

# Practices of Honesty and Dishonesty: Implications of Academic Life of Students

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this study was to investigate the practices of honesty and dishonesty and its implications on the academic life of Assin Manso Senior High School students (AMASS) in the Central Region of Ghana. A qualitative method was used in this study. A case study research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study comprised students from Assin Manso senior high school in the Central Region of Ghana. Purposive sampling technique was employed to select fifty-two (52) respondents for this study. The forty (40) respondents consisted of all Students Representative Councils (SRC) members in the school. Each class has a representation in the study. Twelve (12) teachers selected for the study constitute the members of the disciplinary committee in the school. The main instrument for data collection were unstructured interview guide and observation checklist. Data analysed and interpreted based on the themes related to the research questions. The study indicated that honesty is not only about truthfulness rather it entails sincerity, discipline, trustworthiness, frankness, authenticity, integrity, candour, probity, rectitude, incorruptibility and scrupulousness just to mention a few. The study also revealed that, some students were found not to be honest (cheating in examination, leaving school without exeat, covering up for wrongdoing, not obeying schools' rules and regulations and so on) even though teachers do their best to instil moral values in them and this is due to the fact that the students have little knowledge about the importance and benefits of honesty to them, society, family, school, community and the country at large. Moreover, the study indicated that some of the students were aware of the harmful effects that dishonesty could have on all aspects of their lives. It is recommended that, Students who leave school without exeat or permission should be punished in order to deter others from doing same or to be made as a day student. Students who condone and connive a wrongdoing in the school should be punished. It is also recommended that to prevent students from cheating in an examination closed-circuit television (CCTV) should be fixed in the entire examination hall. Students who cheat in an examination should be punished by the examination committee.

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## 1. Introduction

Honest deserving honour, and honour is due to excellence, or virtue: strictly speaking, honesty refers to the same thing as virtue [1]. In a slightly narrower definition, honesty is defined as the virtue of refusing to falsify true truths in our interactions with others. This viewpoint raises several concerns, such as whether honesty is compatible with white falsehoods, or whether the virtue of honesty obligates us to share all of our most intimate thoughts and feelings with those we love. The importance of honesty for the disposition

and practice of truth-telling is another reason why philosophers regard it as a value. There is no such thing as ultimate truth or honesty. Honesty may not even be a virtue in other instances. Telling the truth in order to manipulate or damage others, for example, cannot be considered an honourable deed. The objectives of our actions, according to Aristotle, specify them in moral terms; some authors, on the other hand, base the appropriateness of telling the truth on the consequence that will result from doing so [1].

However, a researcher argues that if every act of revealing the truth is deemed honourable, then cruel behaviour and irresponsible criticism can be tolerated: the pure absolutist position would be that one still ought to disclose if there is anything to tell. The consequentialist would argue that telling the truth is pointless because nothing good can come of it [1]. A researcher concludes that if both of us were totally honest, there could not possibly be any relationship at all, if for no other reason than that we would continually bore or offend each other beyond the limits of endurance in response to any moral decision that does not take into account elements other than the moral law [1]. Furthermore, telling the truth is linked to reality and our ability to relate to it. Saying something that isn't true not only shows a lack of respect for others, whom we subsequently exploit for our own gain, but it also shows that we give reality less ontological weight than it deserves. The nature of facts and language is twisted by the interests of whoever falsifies reality through the transmitted word [1]. Also, when correctly understood, honesty begins with oneself. Self-awareness and the ability to analyse one's own behaviour are signs of someone who wants to be honest with himself or herself. The three trademarks of an honest person are clarity on limits, in what is sought, and avoiding self-complacency and self-deception.

Every human being begins to develop his or her character in the family, and the manner in which he or she conducts himself or herself throughout his or her life is largely dictated by the character foundations instilled in him or her throughout childhood. In Ghanaian society, children are encouraged to perform well and exhibit positive behaviour and are reprimanded or scolded when they do anything wrong. For instance, children are disciplined when they tell lies, steal, refuse to complete errands for their parents, or attempt to cheat in any way [2]. On the other hand, positive behaviour is routinely rewarded. For instance, there is a proverb that "if you conduct errands with joy, you eat what brings you contentment." That is, a youngster who does not appear unhappy when an errand is sent, or who always completes an errand cheerfully and without complaint, is periodically given something special to eat upon return from an errand. This is a strategy to promote a lack of laziness, honesty, and an entrepreneurial attitude in general [2]. Students' adoption of certain values is a powerful predictor of achievement motivation because values presented students with explicit reasons for pursuing their goals. Students that are instilled with the values of desire, hard effort, aspiration, courage, determination, respect, encouragement, and honesty can soar high in their endeavours [3]. This implies that if honesty is not properly soared in its contest it will bleed dishonesty.

Any conduct that "connotes a desire to deceive" and an absence of integrity; a disposition to cheat, deceive, or defraud has been defined as dishonesty [4]. It is more of a recurring character trait than an isolated act. Dishonesty can also be defined as behaviour that involves deception or concealment that violates a formal or informal social contract for selfish purposes. Dishonesty can be defined as lying, cheating, or stealing in everyday language. Dishonesty or deception, on the other hand, can be easily regarded as the polar opposite of honesty. Dishonesty, according to some authors, is described as engaging in activities, attitudes, and behaviours that ostensibly suffocate truth and sincerity [4]. Dishonesty implies an intention to commit a wrongdoing, and the intent could be to obtain financial benefit (other than benefits earned in the normal course of employment) (a) for the employee or (b) for any other person or organization intended by the employee to receive such benefit [5]. This may appear straightforward, but "the fundamental question

is really: what intent is required, the purpose to commit the crime or the intent to do something wrong?" This is a contentious issue, and I believe that the intent to do something unlawful, as well as the intention to do the act, is both crucial in terms of dishonesty. And they are inextricably linked. It is not unusual to define dishonesty by a lack of honesty. A study noted that defining the positive pole of the Honesty factor (e.g. honest, fair, and trustworthy) suggest a reluctance to exploit others, whereas the terms defining the negative pole of the factor (e.g. sly, greedy, and haughty) suggest an inclination or willingness to exploit others [6].

More dishonest activities were uncovered, why it's difficult to define dishonesty. Researchers have included numerous sorts of behaviour in definitions of the construct dishonesty that are not clear-cut lies, they said. Cheating, stealing, and shirking are examples of these other types of behaviour. Because of the wide range of these behaviours, establishing a precise set of required and sufficient requirements for defining dishonesty has been challenging. As a result, scholars have proposed that the multidimensional notion of organizational dishonesty [7].

Dishonesty occurs when a responsible person deliberately and knowingly breaks some convention of the transfer of knowledge or property, possibly harming a valued being, they said [7]. Honesty and dishonesty, on the other hand, may appear to be diametrically opposed or polar by nature, but they are in fact linked. There are grey regions between perfectly honest and true communication and clear deception [7]. A research remarked that one can progress from honesty to dishonesty in these areas in modest steps at a time [8]. Basically, people label actions as dishonest if they have some or all of the components of a prototypical lie or come close to having those components. People make gradient judgments about what belongs in the lying group, according to us. When behaviours closely resemble the prototype, they definitely fall into the category of dishonesty; however, when they diverge from the pattern, they become "kind of" or "a little" dishonest. The prototypical lie is an untruthful remark or utterance that is made with the goal of deceiving (however inadvertently). When a student, for example, pretends to be ill to avoid punishment [7, 8].

Dishonesty might take the form of omission, rather than outright lying [9]. As UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon has proved, confronting the truth in its entirety without exception can take enormous fortitude. Ban met with China's president, Hu Jintao, in Beijing in the early months of November 2010. Climate change, Korean Peninsula tensions, and peacekeeping were among the topics he covered. However, the New York Times editor pointed out that —he was woefully silent on one key issue: China's abysmal human rights record and the unfair detention of Liu Xiaobo, the country's top democracy champion and... laureate of the 2010 Nobel Peace Prize [9]. Ban has a lot of responsibilities, but one of them is to speak truth to power, which he failed to do in Beijing. Another work has interrogated students about their views on honesty and how it relates to their behaviour in academic life and how that can be solved. Still other studies have focus on developed policy documents and educational intervention in the areas of honest behaviour [10-12] However, few of these studies are specific to Ghanaian adolescent who forms the population in Senior High School (S.H.S). For example, while there are news items from the media and anecdotal information about dishonesty among students in the form of lying, cheating in examination and impersonation, distortion of information and petty stealing from each other? There is no data on the nature and the level of dishonesty among Ghanaian students. There is no monetary value attached to honesty. In light of the aforementioned problems, the purpose of this study was to investigate the practices of honesty and dishonesty and its implications on the academic life of Assin Manso Senior High School students (AMASS). The study sought to answer these research questions – (1) How much of student thinking about honesty is represented in their behaviour? (2) How do students practise honesty in and out of school? (3) What are some implications of dishonesty in students' academic life?

## 2. Materials and Methods

A qualitative method was used in this study. A case study research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study comprised students from Assin Manso senior high school in the Central Region of Ghana. Purposive sampling technique was employed to select fifty-two (52) respondents for this study. The forty (40) respondents consisted of all Students Representative Councils (SRC) members in the school. Each class has a representation in the study. Twelve (12) teachers selected for the study constitute the members of the disciplinary committee in the school. The main instrument for data collection were unstructured interview guide and observation checklist. The data for the study were gathered and collected from secondary or documented sources and primary data from the field. Secondary data were gathered from sources such as newspapers journals, theses, the District Assembly as well as other publications that were sourced from libraries, institutions and the internet. Primary or field data were collected through the administration of unstructured interview guide and observation checklist in the school. The data collection was done using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). The qualitative data was analysed by the use of the interpretative technique based on the themes arrived at during the interview and observation. The themes were related to the research questions.

### 3.1. Results and discussion

#### *3.1. Exploring how the thinking of Students about Honesty is Reflected in their Behaviour*

According to the study's findings, students' perceptions of living an honest life are critical for acceptance within their school community and beyond society. This demonstrates that students value morality when it comes to living an honest life. According to one student, *"Morality is a collection of socially acceptable behaviours, and I tell the truth of my own volition because people know I always do."* Another student stated, *Telling the truth helps you feel free"*. This statement demonstrates that morality, as the socially accepted way of living, plays a significant influence in students' decision to live honest lives.

Another student stated, *"Preaching in church about the evils of lying and my mother's attitude have kept me from lying. And, in addition to a segment of society, my family members have an influence on me"*. The virtues of one's family members (mother and father) and the decent people in society have an impact on one's life. Morality plays a significant impact in how students perceive the concept of honesty, from the teacher's standpoint. According to one teacher, *"Someone who is transparent and forthright in all of his or her actions. And that he or she maintains an open relationship with everyone"*. This demonstrates that society values individuals who are forthright and trustworthy.

This argument also verifies the data that students' pursuit of an honest life is influenced by their morals. Numerous scholars have documented the importance of morality in the quest of honesty. Moral reasoning serves as a bridge between thinking and doing, inhibiting or promoting certain behaviours, depending on whether they are pro-social or transgresses [13].

Although both teachers and students agree on the critical role of societal morality in encouraging pupils to be honest, there are indicators that students' degree of honesty is low and that the majority of students do not demonstrate honesty. According to one teacher,

*"The overwhelming majority of students at AMASS are dishonest, as evidenced by their performance on examinations. Exams are frequently written in the style of assignments. Certain students disregard basic norms and regulations; even students who are to obey teachers in order to be led become a problem"*.

This demonstrates a lack of integrity on the part of AMASS students. These low moral standards may result in unethical behaviour, which may have a negative impact on them.

### 3.2. How do Students Practise Honesty in School?

The researcher was interested in seeing how pupils practiced honesty both in and out of school. According to the study's findings, the majority of students are upstanding when it comes to following school rules and regulations. *"I follow school rules and regulations because I arrive early when school reopens, one of the student stated. I make an effort to speak English on campus because it is one of the school's rules. I also assist with basic school housekeeping and always dress appropriately for school"*.

In addition, the study's findings reveal that not all students can honestly adhere to the school's norms and regulations. This means that a situation may arise in which a student violates school rules and regulations by failing to attend classes on a consistent basis, failing to attend social functions, and so forth.

According to one student, *"I follow school norms and regulations, and one of them states that students should always speak English in class and in the dormitory," yet "at times, my buddies influence me to speak vernacular in class and in the dormitory"*.

Again, one student stated, *I do not always attend school social gatherings"*. This suggests that a student's failure to attend school events is almost always the effect of peer pressure. He or she may have noticed that some pupils have been refusing to attend school events on a consistent basis and that nothing has been done about it for some time.

Further, students' perceptions of honesty differ from those of the outside world. To the pupils, honesty entails being loyal to one's buddy, standing by one another regardless of the repercussions, and safeguarding one another. Students perceive honesty as a sense of we feeling or togetherness, and will go to great lengths to defend a colleague who has acted improperly. According to the study's findings, some students perceive honesty as being loyal to a buddy, covering up for one another, and rallying around one another as well. When a student is able to do this, it indicates that the student is honest, while behaving contrary to this indicates that the student is dishonest. *"If I witness a colleague cheating on a test, I will not report him or her to the invigilator, one of the students stated. Once he or she is through coping, I will request and copy the identical material"*.

Another student stated, *"When a student engages in inappropriate behaviour in class, I will not single him or her out for punishment; rather, the entire class should bear the brunt of the penalty"*. This demonstrates that students regard the act of covering or rallying around one another as being honest.

Besides, one student stated,

*"if I detect a friend cheating on an examination, I will not point him or her out; however, after the examination, I will approach him or her and inform him or her that what he or she did was cheating or bad and that he or she should stop. I believe in not subjecting students to punitive measures"*.

However, the concept that students' understanding of honesty is to defend one another, to be loyal, and to safeguard a colleague from punishment is not always true. According to the study's findings, some students believe they will always tell the truth when their classmates misbehave in class or cheat on an examination; and they are not willing to bear another's burden when it comes to punishment, believing that the soul that sins will perish (individual should be responsible for his or her action).

*"If a colleague misbehaves in class and the class is asked to report the offender," a student stated. For my part, I will not call attention to him or her, but rather will approach him or her and raise his or her hand. Similarly, if I witness someone stealing in the dormitory, I will call attention to that individual"*.

*"I will point out a student who misbehaves in class because one should not misbehave in class," another student stated. For instance, as the class prefect, I am required to report any of my classmates who are misbehaving in class to our class instructor or teacher. At one point, a student misbehaved, and I reported that student. Some of my colleagues believed I did the right thing, while others said I did the wrong thing. However, I was certain that I had done the correct thing".*

This demonstrates that not all students condone their colleagues' poor behaviour and that some students are willing to report those who misbehave to the relevant authorities for suitable punishment. In contrast to the preceding, there are instances where a student is truthful in one context but dishonest in another. Honest because he or she believes that cheating during an examination is wrong and, as such, will denounce a colleague who cheats during an examination. Acting dishonestly occurs when the same student conceals a student who requires reprimand for his or her classroom behaviour. Thus, in one case, the student reports, while in another, the student conceals or protects a colleague from punishment.

According to the study's findings, a student may be honest in one scenario but dishonest in another.

*"If I discover that a colleague is cheating during an examination, I will tell him or her to stop or I will report him or her to the invigilator; even during the West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE), I will tell him or her to stop cheating, but I will find it difficult to point out a student who misbehaves in class for punishment by the teacher, so the teacher should punish".*

This demonstrates that the student will be honest in one setting by reporting a wrongdoing but will act dishonestly in another scenario by demonstrating a sense of solidarity for a wrongdoing. This statistic corroborates the idea of specificity, which asserted that humans may be honest in one setting but dishonest in another, and that individuals would react according to the way they had learnt to act in that situation.

Without exception or permission, an honest student will not quit school, regardless of the circumstances, and a student who does so at his or her own risk. Issuing exeat to students allows for the regulation of their movement within the school and also allows for the tracking of students who leave the school with exeat. Also, it assists in keeping track of students' movements.

According to the study's findings, some students drop out of school regardless of their circumstances. According to a student, *"if my housemistress refuses to sign an exeat for me in the event of an emergency, I shall violate my restrictions and return home."* Similarly, another student stated, *"If my housemistress refuses to sign an exeat on my behalf, I will violate my boundaries and leave."*

This information reveals that when it comes to exeat or granting permission to students, some are dishonest, as violating boundaries creates its own set of problems that can harm both the school and the student. Regardless of the circumstances, not all students are dishonest when it comes to signing of exeat. According to the study's findings, some students will not violate their bounds when their housemasters or mistresses deny them an exeat. *"If my housemaster refuses to sign an exeat for me, I will remain in school,"* a student stated. Similarly, another student stated, *"If my housemistress refuses to sign an exeat for me, I will not violate any rules except to remain in school".*

This data demonstrates the degree to which some students are truthful when it comes to signing an exeat or leaving school with permission.

The researchers were interested in determining how students use the virtue of honesty at home. According to the data, the majority of students were truthful at home because their parents instilled in them the importance of always being true. *"If I am dispatched*

*and there is change, I will deliver it to the individual; perhaps the person will inquire about the item's price, a student stated. Another student stated, "When I do anything wrong and my parents confront me about it, I will tell them the truth and then apologize."*

This demonstrates that the inculcation of morals in the home is described in a variety of ways, the majority of which emphasize the importance of the quality of the house's products and the sort of moral training provided in the family.

According to the study's findings, the majority of students would prefer report their sibling to their parents for discipline than shield them when they engaged in dishonest behaviour such as lying and stealing. *"I will discipline or counsel him or her because stealing is not an acceptable behaviour, a student stated. "If I am older than my sibling, I will inform our parents". "I will denounce him or her to our parents," another student stated, "because I am incapable of disciplining my siblings". Further, a student stated, "If I notice one of my siblings stealing in the house, I will denounce him or her because if I do not, he or she may come in with a pistol and rob us, or he or she may throw the thief outside and be beaten to death".*

This reflects the moral education the parent has instilled in their children to always be truthful, and there is an adage that charity begins at home. The findings of this study was supported by earlier research that parents and educators, should all advocate the teaching of moral values in our schools to instill in students the benefits that honest brings to them, the school, the family, community and the country as a whole [14].

### **3.3. Some Implications of Dishonesty in the Academic life of Students**

The researchers aimed to study some of the consequences of academic dishonesty. The data reveal that the majority of students were not honest, despite teachers' best efforts to instil morality in them. *"Honesty among students is far away from them because they cannot be trusted when it comes to honesty, but there are a few who are on the average when it comes to honesty," a teacher observed. Because there are numerous theft cases pending at AMASS".*

The high level of dishonesty among pupils had a number of negative consequences on the students' behaviour. For examinations, it is worse since some students bring foreign materials to the tests room or hall and conceal them in a vital and sensitive area, particularly the girls, which is uncalled for, and so students cannot be trusted at all during examinations. The information above corroborates evidence provided by several students regarding examination cheating. Students commit examination malpractices as a result of their low morale in terms of honesty. Another teacher holds a similar opinion, stating:

*"During a class test or examination, you will notice a large number of students cheating, copying from books, and entering the exam hall with foreign materials. At one point, I even discovered a spot where I had to detain some students who were in possession of foreign materials. Even in co-curricular activities, they demonstrate dishonesty rather than the virtue of honesty. For instance, some falter during athletic competitions, others avoid grounds work, and you will even hear house masters and mistresses complain".*

This finding reaffirms the earlier finding that low morality drove students to engage in a variety of bad behaviours. The data indicates that some students lied to teachers when identifying a student who misbehaved or mentioning the name of a student who fled. This is frequently the case when students are grouped together. They will not provide you with the identities of students who fled and, if you are lucky, will provide you with fictitious names. Likewise, it is noted that some of the students lied to their parents in order to collect money under the school's name. The researcher observed a case involving a final year student who deceived his parents by collecting 50 Ghana cedis in order to purchase a clearance form; however, when the student's father called the housemaster to confirm,

it was discovered that the student required money for other purposes and no clearance form was sold for that amount. Again, it was noted that a female student in form one lied to a teacher when she was requested to produce her timetable. She informed the teacher that she would bring it, and the teacher waited patiently for her as well, but it turned out that she lied to the teacher when challenged later.

Moreover, it was reported that a form one student stepped out to visit a colleague without permission. When the security guard asked him or her if he or she was a boarder or a day student on his or her way back to campus, he or she replied, "he or she is a day student but is actually a boarder." I discovered he or she is a boarder from his classmates. This implies that he or she lied to the security guard in order to evade punishment. Students' perspectives differ significantly from teachers' perspectives on the impact of dishonesty on students' academic lives. Besides, it appears that a sizable proportion of respondents grasped the definition of dishonesty.

According to a student, *"dishonesty is the act of engaging in improper behaviour such as breaking rules and regulations, cheating on an examination, and engaging in activities that are highly prohibited"*. According to another student, *"dishonesty refers to not being truthful to oneself or telling lies in order to gain someone's trust"*.

Similarly, a student stated, *"dishonesty simply refers to someone who is not truthful"*. This demonstrates that dishonesty is a terrible moral behaviour that renders one untrustworthy and undermines one's social standing. The preceding findings are compatible with Wilkinson's (2012) study, which indicates that dishonesty is defined as the act of lying, cheating, or stealing, and that dishonesty may be thought of as the polar opposite of honesty.

In terms of the consequences of dishonesty on students, the study information indicate that a sizeable proportion of students believe that dishonest behaviour results in embarrassment, rejection by society, and loss of friends. The dishonest individual will also have difficulty establishing relationships with his or her friends and acquaintances. According to a student, *"it may result in the loss of friends and social rejection"*. Another student stated, *"It adds embarrassment to the dishonest student, and a dishonest student may find it difficult to connect with his or her peers"*.

According to another student, *"a dishonest student becomes socially and emotionally unstable, which can have a negative effect on the student's academic performance and can result in a loss of concentration in class. This suggests that being dishonest has a significant negative impact on the individual. Thus, one must always strive to be truthful in order to earn society's love. Students' dishonesty has ramifications for their academic lives. According to the study's findings, the majority of students believe that being dishonest will have a negative impact on their academic success. Another student noted, "a dishonest student is likely to be suspended from school for violating school rules and regulations, which will have an effect on his or her academic performance."*

Another student stated:

*"When a student cheats on an examination, the student may be penalised or his or her examinations may be annulled, which will have an effect on the student in the future. In addition, tardiness in class may result in poor academic achievement, for which a student may be removed. A dishonest student will not be loved by his or her teachers and will not receive assistance with his or her studies"*.

Furthermore, a student stated:

*"it can result in school dropout as a result of acute stigmatization. Also, such a student will not be voted as a prefect at his or her school, and it may become difficult for*

*him or her to achieve in life. Cheating on an examination might result in the suspension or cancellation of all subsequent exams, which can have an emotional and psychological impact on the student”.*

This demonstrates that dishonesty has a detrimental effect on both the student and society. Thus, students should be taught about the harm that academic dishonesty can do to their academic careers, both now and in the future.

#### 4. Conclusions and Recommendations

The study indicated that honesty is not only about truthfulness rather it entails sincerity, discipline, trustworthiness, frankness, authenticity, integrity, candour, probity, rectitude, incorruptibility and scrupulousness just to mention a few. The study also revealed that, some students were found not to be honest (cheating in examination, leaving school without exeat, covering up for wrongdoing, not obeying schools’ rules and regulations and so on) even though teachers do their best to instil moral values in them and this is due to the fact that the students have little knowledge about the importance and benefits of honesty to them, society, family, school, community and the country at large. Moreover, the study indicated that some of the students were aware of the harmful effects that dishonesty could have on all aspects of their lives: ranging from suspension from school, cancellation of examination papers, loss of friends, dropping out of school, rejection by peers, and loss of goodwill and so on. This effect can lead to emotional and psychological imbalance on the student’s which can result in other serious maladies.

It is recommended that, Students who leave school without exeat or permission should be punished in order to deter others from doing same or to be made as a day student. Students who condone and connive a wrongdoing in the school should be punished. It is also recommended that to prevent students from cheating in an examination closed-circuit television (CCTV) should be fixed in the entire examination hall. Students who cheat in an examination should be punished by the examination committee. It is once again recommended that, teachers should encourage the students to report any dishonest act in the school to their form masters or mistresses, housemasters or mistresses or to any trusted teacher in the school.

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