these generic studies, Zheng and Cheng (2015) sought to capture the view of international students with respect to ghostwriting. Participants of these interviews included ghostwriters and students who had employed these services. They concluded that students’ obsession with achieving a good grade was the prevailing factor behind the practice of ghostwriting and if this was replaced with an obsession to learn only, they would improve themselves. A desire to learn, they argue is honed especially in a liberal arts education.

2.3 The Consequences of Ghostwriting and Contract Cheating

Barbour (2010) addresses the consequences of ghostwriting in the field of science. Specifically, she considers how these authorship violations in medical publications have the potential of threatening the credibility of medical knowledge and medical journals as well as confidence in the findings. She argues that the slippery notion of authorship which has “somehow slipped recently from something to be earned through a specific, meaningful contribution to a superficial designation that can be traded” should be addressed by the parties which include the journals, pharmaceutical companies. It should be “returned to something that can be a source of pride, and which is deserved and earned—and declared” (2010, p. 2).

2.4 Evaluating Contract Cheating and Ghostwriting in Nigeria Higher Education Institutions

Just like so many institutions across the globe struggle with the concepts, Nigerian higher institutions are not left out. A search on the availability of academic literature focusing on plagiarism in the context of Nigeria reveals the existence of an average amount of papers in recent years. These papers on plagiarism with respect to Nigeria have examined the: Nature of Plagiarism; Reasons for Students’ Plagiarism; Strategies for Evaluating and Detecting Plagiarism in Students’ Works; Recommendations for curbing the behavior in NHEI (Agu et al., 2009; Adebayo, 2011; Onuoha & Ikonne, 2013; Ubaka et al., 2013; Faloore, 2014; Orim et al., 2014). A review of the most recent papers on plagiarism in Nigeria will show there is hardly any mention of the issue of contract cheating and ghostwriting (see

Faloore, 2016; Idiegbeyan-ose et al., 2016).

The authors of this paper acknowledge that plagiarism includes the seemingly complex and virtually undetectable practice of contract cheating and ghostwriting (Orim, 2014) and they focus their research on the elusive aspect of ghostwriting and contract cheating.

Even though the problem of contract cheating is universal, there is a need for empirical research of the issue in the context of Nigeria. Despite the ubiquity of the practice, certain aspects are not universal. As motivations behind the practice, the implications would not be the same in Nigeria in comparison to the United Kingdom or Australia. As Orim et al. (2012) noted on the issue of plagiarism in Nigeria HEIs, “some of the lecturers and administrators of Nigerian universities think there is no case of plagiarism on their campuses”, this could also apply to the issue of contract cheating in Nigeria.

Owing to the increasing popularity of these non-traditional forms of plagiarism, there has naturally been a prevalence of academic papers aimed at understanding the student’s perception, attitude as well as their motivation regarding these acts (Macatangay, Zheng, & Cheng, 2015). Despite the accuracy and coherence of these papers, they cannot be applied to varying academic contexts. For instance, it is simplistic to posit that in Nigeria Higher Education Institutions (NHEI), the increase in ghostwriting and contract cheating is hinged on the following factors: widespread use of ICT, student laziness, pressure from external sources (e.g., parents), etc.

However, from the literature review, there are still gaps in knowledge regarding the Nigerian student’s perception and motivation of ghostwriting and contract cheating. The importance of such a research area cannot be debated, it is only through a thorough understanding of NHEI student’s perception of these practices that functional countermeasures can be formulated and adopted. To this end, this paper has adopted the following research questions which shall guide this study:

- 1) What is the Nigerian student’s perception towards contract cheating and ghostwriting?
- 2) What motivates or influences this view?

3. Theories Underpinning This Study

This study employs multiple theoretical perspectives for the purpose of critically evaluating, clarifying and conveying the research findings and analysis of these findings. The theories that were employed include: the theory of techniques of neutralization, rational choice theory, ethics of care and Vygotsky’s theory of social development.

The theory of techniques of neutralization developed by David Matza and Gresham Sykes (1957) posits that there are 5 techniques through which individuals rationalize their wrongdoing. The techniques include: Denial of responsibility, Denial of injury, blaming the victim, Condemn the condemners and Appealing to a higher loyalty. This sociological theory was developed as a challenge to existing deterministic, positivistic subcultural theories of crime that denies the rationality of the offender (McLaughlin & Muncie, 2006). Matza and Sykes were of the opinion that offenders were fully aware of their moral obligation and did not act irrationally. Offenders do not inhabit a subculture in contrast to

the existing social order.

In other words, they are choice-makers who understand the division between “deviant” and “respectable” behaviour and thread on this line (Curasi, 2013, p. 168). According to the theory, offenders feel guilt, they understand their wrongdoing, they do not always pursue deviant activities and do not see themselves as criminals. They develop a set of rationalization or techniques to neutralize and suspend commitment to these values temporarily (McLaughlin & Muncie, 2006). In using these techniques, they provide themselves with freedom to engage in these acts as it allows them to cope, comprehending the potential consequences without damaging their self-image and self-esteem (Curasi, 2013, p. 168).

The application of this theory in this study is justified by the fact that neutralization theory is strongly associated with academic dishonesty (Ligi & Trasberg, 2014, p. 3). Indeed, several students unknowingly employed techniques of neutralization during the interview session. Copes (2003) argued that this is not surprising as socially attached offenders tend to use neutralization than less attached ones. Thus, this theory is a way of interpreting the reasons the students provide for their actions. The application of this theory will aid in our understanding of how students in NHEI can drift from illegitimate to legitimate actions while retaining their moral code and belief in their non-criminality, thus answering core questions such as “why did they do it?” and “how can they continue?” (McLaughlin & Muncie, 2006).

The rational choice theory is hinged on the assumption that all human actions are subject to rational decisions. Individuals will always make decisions that will provide them with great benefits. The theory posits that “...one takes those actions, criminal or lawful, which maximize payoff and minimize costs” (Akers, 1990, p. 654). The adoption of the rational choice theoretical perspective provides a better understanding of the motivating factors behind a student’s desire to cheat because it highlights the significance of the interaction between situational and individual factors on decisions to cheat (Ogilvie & Stewart, 2010, p. 130). Understanding this has implications for the prevention and management of contract cheating and ghostwriting by NHEI.

The theory of the ethic of care is a normative ethical theory which explores how humans as inherently and responsive beings make decisions. Ethics of care emphasizes the importance of factors such as human interdependence and relationships. According to Gilligan (2011), “Its logic is inductive, contextual, psychological, rather than deductive or mathematical”. Thus, the question “what is just?” does not influence our moral perspective anymore, rather, the individual is concerned with “how to respond?” (Held, 2005; Corsetti, 2010). This paper is concerned with student’s perception and motivation regarding contract cheating and ghostwriting and this theoretical perspective will be adopted because it helps explain the shifts in the student’s moral perspective.

Finally, Vygotsky’s social development theory states that social interaction leads to development. For consciousness and development to be developed in an individual, socialization must occur. Three major themes are core to this theory, they include: social interaction, the More Knowledgeable Other (MKO)

and the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Social interaction plays a key role in the cognitive development of the learner, MKO refers to an individual with who has better understanding and knowledge than the learner and finally ZPD refers to distance chasm between what a learner can do independently and what the learner needs assistance with. Vygotsky believed that learning occurred in this zone and it is the duty of the teacher to identify this zone (Vygotsky, 1997; Tukur, 2008). Although the focus of this study is the student's perception and experience with ghostwriting and contract cheating, the role of the educator (lecturer) is also focused on. Thus, this theoretical perspective provides an insight as to the role of the lecturer and the lecturer's relationship with the student in the academic environment.

4. Methodology

This paper employed a mixed-method approach to acquire information regarding student's perception and experience with ghostwriting and contract cheating. The first method used was semi-structured interview which was focused on Nigeria students who had experienced the concepts while studying in a NHEI. The second method involved the use of a survey.

5. The Interview Approach

Participants in this study included twenty-six students from different NHEI who prior to their interview had attended a NHEI or were still studying in a NHEI. The basis for recruitment was that of diversity of NHEI attended, consent and willingness of the participant to answer the questions. The interview sessions with the participants were semi-structured. Before each interview occurred, there was a statement by the researcher aimed at outlining the purposes and nature of the research. Furthermore, each participant was assured of anonymity and the only personal information required of the students was the name of the institution of study and present level of study.

This extracted information could be regarded as pure as it was rendered without any imposed conceptual framework and thus it represents their thoughts on the issue through their personal experience. The participants were not offered any incentives in order to participate in the process. Responses were recorded in shorthand or in some cases like the call interviews, they were recorded at the consent of the interviewee. However, immediately after the interview, the researchers transcribed the responses.

6. Self-Reporting Survey

Following the use of interviews, an anonymous survey was also employed, it was placed on an online campus platform where students could have access and respond to the survey. The availability of the survey was advertised around several Nigerian campus primarily by word of mouth, social network and emails. The surveys which was completed by 113 students and alumni from 37 NHEI required the respondents to answer questions regarding their previous experience with ghostwriting and contract

cheating and their experience with respect to the implications of contract cheating and ghostwriting. The survey questions focused on; student experience with ghostwriting, the satisfactory nature of the services, experience of university management (detection and penalty).

7. Findings and Analysis of the Data

Of the 37 interviewed students that gave initial consent, 12 declined to respond to any of the questions posed. When informed of the purpose of the interview and despite being assured of anonymity, they felt uncomfortable disclosing any information.

8. Findings and Analysis of Data Collected from the Interview Sessions

8.1 Students Understanding of Ghostwriting and Contract Cheating

According to the interviewed students, ghostwriting and contract cheating are similar concepts which denotes situation whereby a student pays a third party to produce an original academic paper which will only be attributed to the client (student).

P1: "...giving out your work to someone to do it for you. You pay, you contract out your work"

P2: "sharing your academic paper with other students or giving it out for outside parties to write for you"

P25: "Ghostwriting is like someone helping you to write but contract cheating could be that you paid someone to help you to write"

The above definitions provided by the respondents proved rudimentary, with hardly any attempt to differentiate the terms. Although there is a mixture of collusion depicted in their view, their definitions showed a basic understanding of what the two terms mean.

With respect to the experience with ghostwriting and contract cheating, all the students unanimously agreed that this was a phenomenon that occurred in NHEI. However, when asked for their personal experiences and encounters, eight of the interviewed students declined to provide a response. The remaining 16 respondents pointed out that they experienced it as "friend helping a friend" while only one participant acquiesced to being a client. This suggests that there is shame in the practices, perhaps a stigma that follows those that may be caught or penalized for engaging in this behavior.

8.2 The Motivation behind the Practice of Contract Cheating and Ghostwriting

Six categories of motivating factors were identified in the responses of the 25 students. These were both external and internal. These were, the work ethic of the NHEI students, the inadequacies of the NHEI, the NHEI students need for money, external pressures and a desire to help fellow colleagues or friends. 4 of the respondents cited the work ethic of the student as a motivating factor. This response demonstrates an understanding within some students that their educational progress is hinged on their actions and no one other than the student will be held culpable.

Findings which drew attention away from the role of the student focused on external factors such as: the role of the institution, who they claim fails to prepare them adequately for academic writing; monetary incentives which is inviting; and external pressures from parents and society which causes

them to adopt university courses they are not familiar with and have no interest in. These three reasons can be understood in relation to the theory of “techniques of neutralization” (Matza & Sykes, 1957).

In providing these rationalizations in defense of these actions, these respondents made use of three techniques of neutralization: denial of responsibility, blaming the victim and appeal to higher loyalties. With respect to denial of responsibility, students claimed that the situation was out of their hands. As P14 stated:

P14: “I also think people are trying to multi-task. People may have demanding jobs and wanting to go to school at the same time. Poverty and the need for money causes people to do it”

Regarding “blaming the victim”, the respondents highlight the failure of NHEI to train and properly prepare students. Thus, while they acknowledge that the actions they partake in are wrong, they seem to suggest that the university deserves this behavior for its shortcomings.

P4: “First of all, learning environment (Nigeria University) is poor and sometimes there is not enough materials”

The participants further noted that although regulations specific to these practice may exist, they were hardly made aware of these regulations. Regarding the responses, a large majority asserted that the responses were largely inadequate.

P1: “from my experience, there is no institutionalized response or mechanism for detecting or responding to it. I never met anyone that was ever indicted for ghostwriting, contracting or cheating of that manner. So, I don’t think they are actually prepared for it”

This notion that the failure of the institution in instilling the values of academic research or preparing the students for independent research drives them to cheat, is not novel or unique. It has been affirmed in academic research that the failure of the academic system is a motivating factor that has spurred ghostwriting and contract cheating companies to target master and doctoral students. Thus, this low level of effort by the university in teaching the rudiments of academic writing noted by Orim et al. (2012) is indeed a motivating factor.

Finally, with respect to the technique of an appeal to higher loyalties, the students highlight that while they violated the rules of the university, it was because they were pressured by society and their family to study a course which is highly regarded but not of their interest. This notion is similar to what Zheng and Cheng (2015) found in their research hence they argue that if students follow their desire course of study, for instance a liberal arts education, there will be no need to cheat. This factor is significant because it can extricate students from the view that they are lazy and thus engage in the behavior. It can now be seen that there is a possibility that the laziness portrayed by the students may not be a direct consequence of their desire not to put in an effort but could be the result of disinterest in their area of study. This does not assuage students of their culpability nor is it an excuse for wrongful behavior but it gives an insight into why students may be desperate to move ahead in an academic environment they are not familiar or may never really acclimatize to.

The final motivating factor is a desire to assist a fellow colleague in the completion of a given

assignment. Considering the response of P1 when asked the reason for engaging in ghostwriting, he stated that:

"I haven't contracted any work out but in one way or the other, I have been a ghost writer. Helping friends in the first place, they couldn't write properly so they needed help for assignments. It seemed harmless, so I helped them out. Sometimes I spelled it out or I explicitly write it down then they can build on it. To just help out people"

This response can be understood in reference to the theory of the ethics of care (Held, 2005).

8.3 Implication of Contract Cheating and Ghostwriting

The students interviewed each demonstrated a level of awareness regarding the possible implications of these practices to students, the institution and the society. Responses regarding the implications for the students were largely centered on effect it would have on a student's total academic development.

P11: It is limitation on their knowledge; they don't get the required knowledge

P17: "The student will lose in the long run"

Thus, they suggested that this limitation can act as a hindrance to future academic success. The respondents further noted that possibly, the student's actions could be eventually discovered and they could be institutionally reprimanded (revoked certificate). This highlighted the fear of public shaming as an implication of this practice to the students.

With respect to the implications on the institution, there was a largely generalized response and it is well surmised by the second participant P2.

P2: "For the university, if there is a mass number of students that engage in this practice, I guess the rankings of the university could be affected as well, or the credibility rather of the university could be affected as well"

The participants could not expand beyond this narrative and they all concentrated on the potential low ranking. The participants are not far off in their assertions as scholars such as Singh and Remenyi (2016) also consider the potential backlash to the institution as continued plagiarism in the form of ghostwriting and contract cheating calls into question the integrity of the faculty and the students. This is extremely detrimental to the institution as the institution values their image and have taken great steps to ensure that it is preserved (Devlin, 2003).

The responses on the effects of these practices on society also produced a similarity of views. It was ascertained that it would be harmful to society as it will be filled with individuals that are inefficient members of the labour force with the propensity to cheat. Indeed, a study conducted by Curtis and Clare (2017) noted that among the number of individuals they found to have engaged in ghostwriting, 62.5% of those students did so more than once. However, the respondents noted that this cheating culture will not be limited to the academic environment alone but will become a large part of every facet of the individual's life, thus leading to continued corruption in the Nigerian society.

P2: "For society, if a lot of people go on cheating, it won't be for education alone, they will find a way to incorporate it in every aspect of their lives"

P25: “Nigeria’s future is at stake and the students end up being a liability to society. Corruption also becomes rampant”

8.4 Perceptions on Possible Solutions to Contract Cheating and Ghostwriting in Nigeria

It was highlighted by a large majority that NHEI have an active role to play if ghostwriting and contract cheating is to be curbed.

P5: “The University should focus on solving the issue; the ball is in their court. It’s their fault”

This respondents with this view noted that the university failed in formulating definitive countermeasures, much less administering these measures. As agents of the university, participants also highlighted the role of lectures that are negligent of the ability of each student and thus are unable to help them. This can be understood in reference to Vygotsky’s theory of social development (Vygotsky, 1978). He believed that it was the duty of a teacher to ascertain through observation each students zone of proximal development, that is, what they are capable of independently and what are they will falter, thus needing assistance from either their peers or the teacher (Turuk, 2008; Berger, 2009). The possibility of achieving this in a typical NHEI is low because of the discouraging *lecturer: student* ratio (Oribabor, 2008, p. 228).

Following the mention of the role of the institution and its agents in assuming an active role, the second common prescribed solution was the eradication of pressures from the student. This refers to the workload given to the student and also external pressures from parents in choosing a course of study. This mention of pressure once again highlights the underlying belief by the students that they are the victims. Only one participant noted that the student has a role as part of the solution. Consider the response of the third participant P3.

P3: “By being more strict with the students, by taking into acknowledgement their previous performances and comparing it to how it is now, by also having them verbally explain their work in some cases”

This suggests the implementation of policies like viva for submissions.

9. Findings and Analysis of Data Collected from the Online Survey

Analysed data from the survey (Figure 1) revealed that a great majority of students that have studied in NHEI have had an experience regarding ghostwriting and contract cheating.

Table 1. In Relation to Your Experience, Would You Be Inclined to Say That the Statements (a-d) Below Are True? (Please Tick As Appropriate)

a(1)	I have submitted as my own, a work written for me by someone else (ghost-writer) (replacing the author)
b(2)	I have submitted as my own, a work written for me by some other student
c(3)	I know of some student(s) that submitted as theirs, a work written for them (ghost writer) by someone else they did not know (replacing the author)

d(4) I know of some student(s) that submitted as theirs, a work written for them by another student (replacing the author and contributing to work)

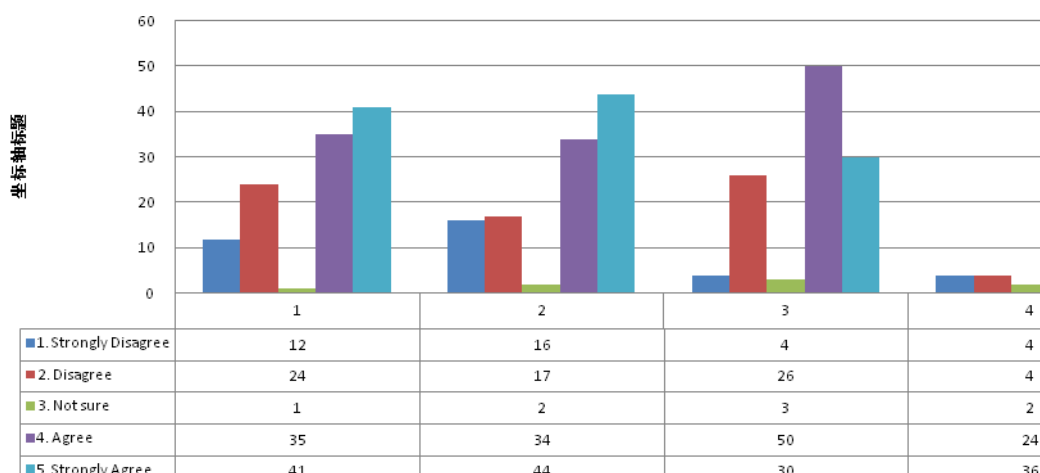


Figure 1. Students Experience with Ghostwriting and Contract Cheating in NHEI

From Figure 1, 76 respondents acknowledged that at one time, they had deliberately submitted a work as their own which was prepared by a ghostwriter. This contrasts with the 37 respondents who disagreed. Furthermore, of the 113 respondents, 100 attested to knowing students who had employed the services of ghost writers and 60 further noted that they knew students that had gotten help from other students. This suggests that ghostwriting is prevalent in NHEI. Furthermore, the surveys highlighted the fact that students in NHEI are acutely aware of these practices among other students. In addition, it is noteworthy that students who completed the online survey seemed to have been more comfortable answering questions regarding contract cheating and ghostwriting, possibly a result of anonymity associated with online surveys.

Figure 2 compliments Figure 1 by exploring further students experience with ghostwriting. It explores how satisfactory the service turned out to be for the students that used it. The data from Figure 2 reveals that these services incur mixed reviews. A larger percentage of the respondents believed that the services offered were not satisfactory; 46 participants disagreed that they produced satisfactory results while 20 were unsure if the results were satisfactory or not. There were positive affirmations (47) also and this is further complimented by the fact that a good number (46) of the respondents considered remittance for the service to be affordable probably because there was no comparison with which to determine the affordability. However, 35 of the respondents stated they were not sure.

Table 2. In Relation to Your Experience, Would You Be Inclined to Say That the Statements (a-c) Below Are True? (Please Tick As Appropriate)

A(Series1)	When these services (Question 1a and 1b) were used, they produced satisfactory results
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- b (Series 2) Where payment was made for these services(a and b), it was affordable
- c (Series 3) I have not engaged in any of these services(a and b)



Figure 2. The Satisfactory Nature of the Service Rendered

64 respondents (Figure 2) stated that they have not engaged with any of the services and again 23 were unsure whether or not they have engaged with the services. Although the number of participants who decided to “*sit on the fence*” of uncertainty suggests that a few participants might have been “*holding back*”. Nevertheless, this aid our understanding of the perpetuity of this practice. Satisfactory results complimented by relative affordability ensures that this practice carries on. The affordability and the satisfaction attached to the service is not the only guarantee for continued endeavor in the practice. Figures 3 and 4 which are illustrations of the survey evaluating NHEI Responses to Contract Cheating and Ghostwriting shows that the implications on the students are not effective deterrents hence proving a reason to carry on with these practices.

Table 3. Students’ Previous Experience with Institutional Management of Ghost-Writing and Contract Cheating

In relation to your experience, would you be inclined to agree with the statements (1-4) below? (please tick as appropriate)	
1	I have been caught in the past when I submitted as my own, a work written for me by someone else (ghost writer)
2	I have been caught in the past when I submitted as my own, a work written for me by some other student
3	I know of some student(s) that have been caught in the past when they submitted as theirs, a work written for them (ghost writer) by someone else they did not know
4	I know of some student(s) that have been caught in the past when they submitted as theirs, a work written for them by some other student

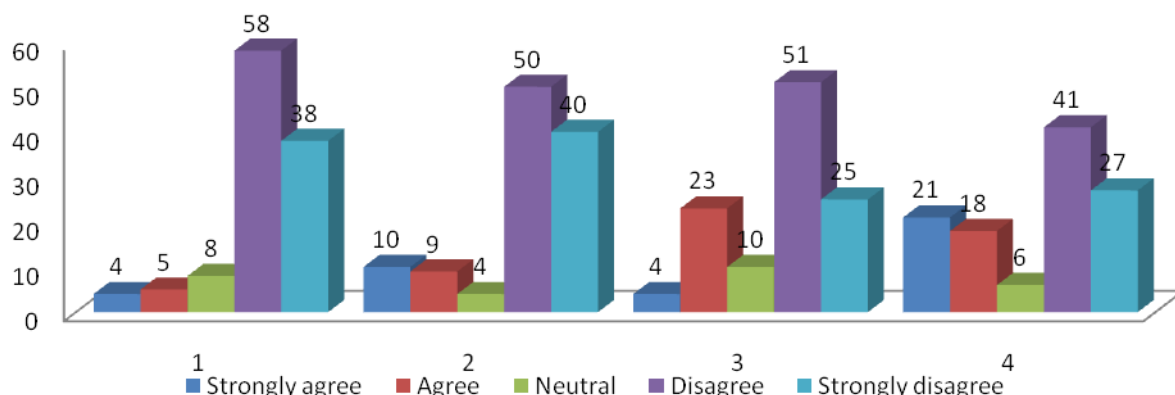


Figure 3. Detection of Contract Cheating and Ghostwriting

The data from Figure 3 shows minimal detection of those that engage in these practices. 96 of 113 respondents stated that they had never been caught in the past when they “submitted as their own, a work written for me them by someone else (ghost writer)”. These are staggering Figures. 90 asserted that when fellow students aided them, they still escaped detection. A further 76 stated that they did not know of other students who had been caught employing the services of ghost-writers and finally 68 did not know any students who was aided by a fellow student and was apprehended.

It is important to note that in all instances, >50 of the respondents suggested that there is a failure of NHEI detection measures. Furthermore, wheresome participants agreed to knowing students caughtwho submitted works written by another (39), less stated that they have been caught (27).

Figure 4 which illustrates students experience with being penalised as a result of ghost-writing reinforces the data collected, analysed and depicted in Figure 3.

Table 4. In Relation to Your Experience, Would You Be Inclined to Say That the Statements (a-d) Below Are True? (Please Tick As Appropriate)

a(1)	I have been penalised in the past when I submitted as my own, a work written for me by someone else whom I paid (contract)
b(2)	I have been penalised in the past when I submitted as my own, a work written for me by some other student
c(3)	I know of some student(s) that have been penalised in the past when they submitted as theirs, a work written for them (ghost writer) by someone else they did not know
d(4)	I know of some student(s) that have been penalised in the past when they submitted as theirs, a work written for them by some other student

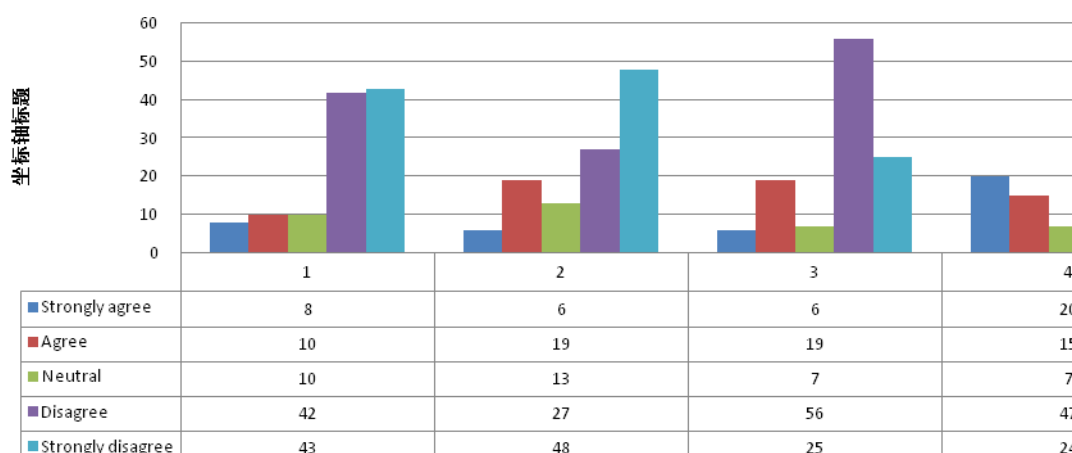


Figure 4. Students' Previous Experience with Institutional Management of Ghost-Writing and Contract Cheating

From this analysis, 85 of the 113 students disagreed that they have been penalised in the past when they submitted as their own, a work written for them by someone else whom they paid. Also, 75 of the students disagreed that they have been penalised when they submitted as their own, a work written for them by some other student. Even when they were reporting that they knew of some student(s) that have been penalised when they submitted as theirs, a work written for them by someone else they did not know or other student, 81 and 71 students respectively disagreed.

Findings from Figure 4 augments the argument that there are possibly no ghost-writing detection mechanisms, penalties or policies in most NHEI. If there are, then they are lacking in implementation. Indeed, if there is a great failure in detecting the students as highlighted in Figure 3, then, it will be inappropriate to penalise anyone. If also those that were detected are rarely penalised then the act will be rife. The percentage of students that engaged in ghost-writing and were not penalised is over 50%.

10. Discussion

A significant finding from this study was the knowledge that majority of the students interviewed understood the potential implications of contract cheating and ghostwriting to the individual/student, the institution and the society. Specifically, their understanding of the institutional implications was consistent with the opinion of Barbour (2010) who submitted that these practices have the potential of threatening the credibility of medical knowledge and medical journals. It was encouraging that the students perceived contract cheating and ghostwriting as unethical practices. This suggests that these students could differentiate between ethical and unethical practices. However, this study also revealed that despite this understanding of these practices as unethical, a great majority (>60%) of the interview and survey respondents have engaged in ghostwriting and contract cheating. This fact sourced from the surveys and interviews gives credence to the works of Clarke and Lancaster (2006) and Mammen and

Meyiwa (2013) who highlighted the prevalence of the practice in all academic fields.

It is asserted by the findings of this study that despite the students' perception of these practices as unethical, their views are distorted by two main factors which appear to have caused them to relegate their initial perception to the background; these factors are the existence of *opportunity* and the *student's ethics of care*. These factors reveal the peculiarity of the situation in NHEIs since in different academic contexts, there will be varied and unique factors at play.

From the reviewed literature the authors that explored the motivating factors behind the practice of contract cheating and ghostwriting all had different conclusions (Lancaster & Clarke, 2007; Osipian, 2012; Hu & Wu, 2013; Rigby et al., 2015; Zheng & Cheng, 2015). Where Rigby et al. (2015) note that the fear of achieving lower grades as well as a student's enrolment in a foreign language speaking country are major factors that compels students to cheat, Lancaster and Clarke (2007) blame institutional admission criteria, poor student understanding of plagiarism and poor academic skills while Hu and Wu (2013) and Osipian (2012) emphasize the monetary value of the practice as the prevailing influences to engage in these practices. It was also observed that Zheng and Cheng (2015) criticized students' obsession with achieving good grades as the prevailing factor. However, in this research, the authors identified *opportunity* and the *student's ethics of care* as the unique factors which are specific to NHEI.

With respect to the existence of opportunity, this is caused by the inadequacies of NHEI in formulating and consistently applying countermeasures to curb ghostwriting and contract cheating. According to Park (2003), "student perceptions of cheating situations are contingent upon the interplay of multiple factors such as need, provocation, opportunity and intentionality" (2003, p. 476). Thus, there is a seeming "opportunity" for these student's perception of ghostwriting as there appears to be no risk of being caught. Hence, the opportunity for them to engage in the practice exists because of the inadequacies of the NHEIs institutional framework for deterrence. These inadequacies are unfortunately complemented by the natural elusive and problematic nature of the practice as highlighted in the paper by Walker and Townley (2012).

According to Orim (2014), they are seemingly complex and virtually undetectable which invariably leads to the continued existence of opportunity. The above observation being made concerning the relationship between the inadequacies of NHEI in curbing ghostwriting and contract cheating is further supported by the "rational choice theory" addressed by Akers (1990) and Ogilvie and Stewart (2010). From this, one can deduce that with the existence of legal punishments and reprimands which would act as deterrents, individuals would rationally avoid such actions. When deterrents are not formulated or adopted by the NHEI, the students see an opportunity for maximum gain at extremely minimal risks. The study by Akers (1990) takes this understanding further as the author notes that a lack of deterrence not only provides opportunity but it serves a reinforcing factor for the practice. According to the author, the reward (not getting caught) reinforces the belief that the behaviour cannot be sanctioned.

This understanding is contrary to rhetoric's which are anchored on the belief that the morality and work

ethic of the student are the greatest motivating factors influencing how students perceive ghostwriting and contract cheating. Such an opinion is shared by Lancaster and Clarke (2007) who calls attention to the moral bankruptcy of the student as well as personality factors such as laziness. Several academics have dubbed it as a sin against originality (Freedman, 1994; Colon, 2001). The paper by Adebayo (2011) proposes that the morality of the Nigerian student is a factor perpetuating the practice. He states that despite “extra-judicial” methods devised by universities to punish offenders, cheating in NHEI abounds, because they have not acted as “strong deterrence”. He further suggests academic cheating is a criminal offence by law and should be treated as one (deserving jail time) so that the practice can be managed. While the opinion of Adebayo (2011) could possibly deserve some consideration by some people, problems can immediately be inferred from suggestion of such stringent measures. The time and energy that would go into such countermeasures would be immense and the penalty could be argued as not commensurate with the offense. What occurs then is that, out of their depth, educational instructors who attempt to address the issue are steered away from their primary duties. Instead as Walker and Townley (2012) had noted, focus should remain on supporting the “honest students and good academic practice” (2012, p. 27).

This study further reveals the prevalence of another factor influencing student’s perception of ghostwriting and contract cheating. That factor is the Nigeria students focus on values such as friendship. As it was highlighted in the interview findings, one of the motivating factors for students engaging in ghostwriting is the need to help friends. This was understood in reference to the theory of ethics of care’ which notes that interpersonal relationships override any moral obligation. Furthermore, the surveys revealed that Nigerian students are aware of academic cheating among their peers as well as possibility of punishment and sanctions but are indifferent to this fact. While observers may consider such a state of affair incredulous (that is, the willingness of a student to help a fellow student despite possible sanctions), a study of the papers by Held (2005) and Corsetti (2010) presented the opportunity of such a situation. Importantly, Gilligan (2011) reveals that humans are by nature empathetic beings. Thus, human interdependence and relationships which are valued more would lead to actions which are inductive, contextual, and psychological rather than being deductive.

Thus, for the Nigerian student, when all things are considered, the ethics of justice or integrity ranks second to the ethics of care suggesting that ghostwriting and contracting cheating are trivial issues when compared to friendships and relationships. It appears that students in NHEI fail to reconcile friendship and interpersonal relationships with justice and integrity which means they are ready to condone and even promote these practices because they empathize with those who cheat as they have an understanding of the pressures involved as a student.

While the understanding of student’s ethics of care in this context functions as an explanation which illuminates how NHEI student’s perception of ghostwriting and contract cheating is distorted, it also serves another function. That is, it reveals that ghostwriting in NHEI occurs in varying degrees. The ethics of care as understood in this context highlights the importance of interpersonal relationships.

Consequently, we understand here that students help students. However, this is not the only method through which students engage in ghostwriting, they also outsource their works to non-students (ghostwriters) as noted in the survey. The point being made is that in the case of students helping a fellow student by virtue of interpersonal relationship, the student who assumes the role of a ghostwriter may contribute little parts or huge aspects to the written paper. In this situation, there are two authors, although the ghostwriter student will not be recognized. However, the second degree in which ghostwriting occurs, the student (client) may completely outsource the work to a professional ghostwriter or service, without making any contribution. This phenomenon of the varying degree ghostwriting is supported by McCrostie (2009) who also explored this feature of ghostwriting.

11. Conclusion

This study explored the experience and perceptions of Nigerian students who have engaged or may not have engaged in contract cheating or ghostwriting. Their perceptions suggest that these practices are not serious academic misconducts. This stems from their observation that in a number of Nigerian universities, staffs and the management are doing little or nothing to curb the practices. In some cases, it is revealed that some staffs of Nigerian universities even engage in academic misconducts, thus promoting this perception.

Student suggestions regarding what could be done include: the formulation and adoption of mechanism and measures which should appeal to the student's values (such as integrity and to foster a culture of social responsibility); the need for lecturers to be adept at understanding the students present ability and thus assist them to achieve what they are incapable of; the eradication of pressure from the students in the form of academic workloads which drives them to cheat; the eradication of pressure on the students by the parents which causes them to enroll on courses in which they have no interest; and finally the use of viva voce where students will defend their papers verbally to confirm authenticity.

Although these measures are useful, not all can be implemented in all NHEIs. The adoption of mechanisms by the university, the eradication of pressure through reduced workload and implementation of viva voce are all attainable. However, the suggestion calling for teaching staffs to focus highly on student ability will be difficult to achieve except in small NHEIs where the staff: student ratio is high. Suggestions regarding eradication of pressure from the parents are difficult to achieve because the external pressures in question are beyond institutional control. Where the workload on the student can be reevaluated, pressure from parents cannot.

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