

# Unveiling the Challenges of Corruption and Academic Dishonesty in Ethiopia: An Overview of the Nature, Magnitude, Consequences, and the Way Forward

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## Abstract:

*The paper examines the challenges that Ethiopia is facing in systemic corruption and education sector academic dishonesty (cheating), and the links between the two and the deleterious effect on the quality of education and the production of competent human power. Corruption in general and academic dishonesty in particular are spreading in Ethiopia. The objectives of this study are to present the highlights of the findings of a National Corruption Perception Survey conducted in 2021 and the synthesis of nine empirical studies on academic dishonesty in Ethiopia, published in the past ten years. The overwhelming majority of the participants (i.e 80% of 6,627) have indicated that corruption is widely prevalent in all sectors, including the education sector, though land and revenue administration, municipalities, the judiciary, and police are reported to be more corrupted than others. As further corroboration of the situation of corruption in the education sector, focusing on academic dishonesty, the empirical studies reviewed indicate that cheating in examinations, plagiarism, recruitment of weak teachers, falsification of qualifications/documents, favoritism or nepotism in the assessment of students are widely prevalent in high schools and higher education institutions in Ethiopia. Researchers have widely reported that academic dishonesty has a positive relationship with workplace dishonesty.*

**Keywords:** Academic dishonesty, academic integrity, corruption, cheating, plagiarism

## Introduction

In general, corruption is defined as the misuse of public power, office, or authority for private benefits through bribery, extortion, influence, peddling, nepotism, fraud, speed money, or embezzlement (UNDP, 2004 & 2015; World Bank, 1997 & 2000). Many researchers such as Bretag (2016) and Jones (2011) consider that academic dishonesty (mainly students' cheating which is learned deceptive and dishonest behavior) is the worst form of corruption as it leads to the production of less competent, corrupt, and unethical human power for various sectors of work in the country. Academic dishonesty (AD) threatens the equity and efficacy of instructional measurements, reduces the level of learning, and negatively affects the quality of education and graduates at various levels of education. Human life, faster socio-economic development, and societal well-being are in danger due to fake and incompetent doctors, engineers, judges, teachers, researchers, and experts. As would be substantiated later, corruption and AD are widespread in Ethiopia.

As commonly understood, lack of integrity and unethical behavior within the education sector is highly inconsistent with the efforts of production of good citizens, who are ethical, honest, hardworking, respectful of human rights and the law, fair to all, and competent in their fields of specialization (particularly those graduates of college).

Some of the areas (sub sectors) in the education sector affected by corruption are: infrastructure construction, information system, recruitment and appointment of teachers, the supply and distribution of equipment and textbooks, the allocation of allowances and scholarships, examinations and students' performance (IIEP/UNESCO, 2006; Kirya, 2019). Corruption in all these subsectors affects access, quality, equity and ethics of education. The focus of this study will be on issues of malpractice in examinations, assignments, and grades.

Hence, the objectives of this study are to present the highlights of the findings of a national corruption perception survey (NCPS) conducted in 2021 in Ethiopia, and the synthesis of nine empirical studies on AD in Ethiopia, published in the past ten years. The articles were obtained through Google Scholar search, as it is convenient, easily available and has credible documents publicly accessible. In addition to suggesting strategies to deal with corruption and AD, the forms, trends, causes, and consequences of corruption and AD are discussed. It is hoped that some debates and reconsideration of policies, rules, procedures, and actions will emanate from the findings regarding the menace of AD and corruption. The paper has two parts, where the first part is mainly the National Corruption Perception Survey (FEACC-UNDP, 2021), while the second part is the synthesis of empirical studies on AD done in January and February 2024. As will be pointed out in the literature review, discussion, and conclusion sections, AD (cheating) is highly related to systemic corruption. An attempt was made to link studies in both areas.

## **Statement of the Problem**

### ***Regarding Corruption in General***

In Ethiopia, corruption occurs in various forms, including but not limited to clientelism (relations of patronage), kleptocracy (exploiting the people), rent seeking (manipulating policies), and state capture (private interests influencing state decisions) (Kirya, 2019; Plummer, 2012). Although anti-corruption laws in the country remain strong in principle, they are not implemented adequately.

Corruption, by its nature, is hidden and inherently difficult to study with confidence. Fortunately, corruption research has also responded with plenty of indices, scores, rankings, and other assessments (Kaufmann et al., 2006; UNDP, 2011, 2015). Efforts have been made to answer questions such as how serious corruption is in a given country or sector. Is it getting worse or getting better? What interventions/actions are being taken and in which sector? Who

are the victims and perpetrators? How do the social and political systems facilitate, drive, or discourage corruption? (Campos & Pradhan, 2007; Hart, 2019; UNDP, 2005; Wondimu, 2021).

Some of the well-known indexes/indicators/surveys on corruption include Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index, World Bank's Governance Indicators, International Crime Victim Survey, and Transparency International's Global Corruption Barometer. In general, these scales measure behaviors and perceptions related to corruption and serve as tools to raise awareness, for naming and shaming, and to take some measures to reduce corruption (Graycar & Prenzler, 2013). The results/findings of such studies tend to guide policymakers, government and private sectors, investors, development partners, and donors.

According to Corruption Perceptions Index reports by Transparency International (TI), Ethiopia was the 96<sup>th</sup> least corrupt nation out of 180 countries in 2019 and 94<sup>th</sup> in 2020; and 98<sup>th</sup> in 2023 (TI, 2019, 2021, 2024). Where Ethiopia stands indicates that there is a serious national problem to deal with. Graycar and Prenzler (2013) argue that,

If there is bribery, extortion, misappropriation, self-dealing; if major capital and development projects serve an individual's financial interests rather than the public interests; if foreign corporations bribe public officials to exploit natural resources; if human rights abuses are tolerated; if justice administration is inconsistent with the rule of law, then the society is more corrupt than those in which these behaviours are less or not part of the social fabric (P.34).

The situation of Ethiopia is of great concern when assessed with these and other relevant parameters.

Corruption is a global phenomenon that causes poverty, hinders development, and pushes away investments. It also can incapacitate political and judicial systems that should be working for the good of the people. The Ethiopian situation needs to be assessed with regard to its nature, causes, types, and effects of corruption.

Fishman (2012) indicates that "a narrow focus on student cheating is insufficient and that what is needed, instead, is a much broader approach to the development of integrity not only for students but for educators, researchers, educational practices, institutions and cultures" (p.8). Also, Orosz et al. (2018) have provided some evidence that "link exists between academic cheating and corruption" (p.89). To the writer's knowledge, there are no empirical studies that examine the relationship in Ethiopia. Therefore, the concern of this study is on both systemic (national level, socio-economic order) corruption, and AD in secondary schools and colleges in the country.

The primary objective of the NCPS was to determine the perceived and observed levels of corruption in Ethiopia and promote public debates and drive demand for change on corruption.

The specific objectives of the study, *inter alia*, were to:

- a. Find out the forms and causes of corruption that are most prevalent.
- b. Identify the trends and status of corruption in the country.
- c. Identify sectors and institutions most affected by and prone to corruption and examine the extent, level, type and nature of corruption.
- d. Propose interventions/strategies to enhance ethics, integrity and effectively combat corruption in Ethiopia.

### ***Regarding Academic Dishonesty***

Education is crucial for national development and the development of integrity, peace, equality, social justice, and shared responsibility. The World Bank conducted a major study in Ethiopia to map corruption in various sectors, including the education sector (Plummer, 2012). The report indicated that, ‘‘Of particular concern are the widespread perceptions of fraud in examinations, falsification of qualifications, teacher absenteeism, and favoritism towards members of the ruling party both in teacher recruitment and in student selection and assessment’’ (Latham in Plummer, 2012:6). In this paper, academic dishonesty, cheating, corruption in education, and exam misconduct are used interchangeably depending on the context.

It is well documented that corruption in education sector includes bribes and illegal fees for admission and examinations, academic fraud (deception), withholding teachers’ salaries, preferential promotion and placement, charging students for tutorials, illegal practices in textbook procurement, meal provision and infrastructure contracting (DFID & UKAID, 2015; TI, 2005, 2021; UNODC, 2022). Young (2013) succinctly indicated that ‘‘whether it is in the form of bribery, kickbacks, extortion, or a selective application of laws, the lessons that parents and society instill in children from an early age are that hard work and academic achievement are not always the paths to success. A society where corruption is not regarded as a serious matter...must be considered a factor in students’ decision to commit academic dishonesty’’ (8).

A few studies are focusing on AD in Ethiopia, even though it is rampant and needs vast coverage and deliberations. A glaring illustration is that the Federal Ministry of Education has started administering secondary school leaving (and higher education admission) exams in public universities rather than the respective schools, since 2022, due to students’ cheating throughout the country. Efforts are also made to assign invigilators from other regions and in some cases other ethnic groups to the exam centers. The key plan documents in the education sector, ESDP VI, Education Development Roadmap and GEQIP, focus on issues of access, quality, efficiency, and equity, though students’ learning is emphasized (Endale et al., 2023; MoE, 2017, 2021). The serious challenges of AD are not well addressed in these documents.

Some of the studies conducted in Ethiopia are specific to the context (the school or college) and do not reflect the state of knowledge regarding AD in Ethiopia (Abeshu & Daksa, 2017; Birhanu, 2020; Chala, 2021; Feday, 2017). Hence, there is a need to bring the isolated studies' findings together and synthesize them. The focus of this and the studies for synthesis are on issues related to student learning, assessments, and marks, but not on issues of corruption related to infrastructure, textbooks, and financial matters.

The main research questions of this part of the study are the following:

1. What are the major findings of AD studies in Ethiopia?
2. What strategies are suggested by the researchers to curb AD in Ethiopia?

## **Brief Related Literature Review**

### ***Focusing on Corruption in General***

The focus of the brief literature review will be corruption in general, followed by academic dishonesty.

Corruption has become a serious global issue as it affects the development of every nation. These days, it is hardly possible to find a country free from corruption, including those that are considered democratic and developed (though the magnitude would be low).

It is well accepted that corruption is one of the main impediments to economic development, good governance, and good service delivery throughout the world. The UN Convention against Corruption succinctly states that Corruption is an insidious plague that has a wide range of corrosive effects on societies. It undermines democracy, and the rule of law, leads to violations of human rights, distorts markets, erodes the quality of life, and allows organized crimes, terrorism, and other threats to human security to flourish (UNODC, 2004). Unfortunately, corruption exists even in institutions that are principally believed to fight corruption, such as religious institutions and professional associations. It affects people indiscriminately, both young and old, men and women alike, though it hurts the poor and the vulnerable. Cross-cultural studies show that corruption is higher in countries where there is political instability and where wide ethnic divisions exist (e.g., Treisman, 2000). Such findings should alert countries like Ethiopia, where multiculturalism and ethnic diversity exist.

The literature distinguishes between different types of corruption in terms of scale, cause, context, and method. Types of corruption have been distinguished as petty versus grand, administrative versus political, and so forth. Petty and administrative corruption refers to a smaller scale corruption involved in service delivery and could also mean the type of extortion (e.g., by traffic police) or soliciting of "speed money" (e.g., customs officials) usually by lower-level officials. Whereas grand corruption refers to transactions involving substantial amounts of money, for instance in construction or procurement, and usually involving higher-level officials. In line with this, political corruption could also encompass what is commonly referred to as

“state capture”, where groups can influence state rules and regulations in such a way that it would allow them to gain unjustified economic or political benefits (Campos & Pradhan, 2007; FEACC-UNDP, 2021; Graycar & Prenzler, 2013).

The Transparency International (TI) 2018 report shows that the major sectors that are prone to corruption in Ethiopia include the energy sector, judiciary, police, land administration, and social services (health and education). On the other hand, Jenkins and Elsayed (2023) have reported that the Transport Bureau, the Ethiopian Electric Utility Office, Urban Development, Housing and Construction Bureau were the most corrupt organizations in Ethiopia.

In terms of legal and institutional frameworks, Ethiopia ratified the United Nations Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC) in 2007. Also, it has ratified the African Union Convention on Preventing and Combating Corruption in 2007. Furthermore, it established the Federal Ethics and Anti-corruption Commission in 2001 (FDRE, 2001). In addition, the Government of Ethiopia has issued the Corruption Crimes Proclamation (No. 881/2015) and has included 25 types of corruption crimes, which are punishable crimes of corruption. This proclamation clarifies the Ethiopian Criminal Code of 2004. The 25 forms of corruption crimes that are punishable as per the proclamation include abuse of power, bribery, and acceptance of undue advantage (FDRE, 2015). It is to be noted that some of these acts are also listed in the AU Convention on Corruption (2003).

TI (2021), Graycar (2020) and others recommend that promotion of justice and strengthening the rule of law by strengthening the independence of the justice system, introducing integrity and monitoring mechanisms, and promoting cooperation between organizations working to curb corruption would assist in tackling corruption.

As indicated above, to fight the rampant corruption, the Ethiopian Government established the Federal Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission (FEACC) in 2001. FEACC’s establishment was motivated by the belief that corruption and impropriety can hinder the social, economic, and political development of the country, and that the FEACC was necessary to address the threat posed to Ethiopian development by corruption and impropriety.

### ***Focusing on Academic Dishonesty***

A USA college defines academic dishonesty as: “(1) receiving, giving or using of any unauthorized assistance on any academic assignment, including quizzes, tests, written assignments, examinations or laboratory assignments; (2) referencing and or using sources beyond those authorized by the instructor in preparing papers, constructing reports, solving problems; (3) inadequate citation of sources (plagiarism); (4) acquisition, without permission of tests, computer files or similar materials that would give the student unfair advantage on an assignment or examination; (5) submission of academic work not a student’s original effort; (6) use of the same work for multiple courses without permission; (7) unauthorized altering of

academic records(transcripts) and (8)fabrication of research data”(Bowdoin, 2023: Article IV,1). This is an elaborate definition of AD worth accepting in principle. However, the need for the prevalence of academic integrity (AI) is also worth mentioning. Where there is high-quality education, AI is also high. AI generally means the commitment to honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility in academia (Eckstein, 2003; Fishman, 2012; Jones, 2011; NAIN, 2021). It is living these values! Falsification of data, lying, cheating, fraud, theft, copying without acknowledgment, and other dishonest behaviors are unacceptable.

Latham (2012) has reported that in addition to the students' AD, assistance from invigilators and local officials are common in all regions of Ethiopia that were studied. Threatening or bribery of strict supervisors, and invigilators for their silence are also reported in several schools. Sanbi (2021) has reported that the students, teachers, administrators, and the school culture are the major causes for the academic cheating in Jimma Zone secondary schools. Scholars continue to search for the personal, environmental, cultural, internal, and external causes and contributing factors to cheating and other dishonest behaviors (Hallak & Poisson, 2007; Isakov, 2017; Rettinger & Kramer, 2009).

Techniques of cheating or AD include looking at neighbours' answer sheets, sale of exam papers, taking forbidden materials to exam halls, use of pre-arranged signals between exam takers, crib notes in pockets, impersonation (hired substitute), usage of cell phones, and bribery. The motivators for cheating include lack or low participation of students in lessons, disengagement of teachers, small physical distance between students (during exams), high pressure from parents and peers for better grades, severe competitive situation to score high (and between schools to pass more), students distorted perception of integrity issues, lenient imposition of rules and regulations, and conducive school environment for cheating. Unfortunately, many students perceive cheating and unethical activities as ordinary common school acts to be tolerated by all (Dinka, 2015; Nwoye et al., 2019; Sanbi, 2021; Tadesse & Getachew, 2010; Young, 2013).

Several studies in the area of AD suggest that an institution's integrity programs and policies, such as honor codes, can have a significant effect on students' behavior (Bretag, 2016; Hallak & Poisson, 2007; McCabe et al., 2001; UNDP, 2011). As indicated earlier, academic integrity is loosely defined as following values and principles consistent with ethical teaching, learning, and scholarship (Bretag, 2016; Fishman, 2012). These and other researchers suggest that affirming academic integrity as a core institutional value, providing clear expectations to students and faculty behavior, reducing opportunities for temptations, and prompt action when AD occurs would help curb and/or reducing AD. Also, often mentioned are embedded culture of integrity, supportive and trusting atmosphere, severity of punishments, existence of clear rules regarding AD, faculty monitoring unacceptable behaviors, peer pressure not to cheat,

prevalence of likelihood of being caught or reported, and small class size as reducers of AD and cheating.

## Methods of Study

### *Method of the National Survey*

The NCPS led by this researcher (sponsored by the FEACC and the UNDP), where 6,627 adults (31% females & 69% males) from rural (46%) and urban (54%) Ethiopia, sampled (convenient) from households, public institutions, and private institutions was conducted in 2021.

The sample size allocated to each region and the socio-economic sectors (based on population size) is provided in Table 1. All regional states were included, except Tigray, due to security problems.

**Table 1**

*Sample Distribution of Respondents by Region/City Administration and Sample Sector*

Region	Sample sector						Media	Total
	House holds	CSOs/NGOs	Religious institutions	Private institutions	Public institutions	Professional associations		
Addis Ababa	359	34	14	97	79	3	20	606
Afar	244	23	9	67	57	1	2	403
Amhara	785	74	30	214	179	5	4	1291
Benishangul-Gumuz	178	17	7	48	40	1	2	293
Dire Dawa	127	12	5	35	29	1	2	211
Gambela	118	11	4	32	28	1	1	195
Harari	89	10	3	23	19	0	2	146
Oromia	981	96	38	271	224	3	4	1617
SNNP	728	64	27	201	167	4	3	1194
Somali	409	39	15	111	93	2	2	671
<b>Total</b>	<b>4018</b>	<b>380</b>	<b>152</b>	<b>1099</b>	<b>915</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>6627</b>

**Source:** FEACC-UNDP & Frontieri, 2021.

The methods of measuring corruption include public expenditure tracking, surveys, FGD involving dialogue between ordinary people, Delphi method featuring opinions from researchers and experts, interviews with police officers and judges and anticorruption agencies. Some researchers recommend that the existing scales/surveys be adapted, rather than trying to develop own new scales. One needs to be clear on what is to be measured. Why to measure it and the available measures for the purpose (Hart, 2019; Kaufmann et al., 2006). The criteria to use to adapt a measure include validity (accuracy), reliability (consistency), clarity, ease of use/administration, and cultural/sectoral appropriateness. The tools used by the FEACC-UNDP study (NCPS) fulfilled these criteria.



For the NCPS, the development of the tools (one for each sector) involved adaptation, translation to Amharic, Afaan Oromo, Somali, and Afar languages, pilot testing, and refinement of the tools. The data collection tools were pilot tested on 382 adults in selected areas of Addis Ababa, Oromia, Afar, and SNNP. The data were collected by trained enumerators using Android-based tablets for the pilot and main study. The analyses were made using descriptive statistics, mainly percentages and means. All ethical principles, such as no harm, consent, and confidentiality, were maintained.

### ***Method of Research Synthesis of AD Studies***

The Google Scholar search terms used were: Academic dishonesty in Ethiopia, academic corruption in Ethiopia, academic cheating in Ethiopia, dishonest behavior in education, corruption in the education sector in Ethiopia, academic/exam misconduct in Ethiopia, and plagiarism in Ethiopian schools/universities. The number of articles identified and downloaded was 26, of which only nine fulfilled the inclusion criteria.

The inclusion criteria were Journal articles published in the English language, articles of empirical research focusing on AD, articles published in the past ten years, and articles focusing on secondary and tertiary level education in Ethiopia. The exclusion criteria were articles published in languages other than English, articles not fully focusing on Ethiopia, articles not focusing on AD/cheating/corruption, and articles not published in journals (proceedings, book chapters, reports). The Google Scholar search engine was used for searching the information in January and February 2024.

To conduct the research synthesis, the steps and procedures followed were those recommended by various scholars (Cooper, 2017; Fingfeld-Connett, 2018; Tawfik et al., 2019), although the latter two place greater emphasis on meta-synthesis and meta-analysis approaches. Research synthesis, systematic review, and meta-analysis are terms often used interchangeably; the first is preferable for the study at hand in line with Cooper's (2017) suggestion. "Research synthesis focuses on empirical research findings and has the goal of integrating past research by drawing overall conclusions (generalizations) from many separate investigations that address identical or related hypotheses or problems" (Cooper, 2017: 18). The seven steps of the process of research synthesis are formulating the problem, searching the literature, gathering information from studies, evaluating the quality of the studies, analyzing and integrating the outcomes of studies, interpreting the evidence, and presenting the results (Cooper, 2017). Both research synthesis and meta-synthesis assist in constructing greater meaning through the integrating and interpretive process across the studies and to discover patterns and common threads on a specific topic/issue. They would be very useful for making evidence-based policies, decisions, and implementations.

After the selection of the nine articles, each article was read, marking main ideas/codes/themes/categories. Based on the highlighted terms and the literature reviewed, a coding guideline was drafted. The codes include nature, magnitude/level, context, causes/reasons, justifications, types or forms of cheating, actors, attitudes, and the measures to take to curb AD/cheating. After drafting the coding guideline, each article was read again to code the findings as per the guideline. Finally, the analysis and interpretation of the coded data were made.

## **Findings**

### ***Highlights of the Findings of the NCPS by Socio-economic Sector***

The key finding is that corruption is widely prevalent in all sectors, including the education sector, though land and revenue administration, municipalities, the judiciary, and police are reported as more corrupt. The participants ranked corruption as the third major socio-economic problem that Ethiopia is facing, next to the high cost of living and unemployment. The summarized findings of the NCPS will be presented by sectors: Households, public institutions, private institutions, CSOs/NGOs, religious institutions, professional associations, and the media.

#### ***1. Household participants***

The findings concerning households, where 4,018 adults participated, show that the overwhelming majority (84.6%) of the households perceive that there exists corruption in public institutions, followed by private institutions (51.5%) and CSOs/NGOs (38.9%). Some institutions indicated by the respondents, as corrupt, include land management, municipality office, transport bureau, police and traffic police, and Woreda courts.

The participants of the study (92%) endorsed the acts and practices listed in the Corruption Crimes Proclamation 881/2015 as corruption. Bribery, acceptance of undue advantages and abuse of power or responsibility are the common forms of corruption that often prevail.

The major reason given for offering gratification is that there is no other way to obtain a service. In contrast, some respondents indicated moral unacceptability and risks of punishment as reasons for not giving gratification. Most respondents (54%) perceive that corruption in Ethiopia is at lower level than it was about five years back, yet the great majority (92%) view corruption as a serious problem in the country today. Greed and desire to get more, ambition to become rich quickly and being devoid of ethics or moral values are the major causes of corruption in Ethiopian context. Overall, 69% of the participants consider women to be less exposed to corruption compared with their male counterparts, and they generally believe that appointing women in areas vulnerable to corruption would help as a therapy to combat corruption in Ethiopia in general.

## **2. *Public Institutions***

Complaints handling, perception of corruption, presence and tolerance of corruption, trend and status of corruption, and perceived causes of corruption were some of the main issues assessed regarding public institutions. The results obtained from public institutions' participants were similar to those of households. However, undue delay of matters and maladministration in governance of public enterprise work were the most common forms of corruption reported (by 60%) as prevailing in public institutions.

Regarding the integrity of institutions under the legislative branch of government, most respondents (75%) perceive that these institutions are honest (i.e., Human Rights Commission, Ombudsman, FEACC, Parliament, etc) An exception was the Ethiopian Broadcasting Authority, where none of the respondents forwarded a favourable rating.

## **3. *Private/Business Institutions***

Corruption is one of the main challenges currently facing private entities in the operation and growth of their business. According to the respondents (over 50%), public institutions, private enterprises, and NGOs are organizations where corruption is widely prevalent. Regarding reporting incidents of corruption, 64% of the respondents indicated that neither other people nor themselves report corruption practices whenever they experience them.

Undue delay of matters/actions, maladministration of business/work, and abuse of power are the common forms of corruption that reportedly prevail in business enterprises. Greed and the desire to get more were cited as the leading causes of corruption in Ethiopia. This is followed by the ambition to get rich quickly and have no ethics or morals. Ethiopian Investment Commission, from the executive arm, and the Federal Supreme Court, from the judiciary arm, were mentioned as institutions that render good quality services and are labeled as honest institutions by respondents (nearly 50%). Private entities perceive that professional associations, the Prime Minister's Office, and religious institutions would contribute more to the fight against corruption in the country. On the other hand, awareness creation campaigns, registration of assets, and the establishment of federal and regional EACC initiatives were mentioned as the most effective measures in combating corruption in Ethiopia.

## **4. *CSOs and NGOs***

Bribery, abuse of power or responsibility, and misappropriation in the discharge of duties were among the major forms of corruption mentioned by CSO and NGO participants. Greed and desire to get more, and ambition to get rich quickly are the main causes of corruption. Participants (over 40%) reported that corruption and failure to expose corrupt acts also prevailed in NGOs and CSOs of the country.

Regarding service delivery, private banks took the leading position in the quality of service, whereas Ethiopian Electric Utility was rated as an organization with poor service delivery.

Despite the need to report corruption, people did not do so mainly because of the fear of retaliation. In combating corruption, mass media (newspapers and TV), regional ethics and anti-corruption commission, civic society organizations, and non-governmental organizations were considered as key players.

### **5. Professional Associations**

The overwhelming majority (75%) of the respondents from the professional associations sampled indicated that bribery, acceptance of undue advantage, and appropriation and misappropriation in the discharge of duties, as well as lack of law enforcement, are the common forms of corruption prevailing in Ethiopia. About 47% of the respondents indicated that the current government's will and desire in fighting corruption is higher compared to the situation five years back. Corruption is ranked as the third major problem that Ethiopia is facing, next to unemployment and the high cost of living.

### **6. Religious Institutions**

Respondents from religious institutions (over 50%) indicated that abuse of power or responsibility and bribery are among the top forms of corruption they observed in Ethiopia. 63% also indicated that corruption has shown a decreasing trend today in the country as compared with its level about five years ago, yet it remains a serious problem in the country. In the views of religious leaders/respondents, ambition to become rich quickly, greed and desire to get more, and lack of ethics or morals are the main causes of corruption in Ethiopia. Though small in numbers, the prevalence of corruption within faith-based institutions is also reported (by about 25%).

### **7. Media Institutions**

Media sector respondents (95%) indicated that abuse of power, bribery, acceptance of undue advantages, etc., listed in the Corruption Crimes Proclamation 881/2015 are widely prevalent in Ethiopia. Non-existence of ethics or morals, ambition to become rich quickly, and greed and desire to get more are the main causes of corruption. According to 43% of media sector participants, the level of corruption is higher today than five years ago in the country and the media sector.

Assigning anti-corruption officers in various offices and awareness creation /training campaigns are recommended by the media participants as effective ways of fighting corruption in Ethiopia. Legal aid and council strengthened whistleblowers' protection, and protection of media personnel were also indicated as valuable resources and support for them in the fight against corruption.

### **Findings from the Research Synthesis on AD**

The data used to report the findings here are mainly the integrated findings of the nine empirical studies conducted in Ethiopia in the past ten years. The objectives of the nine studies were

mainly to find out the level, types, and justifications for cheating (Dejene, 2021; Desalegm & Berhanu, 2014). Also, the perceptions of students and teachers regarding AD were studied (Bachore, 2016; Berhanu, 2020). The studies were conducted in Hawassa, Debre Markos, Dire Dawa, Bahir Dar, and Arsi universities and high schools in Jimma, Dire Dawa, and Harar. The methods of study and tools of data collection were qualitative, quantitative, mixed, and classroom observation, though self-report questionnaires were the dominant ones for data collection.

The main codes used to synthesize the data are nature, magnitude/level, context, causes/reasons, types or forms of cheating, actors, attitudes, and the measures to take to curb AD/cheating. During the analysis and interpretation, some of the codes were put together to create a better meaning. Hence, we will be using broader categories: Nature, types and forms of cheating; causes and reasons for cheating; attitudes and perceptions on cheating; and the way forward.

1. ***Regarding the nature***, types and forms of cheating, the studies indicated that copying from others, use of crib sheets, sharing exam answers, using prepared answers, writing possible answers on body parts, exchange of answer sheets, usage of agreed on codes/signals, and collaboration with the invigilators are widely reported (Birhanu, 2020; Dejene, 2021).
2. ***Regarding the causes and reasons for cheating***, most studies indicated that it is a ‘normal or common’ behaviour, difficulty of the exams, pressure to score high or at least to get a pass mark, parents want them to get better grades, lack of self-confidence, to join colleges at any cost, to graduate and have a job, fear of failure, and other students also do it (Abeshu & Daksa, 2017; Gobie et al. 2020).
3. ***Regarding the magnitude or number of cheaters prevalent in the studied colleges and schools***, it is reported that 20 to 81% of the students have admitted cheating sometime in the past year or so (Dejene, 2021; Desalegm & Berhanu, 2014; Mulisa, 2015). The findings regarding the differences between boys and girls are mixed and not conclusive. The attitudes towards cheating and AD are mixed. Some students (over 50%) consider it a serious problem, while others (30%) consider it a minor problem ‘to be tolerated’ by the schools and colleges.

There are some indications that cheating in assignments and plagiarism is more common among students than exam cheating (Birhan et al., 2020; Chala, 2021; Mulisa, 2015; ). The studies were done at various schools and colleges in the country and seem to indicate that AD is prevalent in all areas/contexts, and fields of study of the students. However, it is to be noted that where there is laxity in invigilation, and space between the examinees is small, reportedly the number of cheaters increases (Desalegm & Berhanu, 2014; Chala, 2021).

The focus of the synthesized studies was students in colleges or secondary schools, though instructors have participated in some of the studies. The students have reported in some cases that the teachers look the other way when cheating is taking place and even assist during national examinations (Birhanu, 2020; Chala, 2021; Desalegm & Berhanu, 2014). One study indicated that 80% of the students would not report the act of cheating witnessed in exam halls or in doing assignments (Desalegm & Berhanu, 2014).

4. *Regarding the measures to take to curb AD*, several suggestions were forwarded. Revisiting the code of conduct related to AD, implementing severe punishments including dismissals, development of academic integrity policies accepted by all the key stakeholders (at least by the students, teachers, administrators, and parents), developing students' self-confidence, teaching good study habits, strict supervision and strengthening the culture/habit of integrity in schools and colleges are mentioned (Modes, 2020; Gobie et al., 2020).

## **Discussion**

In this section, the researcher tried to indicate the relationship between systemic (societal level) corruption with academic dishonesty (academic corruption). Some of the challenges prevalent and how to deal with them were indicated. Also, efforts were made to integrate empirical findings with what is in the related literature.

There is a general agreement that the concepts of corruption and academic dishonesty are complex, and some disagreements exist regarding their definitions. For the purposes in this study, to define corruption, the researcher has adopted the definition often used by the World Bank, UNDP, and TI. Corruption is defined as the misuse of government power/office for private gain and the willful violations of rules or codes of conduct. It is receiving illegitimate gain through various acts. Corruption takes many forms, such as embezzlement, fraud, nepotism, bribery, extortion, and money laundering. The Ethiopian Corruption Crimes Proclamation (88/2015) lists 25 acts, including the ones mentioned above. It is dishonest and illegal behaviors of officials, administrators, and experts.

Academic dishonesty is also broadly defined as deliberate and unacceptable behaviors that are against academic rules and regulations. It includes cheating and plagiarism. Using crib notes on tests, copying from another student on a test, copying others' work on assignments and papers without acknowledgements, fabrication of data or sources, etc., are considered dishonest behaviors.

The reasons, for corruption and AD, provided by the literature include greed, selfish interest, putting self before others, lack of democracy and transparency, prevalence of political

instability, lack of accountability and integrity, poverty and the desire to fulfill basic needs, nonexistence or lack of implementation of rules and regulations, peer pressure, competition to be better or greater in grades or wealth, high competition for limited opportunities for college admission, and lack of (weak, eroded) ethical values and behavior at all levels (FEACC-UNDP, 2021; McCabe et al., 2001; Nwoye et al., 2019). The contributions of ignorance, particularly in the case of plagiarism, incompetent instructors, inadequate policies, underdeveloped moral reasoning, sense of inadequacy, peer pressure, and the prevalence of cheating culture are also indicated by some studies (Bachore, 2014; McCabe et al., 2001; Nwoye et al., 2019). Particularly when those corrupt officials, experts, and students go unpunished, the chances are high that others will emulate them. Thu (2022) and Quah (2021) provide vast evidence that corruption and weak/poor leadership are also major underlying causes for underdevelopment. Tella, Liberty, and Mbaya (2014) further confirm that bad leadership and corruption are highly related and are impediments to peace, stability, and development. There is abundant evidence that ethical and effective leaders can play decisive roles in the fight against corruption. Studies conducted in Asian countries report that having ethical leadership and taking serious measures have reduced corruption in countries such as Singapore, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea (Quah, 2021; Talvitie, 2017). These days, the emphasis seems to be on leadership integrity, which is the act of being morally trustworthy, honest, true to oneself, accountable, leading by example, and with clear principles (values and beliefs).

Corruption in education threatens the well-being of society as it erodes social trust, fairness, merit, and worsens inequality (Kirya, 2019). Students' cheating will have catastrophic results on the quality of education, the socioeconomic situation of the country, and the Ethiopian society in general. After critically reviewing the civics and ethical education textbooks in the primary and secondary schools of Ethiopia, Wondimu (2016, 2018) has concluded that the students in primary and secondary schools are not well equipped with the competencies and skills such as non-violent ways of solving conflicts/differences, negotiation/dialogue skills, attitudes of responsibility and justice, and the obligation to abide by rules and regulations. Given such circumstances, hard work, innovation and creativity, discipline and fairness, honesty, and integrity will have no place in academia, in the workplace, and the society at large. The students who have cheated to get through college will not be competent innovators, leaders, or experts in their areas of specialization. Gradually, the number of competent and skilled personnel in many socioeconomic sectors will dwindle, and a dim future will reign. Though not the focus of this study, it is reported that teachers' professional misconduct and low dedication to the profession are well-documented. Reportedly, many secondary school teachers in Ethiopia have low commitment to assist their students, lack interest in their profession, work with low motivation, waste instructional time, and would like to leave teaching if given another job opportunity (Ayenalem et al., 2023).

Available evidence indicates that corruption is a major obstacle to growth, economic and social development; it lowers the quantity and quality of health care and education services, denies the government of tax revenues, and discourages investments (Boly et al., 2020). This and other sources report that there is plenty of evidence that shows higher corruption correlates negatively with the quality of education. Learning and efforts are required to build human capital, pass examinations, and obtain degrees. AD weakens the incentives to work hard and acquire the needed competence and skills.

Some would argue that there is no direct relationship between systemic and education sector corruption/cheating. But it should be noted that parents, teachers, students, administrators, officials, and experts belong to the community, and one learns from the others. Socialization takes place in the community, schools/colleges, and the workplace. Hence, one influences the other!

Empirical studies conducted in Ethiopia (also mentioned earlier) show that there is vast corruption and academic dishonesty in the various socioeconomic sectors, including the education sector (Bachore, 2014; Chemir, 2019; FEACC-UNDP, 2021; Plummer, 2012; Rahman, 2018; Teferra, 2001; TI, 2021). Recent Afrobarometer (2024), in which 2,400 adults from all regions participated, indicates that 46% of civil servants, 49% of the police, and 45% of tax officials are perceived as involved in corruption in Ethiopia. It is also reported that corruption has increased in the past year (42% responded), and the government is handling the fight against corruption badly (65%).

It seems that basic ethical standards of conduct expected of academic staff such as integrity, honesty, fairness, accountability, equality, pursuit of truth and respect seem to be hard to come by though declared by many universities (e.g., We can refer to AAU, Bahir Dar, Gonder, Jimma, Hawassa, and Woliyita universities codes and legislations).

This researcher, in agreement with a few others, is convinced that the AD is highly related to systemic corruption, and one is a contributor to the other. The lessons that parents, officials, and society instill in children from an early age, that hard work, competence, and academic achievements are not the paths to success, affect students' behavior. Social learning theory tells us that the acquisition of new behaviors occurs through direct experience involving trial and error and selecting effective responses (Bandura, 1977, 1986). Human beings get/learn most of their thoughts and behaviors by observing the actions of others, who serve as models. This means that we learn most behavior by observation of the responses of others (parents, teachers, peers, officials, etc.), particularly if they are rewarding. Hence, some corrupt behaviors in general and academically dishonest behaviors such as cheating can easily be explained that the classroom and the school atmosphere affect, and what others do are imitated. Some arguments point out that 'corrupt actions are typically habitual', meaning that corruption of persons and



institutions usually require a pattern of corrupt actions (SEP 2011: 16). Hence, we can argue that systemic corruption has a direct effect on AD in schools, and dishonest behaviors and cheating environments in schools and colleges have some effect on society.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

Though some of the strategies or actions to take are indicated or implied in the Findings and the Discussion sections above, a few conclusions and recommendations are forwarded below (at systemic/societal and education sector levels).

#### ***Concerning Corruption at the Systemic Level***

Various international and regional organizations, such as World Bank, UNDP, TI, Afrobarometer, and academics have developed reliable and valid tools to measure the types and levels of corruption in various sectors. Both objective and subjective indicators are often used. The most common approach is a hybrid where perceptions and experiences are assessed in cultural contexts. The findings alert the public and the government that preventive and remedial measures should be implemented. The NCPS adapted several well-known tools to gather data from seven major socio-economic sectors in Ethiopia.

We can conclude that all sectors, including faith-based and professional associations, had some corruption experiences, the public sector being the main corrupt sector. Over 90% of the participants identified those 25 corruption crimes listed in the Ethiopian Government's Corruption Crimes Proclamation (881/2015). This leaves no room for claims of ignorance or lack of awareness or knowledge.

Greed and desire to get more, ambitions to be rich quickly, lack of ethics and morals were indicated as the major causes of corruption. In the list of grave challenges that Ethiopia is facing, corruption is rated as the third one (by 76% of the participants), with inflation and unemployment taking the major problems' spots. The most corrupt sectors include municipalities, land administration, revenue/tax collection offices, and transport bureaus.

It is recommended that citizens be provided with safe channels to report any incidence or suspicion of corruption or other malpractices regarding all organizations.

Serious commitment of top leadership in Ethiopia in all sectors is required to curb the devastating effects of corruption in Ethiopia. High level integrity, meaning being trustworthy, honest, true to oneself, accountable, leading by example, and with clear principles (values and beliefs) is expected of leaders at all levels, but most importantly at top levels. Lower tiers of government will be effective only when they have access to the necessary human and financial resources to undertake the services they have been conferred. Thus, there is a dire need for assessing, improving, and accommodating varying degrees of local capacity so that such local

governments will plan, finance, and manage their responsibilities. Otherwise, lack of capacity' excuses may hamper sound utilization of public resources and nurture corruption.

There should be clear and objective requirements for awarding government contracts. These requirements may include (but not limited to): creating a system with clear procedures and award criteria; notifying the transparency requirements to all parties; recording procurement proceedings; disclosing information to interested parties including the publication of the award, the name and address of the bidders, and the amount of the bid; ensuring that there is no discrimination against bidders of any kind; and mandating a formal system for challenging bids.

The most frequently cited reason for refraining from reporting corrupt acts was fear of potential harassment and reprisals. Lack of knowledge as to where to report acts of corruption (lack of awareness of available reporting mechanisms) also emerged as a crucial factor for the reluctance by household respondents in the NCPS. Moreover, policymakers need to assess what already exists and identify any weaknesses or gaps in the national and sectoral systems. The law should enable authorities to use preventive protective measures, such as the granting of confidentiality to prevent reprisals from occurring in the first place. A comprehensive review of existing reporting mechanisms will also help determine how they can be improved.

Also, the importance of corruption reporting by the media as well as the impact of new technology on the ways and means people can employ to communicate information about corruption, need to be considered. Furthermore, merit-based recruitment and promotion policies; the tenure of employment to protect the independence of public servants from undue political influence; transparent pay packages and internal controls; and integrity management systems, including the implementation of codes of ethics, ethics training, and whistle-blowing mechanisms, should be promoted to prevent corrupt practices in HR management.

In addition, serious efforts should be made by the Ministry of Education and FEACC towards adequate and better civic education (also raising awareness on the ugly faces of corruption) with regards to the development of ethical and highly conscientious citizens who respect rights, perform their duties diligently, and stay far away from corruption. This researcher also thinks that the media and civic organizations can play important and productive roles in this regard.

Moreover, there needs to exist clear and legally binding collaboration between the major stakeholders such as FEACC, Police, Courts, and the Attorney General at various levels and specific issues. All parties, particularly the Government and the FEACC, work on prevention mechanisms, monitoring, clear systems of operation, including digitalization of various operations, the rule of law, accountability, and transparency.

***Concerning Academic Dishonesty***

Academic dishonesty, which is unethical, illegal, immoral, and in violation of schools, colleges and universities' regulations, is highly prevalent in the Ethiopian education sector. Many students (20 to 80%) in high schools and colleges have admitted that they have cheated in the past year or two on exams and assignments. The studies reviewed indicated that cheating has increased in the past several years. Wide tolerance (by teachers and the school administration) of cheating and other dishonest behaviors prevail in schools and higher education institutions.

It is argued that systemic corruption and education sector cheating are related, and one influences the other, terribly affecting the quality of education and the competence level of graduates (workforce). Cheating tends to reduce the level of student learning and threatens the quality of education.

The major contributing factors to AD are performance anxiety, peer pressure, laxity of the environment for cheating, self-justification habits, pressure to please parents, stiff competition, lack of self-confidence, poor studying habits, fear of failure and its consequences, lack of serious measures/ punishment when/if caught, and the lack of clear code of conduct.

It is recommended that AI documents should be drafted/revised, deliberated on, approved, publicized, and implemented in all schools, colleges, and universities of the country. The cooperation of teachers, students, the administration, parents, and the community is mandatory if this evil of AD is to be wiped out from the sector and the society at large in the next few years.

An embedded culture of AI, supported by a trusting and fair atmosphere, but with severe punishment for breach, is highly recommended if the situation is to improve. This would involve clear codes of conduct (honor code, integrity code, or rules and regulations) regarding acceptable and unacceptable behavior, with serious monitoring of the implementation by the administration, instructors, and the students themselves.

Civics and ethics education with the relevant contents and modes of facilitation, a well-structured code of conduct, participation of parents on matters of student discipline, schools/colleges administration reflecting the habit of zero tolerance for AD, and teachers being role models would contribute to the reduction of cheating.

All loopholes, such as not being aware of the code of conduct, lack of understanding of the consequences of AD, others are also cheating, too difficult examination, small classes without adequate distance between students, and the claim of shortage of time, should be closed/addressed.

***Limitations of the Study***

This study has some limitations. It only describes the perceived and experienced (also observed) types and causes of corruption and AD. More rigorous statistical analysis might shed more light.

The NCPS data is about three years old, and with the fast-changing political, social, and economic situation of Ethiopia, some of the figures might be higher or lower as of today (early 2024). Also, the usage/analysis of older and secondary data/publications might enrich the findings and conclusions of the AD.

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