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FROM ORIGINALITY TO INTEGRITY: CONFRONTING ACADEMIC DISHONESTY IN CREATIVE ARTS EDUCATION-PEDAGOGICAL INSIGHTS AND REFLECTIONS FROM THE COLLEGE OF ART, KNUST

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Abstract

Academic integrity in creative arts education remains an underexplored domain, particularly concerning contract cheating in applied arts, where traditional assessment frameworks prioritise textual knowledge over experiential, process-driven artistic practice. This study critically examines the epistemological bias inherent in institutional integrity policies, which often fail to account for the complexities of non-text-based disciplines, which poses significant challenges to authenticity and ethical practice in artistic disciplines. Drawing on their expertise as art educators, the researchers employ an art-based phenomenological approach within a hybridised descriptive-interpretive paradigm to examine academic disengagement in applied arts education, with specific attention to contract cheating. Findings reveal that cheating behaviours among creative arts students are shaped by a generational shift from valuing self to prioritising a performance-oriented self, a lack of authentic self-expression and the unethical use of technology in educational contexts. Findings further reveal a disconnect between institutional policies and the lived realities of artistic education, exacerbated by broad, text-centric definitions of misconduct. This study highlights the critical gap in academic integrity research, where discussions on contract cheating predominantly focus on conventional text-based disciplines, overlooking the complexities inherent in creative arts education.This paper advocates for a discipline-sensitive, pedagogically responsive, and institutionally adaptive approach to academic integrity, promoting assessment methodologies that align with the experiential and creative processes central to artistic scholarship.

Keywords: integrity, creative arts assessment, visual plagiarism, creativity, authorial identity

1. Introduction

Creative arts education, particularly in the applied arts, has long been associated with the ideals of originality, creativity, and innovation. Gifted and talented students in art schools are expected to explore and express individual and collective identities through imaginative, self-directed work. However, within the structures of tertiary education, creative arts often encounter epistemological bias—one that privileges theoretical, text-based knowledge over embodied, process-driven, and experiential learning. This mismatch in knowledge validation often marginalises non-textual disciplines, where conventional assessment methods such as essays and examinations inadequately reflect the complex, iterative nature of artistic creation and critique.

Academic dishonesty, though traditionally associated with plagiarism and cheating in written assignments, is becoming an increasing concern in non-textual disciplines such as the creative arts. Unfortunately, the discourse on academic integrity has been largely shaped by norms from text-heavy disciplines, with less consideration given to the practical, studio-based contexts of creative education. This paper explores academic integrity within applied arts, specifically focusing on the growing phenomenon of contract cheating—where students outsource their creative projects to others and falsely claim authorship. The discussion critically examines how traditional evaluative frameworks and institutional integrity policies may inadvertently contribute to disengagement, unethical practices, and a diminishing sense of artistic ownership.

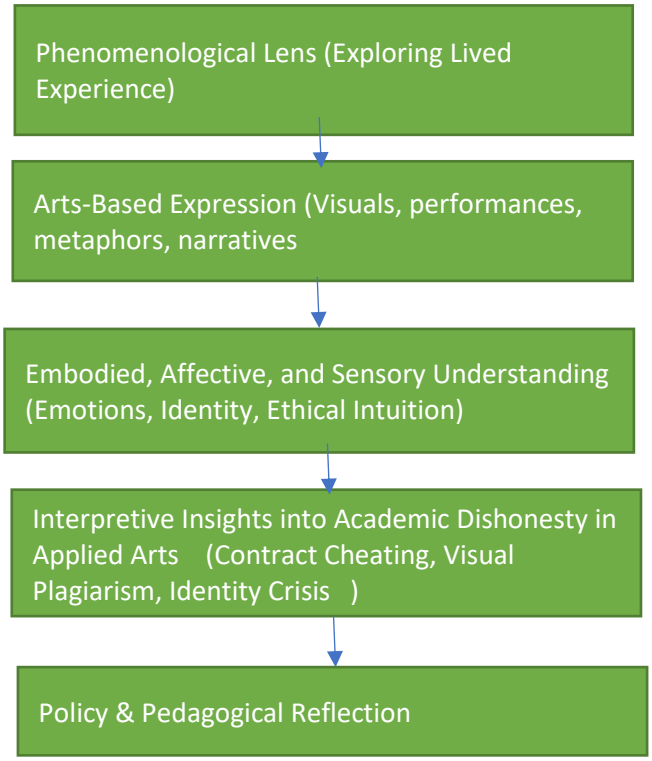
Artistic practice is not created in a vacuum. It evolves within an ecosystem of shared traditions, mentorship, collaboration, and adaptation (TEQSA, 2022). These dynamics, while fostering innovation, also blur the boundaries of originality, posing challenges to conventional definitions of academic honesty. Academic integrity policies are designed to uphold ethical conduct across higher education. However, their broad, standardised formulations often fail to account for the nuanced realities of studio practice, critique sessions, collaborative installations, and other forms of experiential learning that define applied arts education.

In the Ghanaian tertiary context, these challenges are further compounded by widespread unethical academic practices, often fuelled by systemic pressures, limited institutional oversight, and a lack of discipline-specific ethical guidelines. As a result, creative arts educators, administrators, and students find themselves navigating a policy environment that does not fully reflect or support their pedagogical realities. This paper acknowledges the ongoing debates and contested definitions of academic integrity in the creative arts. It seeks to synthesise existing scholarship while drawing on pedagogical experiences from the College of Art to examine the lived experiences of educators confronting academic dishonesty in applied arts. In doing so, the paper raises a critical research question: In what way can institutional academic policy help curb academic dishonesty among gifted and creative arts students while aligning with the ethos of artistic practice? The discussion is guided by a conceptual framework developed from literature and reflection, aiming to inform policy and pedagogical strategies that are responsive to the specific needs of the creative arts discipline.

2. Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in an arts-based phenomenological theoretical framework, which integrates phenomenological inquiry with artistic expression as a means of accessing and interpreting lived experience. According to Barone and Eisner (2012), "arts-based research is an effort to extend beyond the limiting constraints of discursive communication to express meanings that otherwise would be ineffable" (p. 1). This is particularly relevant for applied arts education, where meaning is often constructed through non-verbal, process-oriented creative work. Phenomenology, as a research approach, focuses on the essence of experience as it is lived and perceived by individuals. When combined with arts-based methods, it enables researchers to capture the embodied, emotional, and aesthetic dimensions of these experiences—dimensions often overlooked in traditional text-based research paradigms (Gupta, 2020; Krantz, 2016). Arts-based phenomenology allows for insights that

are both specific and universal, implicit and explicit, and deeply felt and intellectually grasped as illustrated below:



The phenomenological lens begins with participants' lived experiences — their perceptions, feelings, and ethical challenges are explored. The Arts-Based Expression indicates that the experiences are explored not only through interviews or narratives but also through art — sketches, design metaphors, reflective journals, or imagery. This adds depth and emotional resonance. For the embodied and sensory understanding, the arts-based methods allow for the exploration of tacit, affective knowledge (e.g., creative burnout, fear of failure, disconnection from artistic voice, etc.). Through interpretive insights, the research reveals nuanced forms of academic dishonesty (e.g., visual plagiarism, mimicry, performance anxiety-driven outsourcing) while the insights inform a responsive institutional framework that recognises the unique ethical landscape of creative arts education through the policy and pedagogical reflection.

In the context of this study, the framework supports the exploration of academic disengagement, identity formation, and ethical decision-making among creative arts students. It provides the tools to understand how these students navigate institutional expectations, creative pressures, and moral dilemmas. Through reflective accounts, creative analogies, and thematic interpretation, this approach enables a deeper appreciation of how academic dishonesty emerges in studio-based disciplines, not just as rule-breaking, but as a response to misaligned pedagogical and institutional structures.

Thus, this theoretical foundation does not only justify the methodological choices made but also aligns with the study's overarching goal: to provide a nuanced, discipline-sensitive understanding of academic integrity in the applied arts.

3. Related Literature

3.1 Academic Dishonesty in Tertiary Education

Tertiary education has been confronted with deleterious phenomena of student cheating behaviour globally, with creative arts students not excluded. The quest for knowledge has become transactional, not genuine. Although academic cheating is not new and not limited to some disciplines, its notoriety and its present-day sophistication and prevalence among students continue to be a source of

consternation for educators. Zachek (2020) observes that students' cheating behaviour has always been challenging for educators since the advent of formal education. Some scholars argue that the prevalence of academic dishonesty in tertiary institutions reflects broader societal trends, particularly the erosion of moral values and the commodification of knowledge. Others suggest it reflects the old's failure to imbue the youth with lifelong values of integrity, honesty, and responsibility. According to Bertram Gallant & Stephens (2020), cheating persists because it is natural and normal; first is the propensity to cheat (deceive or trick) despite our instinct to avoid unfairness, which was developed as a method for survival. They further argued that while cheating may be expected and natural. It is still" unethical and evitable (Bertram Gallant & Rettinger, 2022), and by implication, cheating can tear at the fabric of the entire enterprise of higher education (McCabe & Trevino, 1997; Butter, 2001; Farnese et al., 2011) by turning any university into a diploma mill, so it has never been more important to ensure that students graduate with an authentic education that prepares them for life as a whole human (Bertram Gallant & Rettinger, 2022). Within higher education, academic ethics and integrity constitute the bedrock of responsible conduct in teaching, learning, research, and the dissemination of knowledge (Poff, 2020). A well-defined academic integrity policy is the ethical foundation for any educational institution. It embodies the institution's values (Glover et al, 2025; Eaton et al., 2023; 2022a, b) and should not be neutral or agnostic. It also serves as the guiding principle for all stakeholders in a learning community (Bretag, 2013). Research indicates that learning communities, regarded as "repositories of knowledge," earn respect and recognition from society when their members adhere to fundamental values of academic integrity in scholarship. Therefore, any academic endeavour and behaviour lacking the quality of honesty, free from fraud or deception, legitimate and truthful, constitutes academic dishonesty. It is of grave concern when the act is aimed at deceiving the assessor by seeking credit for the work or efforts of another through misrepresentation of the work being evaluated and the student's actual knowledge or skills. Such conduct undermines academic integrity and creates an unfair advantage (Eaton, 2024) for the cheater by breaching established academic regulations. To that end, promoting ethical behaviour and tackling academic integrity violations is critical (Alajami, 2021).

3.2 Diversity of Knowledge

Educationists and researchers have seriously critiqued the narrow conceptualisation of literacy as the 'new supreme force' for decades (Gidley, 2001, p.1). She added, "The overvaluing of narrowly-defined 'textual literacy' (reading and writing text) compared with broader categories of human expression (social 'literacy', oral 'literacy', emotional 'literacy') reflects the material manifestation of narrowly defined conceptualisations of human intelligence." Despite a growing body of literature in the West advocating for multiple intelligences, cognitive holism, the importance of artistic education, and oral literacy, many African nations appear to have overlooked their contributions to the holistic development of talented youth. Instead, there is a fervent focus on pursuing STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) only as the pinnacle of education. Ironically, there is a growing trend towards interdisciplinary learning, where non-text-based disciplines are combined with STEM to create a more holistic educational experience. This policy orientation has relegated creative arts education to the 'back burner', resulting in institutional policies that often employ broad terms and assessment criteria that prioritise textual disciplines at the expense of non-textual disciplines. Such practices are detrimental to the advancement of creative arts education. To promote diverse knowledge, this paper advocates for equal recognition and support across all academic disciplines by eliminating the idea of a 'one-size-fits-all' approach and evaluating each discipline based on its own criteria and standards of professionalism.

3.3 Academic Integrity in Creative Arts

Applied arts as a discipline involves the conceptualisation and visualisation of ideas for aesthetic, functional, and ornamental purposes. This process requires a certain level of intellectual insight, approached through various lenses of integrity (Keith, 2024). She noted that different perspectives can be applied when evaluating the integrity of creative arts and media practices.

Existing literature underscores the conceptual and practical challenges in defining and detecting breaches of integrity in these disciplines, notwithstanding the documented occurrence of misconduct such as plagiarism, fabrication, contract cheating, and the emergent issue of AI-giarism within Colleges of Art (TEQSA, 2022). That said, the European Network for Academic Integrity (ENAI) (Tauginienė et al., 2018) adopts Jordan's definition of academic dishonesty:

> Morally culpable behaviours perpetrated by individuals or institutions that transgress ethical standards held in common between other individuals and/or groups in institutions of education, research, or scholarship. (p.252)

Similarly, the International Centre for Academic Integrity (ICAI) posits that "honesty forms the indispensable foundation of integrity and is a prerequisite for the full realisation of trust, fairness, respect, responsibility and courage" (ICAI, 2021, p. 7). Again, "without these values, the work of teachers, learners, and researchers loses value and credibility. Furthermore, the centre suggests that "when a society's institutions are infused with integrity, they create a stronger civic culture" (ICAI, 2021, p. 7). Ultimately, society expects graduates from these institutions to have appreciable levels of knowledge, skills, competencies, and good judgment.

Sadler (2012), as cited by Yorke and Vidovich (2016), defines learning standards as a "definite degree of academic achievement established by authority, custom, or consensus and used as a fixed reference point for reporting a student's level of attainment" (p.9). In other words, they are the demonstrable knowledge, skills and capabilities required from a graduate after pursuing a programme of study (Yorke & Vidovich, 2016) relevant to a wide range of groups, including government and non-governmental bodies, employers, and higher education providers. However, students' engagement in academic dishonesty leads to disengagement from the learning process and results in a de-skilling effect, impacting the student directly and society by extension. This troubling trend undermines the quality of education and research and diminishes public trust in academic institutions and their alumni. As a result, the integrity of higher education is in decline, putting the quality of education at a critical crossroads. In discussing visual plagiarism in higher education in Canada, Foxe et al. (2022) accentuate the challenges arising from the varying ethical, legal, professional, and academic standards across different disciplines. The authors differentiate between copyright infringement, a legal matter, and visual plagiarism, which pertains to academic integrity.

The creative arts operate within established traditions and interconnected networks of influence, which foster innovation and enrich creative practice (Shephard, 2015). Academic integrity policies are the guiding principles institutions employ to uphold ethical standards and value systems, serving as a canon for decisions and actions in scholarship and education (Gustilo et al., 2024). The collision of established artistic practices and institutional regulations causes unique challenges for academic integrity within the creative arts (Davis, 2023). To cultivate environments conducive to genuine learning and creativity, it is imperative to examine the theoretical, practical, and policy aspects of pedagogical ethics in relation to academic integrity dilemmas within creative arts education (Akbar & Picard, 2020; Gallant, 2007).

3.4 The Psychology and Creativity among Gifted and Talented Art Students

In creative art education, several behavioural objectives and learning outcomes are expected of learners by their lecturers, such as fostering creativity and original thinking (thinking freely), critical thinking and problem-solving skills, cultural awareness and application, visual literacy, innovations, and art history. Students in creative art schools are presumed to be gifted and talented individuals with unique mindsets. In scholarly literature, there is a plethora of studies addressing the emotional and academic needs of gifted students (Chessor, 2014; Robinson, 2006; Colangelo, Assouline, & Gross, 2004; Gottfried & Gottfried, 2004, 1996; Gross, 1995; Feldhusen, 1991), Abilock (2009), Tolan (1999), Dai, Moon, & Feldhusen (1998). However, these studies seldom engage with the unique psychological and

academic challenges faced by gifted learners in creative arts programmes, leaving a critical gap in discipline-specific scholarship on academic integrity.

According to Marhoon et al. (2018), the cognitive and social characteristics of gifted adults and children are similar but different from those of uncreative or ungifted persons. Again, literature provides a broad spectrum of what a gifted and talented student is. Artists, whether fashion designers, sculptors, painters, musicians, writers, or performers, are often celebrated for their unique ability to translate their inner worlds into tangible expressions of creativity. While talent and technical skill play vital roles in the artistic journey, one often underestimated factor in an artist's success is their mindset. Samara (2023) examines the relationship between psychology and creativity, emphasising the importance of mindset in fostering creative potential. The mindset of a talented artist is usually characterised by several key traits: creativity and open-mindedness, resilience and perseverance, passion and purpose, a flow state, emotional intelligence, and problem-solving skills that allow artists to solve problems innovatively. Visual culture is inherently complex, presenting challenges and contradictions (Ridgley et al., 2020) that demand critical examination. Throughout history, artists have drawn inspiration from existing masterpieces. Copying has long been recognised as a legitimate learning process aimed at acquiring knowledge rather than creating new meaning, and such memetic exercises remain relevant in art education today. However, it is important that imitated or copied works are not misrepresented as original creations without proper acknowledgement of the source. Recognising that the line between copying and drawing inspiration is frequently blurred in visual culture and image authorship endeavours is crucial in guiding creativity.

It is concerning when art students cheat in their academic work. As a non-text-based discipline, breaches manifest in various forms, such as visual plagiarism, cheating, contract cheating, facilitation of academic dishonesty, collusion, data fabrication, and deceit. Among these, plagiarism is the most discussed in the literature and is often used as an umbrella term encompassing any academic cheating. Simon (2016) states that academic integrity and misconduct are often defined similarly for prose text and non-textual work. Despite the "differing ethical, legal and professional standards" (Porter, 2010; Blythman et al., 2007, 2008; Hamilton et al., 2004). Many universities commonly refer to their academic integrity policy as a plagiarism policy (Glover, Agbo & Essuman, 2025). However, in creative arts studies, academic dishonesty transcends the traditional definition to include appropriation, originality, conceptualisation, artistic style, and technique. These elements can be used to determine artistic dishonesty in artworks.

Table 1. Common Types of Academic Dishonesty

Type	Definition	Example
Plagiarism	Copying someone else's work and passing it off as your own, without giving proper credit	Copying and pasting parts of a source you found online without citing it
Cheating	Using unauthorised sources or devices to help you achieve an outcome you would not have on your own	Copying someone's answers in an examination.
Contract cheating	Paying or bribing someone to help you cheat	Buying examination answers, pre-written essays, or admission to a university
Facilitation of Academic Dishonesty	Helping others cheat	Giving a friend examination answers or taking an examination in their place

Table 1. Common Types of Academic Dishonesty

Type	Definition	Example
Collusion	Working together with others to cheat	Texting your friends during an online examination to compare answers
Data fabrication	Misrepresenting the results of your research	Modifying experimental data to show a nonexistent correlation that would support your hypothesis
Deceit	Lying or falsifying information	Fabricating an illness to get out of an examination

(Orange Coast College, 2024; George and Caulfield, 2023).

As explained earlier, the creative arts discipline lacks scholarly literature that address the issues of academic integrity and their violations (Simon, 2016; Blythman et al., 2007; Porter, 2010). Nonetheless, a few studies have explored plagiarism in non-text-based disciplines such as Computer Science, plastic, and non-plastic arts, among others, at the tertiary level (Keith, 2024; Winstanley & Hodgkinson, 2023; TEQSA, 2022; Simon, 2016; Winstanley, 2020; Garrett & Robbinson, 2012). While these research studies focused on plagiarism, other forms of academic dishonesty in non-text-based disciplines are rarely discussed in the literature, creating a gap and complexities in understanding the concept of academic integrity in non-text-based disciplines, especially applied arts.

3.5 Creativity and Visual Plagiarism

Visual Plagiarism, also known as art theft, is the unethical use of someone else's pre-existing artwork or design and claiming it as one's own without acknowledging the originator or source. Winstanley (2020) defines it as the improper or unethical use of images in the process of creation. In categorising nontext as unique from text-based disciplines, Keith (2024) argues that creative arts' 'subjective and expressive' nuances cannot be "evaluated by functionality or 'right answer' criteria." She further explains that "practices of appropriation, reuse, and collaboration are discipline-specific" (p.528). Diagnosing and identifying plagiarism depends on the knowledge and experience of academics (Bettaieb et al., 2022; Alawad et al., 2020; Garrett & Robinson, 2012). There are various reasons behind student plagiarism, including a lack of understanding of the meaning of plagiarism (Eaton, 2024) or confusion over instructions regarding acceptability (Bettaieb et al., 2022; Cleary, 2017; Starovoytova & Namango, 2016; Blythman et al., 2007). There is also confusion regarding the difference between copying and artistic interpretation (Bettaieb et al., 2022; Walker, 2009). Hence, students must understand the distinction between acceptable and unacceptable ethics in creative arts to prepare them for professional practice. To avoid breaches of academic integrity, students must understand referencing protocols in text-based and non-text-based disciplines (Porter, 2009).

3.6 Misalignment of Institutional Academic Integrity Policy in Creative Arts

The concept of academic integrity breaches in creative arts is nebulous and requires different assessment protocols. Blair (2011) posits that practices of copying and recontextualisation challenge traditional definitions of creativity and ownership. In his study, he explores the evolving concepts of authorship and academic integrity in a remix culture, emphasising how this culture facilitates the fusion of original works across various media. Watiktinnakorn, Seesai, and Kerdvibulvech (2023) argue that such practices blur the boundaries of originality and raise questions about legitimate authorship, suggesting that the idea of authorship must be reconsidered in the context of remix culture and generative artificial intelligence (GenAI).

Research indicates that text-based works are predicated on established formats and referencing systems that enhance clarity regarding using and acknowledging others' materials, thereby supporting ethicality

in scholarship (Keith, 2024; Gravett & Kinchin, 2020; Vardi, 2012). In contrast, non-textual creative works commonly lack standardised frameworks for attribution. Differences in "context, format, and content" show that rules for academic integrity in the creative arts depend on the specific expectations of each discipline and assessment. Again, where there are no standard referencing systems, the practices for using and giving credit are defined and conveyed within the unique contexts of each discipline. However, Keith (2024) proposed a framework for assessing integrity in the creative arts, which includes "academic, moral/ethical considerations, professional, copyright, terms of use, and social/cultural" (p.529). factors. Then again, the principles of attribution and authorship, fundamental to academic integrity, are not just institutional concerns; they directly connect to vital issues like copyright, fairness, and transparency in creative practices that extend beyond academic settings. Considering what constitutes cheating in creative arts requires ethical and legal considerations. Recognising this intersection is crucial for fostering a culture that values ethical creativity and respect for original work.

TEQSA's (2022) document on creative art discusses the complexities of academic integrity in the creative arts, highlighting the unique challenges of attribution, copyright, and ethical practices in various creative disciplines. Bretag (2016) opines that there is "greater uncertainty about what constitutes plagiarism and collusion in design assessments than in text assessments" (p.4). According to Katz-Buonincontro et al. (2020), the connection or disconnection between epistemic beliefs and teaching practices plays a crucial role in shaping teachers' perception of originality in creativity. The study postulates that understanding the relationship between teachers' epistemic beliefs about creativity and their actual teaching practices is essential for enhancing creativity in the classroom. The study further points to the notion that teachers who view creativity as an innate trait may be less likely to implement strategies that encourage creative thinking among students (Hofer, 2004; Hofer & Pintrich, 1997). Thus, the epistemic beliefs about creativity held by students and educators are key in fostering a strong culture of academic integrity in creative arts. This situation is concerning due to the absence of explicit guidelines that differentiate between plagiarism and legitimate practices such as homage, parody, and visual referencing. As a result, both academics and students find it challenging to determine what constitutes acceptable academic conduct. This confusion leads some teachers to overlook the importance of academic integrity in the visual arts. In essence, effectively referencing external sources for all viewers is challenging (Simon, 2016). This concern is underscored by findings from Simon et al. (2014), which indicate that students and teachers within the visual arts are less inclined to regard the use of others' work without appropriate citation as plagiarism, in contrast to their counterparts in text-based assessments. In this context, what constitutes common breaches of academic integrity in creative arts can be complicated, nuanced, and subjective. Breaches are therefore complex to define and detect due to the nature of the creative practice, which often involves adapting, referencing, or integrating elements of pre-existing works.

Like global trends, there is uncertainty among Ghanaian students and teachers about what constitutes plagiarism in applied arts. Common misconceptions regarding authorship and allowable usage, along with the extensive availability of online media and various forms of non-text content, contribute to this confusion (TEQSA, 2022). This has created a gap in students' understanding of what constitutes academic dishonesty in creative arts, a phenomenon Keith (2024) calls "de facto understandings of integrity" (p.526).

3.7 The Concept of Creativity, Originality, Authorial Identity and Assessment

Keith (2024), Roughan, (2020), Connor et al. (2015) postulate that assessing creative arts requires a comprehensive approach that includes not only creative works but also essential text-based and practical evaluation methods in art pedagogies, including project and studio-based assessment, same applicable in "STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) disciplines, with the aim of "developing creativity through exercises in lateral thinking." (p.530). They further suggest that academic integrity may be predominantly concerned with assessment security, which includes the

detection of content similarity and originality in non-textual creative work, validating students' proficiency in professional skills with creative tools, and cultivating discipline-specific practices related to artistic development and communication. This involves various formats such as research essays, analyses, reports, exegeses, and presentations. They added that creative arts and media disciplines often use authentic and individualised assessments that "respect the creative artistry and potential of each student and engage in dialogue" (Keith, 2024, p. 533; Deutsch, 2016), making them less susceptible to cheating.

A test of originality in the context of copyright assesses whether a work qualifies for legal protection or not. A creative work's eligibility for copyright is not determined by its artistic quality. That makes the doctrine of originality nebulous because a work is considered original if it is independently created and not copied from another source, with a level of skill, labour, effort, creativity, judgement, and time. This evaluation involves determining if the author has independently created the work and possesses a minimal degree of creativity. Such assessment is essential for distinguishing copyrightable material from fundamental ideas or facts, ensuring the author's expression is original and not merely replicated. It is important to note that originality does not require a high level of innovation or artistic merit but is instead based on the author's intellectual engagement. The focus rests on the source of the work rather than its novelty or aesthetic properties. Under the originality concept, the test includes the doctrine of "Sweat of the Brow" and Merger", which help to determine the originality and protectability of works. This approach has largely been dismissed in contemporary copyright law, particularly in the United States, where the focus is on the originality and creativity of the work rather than the effort invested in its creation. On the contrary, postmodern appropriation artists have fervently rejected the traditional concept of originality in an era of technological advancement and remix culture, often describing it as outdated. While originality remains a priority in assessing creative arts, it can be viewed as a spectrum ranging from interpretation to innovation (Keith, 2024; Morgan, 2011). The Internet has reshaped how plagiarism is perceived and defined (Keith, 2024; Howard, 2007; Sutherland-Smith, 2008; Scanlon & Neumann, 2002). It has also influenced creative practices in many ways, necessitating a reconceptualisation of academic integrity within artistic practices.

It is important to note that the concepts of ownership, copyrights, fair use, appropriation and attribution, although interconnected in practice, are not synonymous with academic integrity. However, students need to acquire the requisite copyright education, skills, competencies, and experiences to effectively navigate the complexities associated with academic misconduct and violations of Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) (Porter, 2009, 2010). Discussing the importance of originality, appropriation, and collaboration in the context of creative works, Winstanley and Hodgkinson (2023), Okada and Ishibashi (2016) argue that, unlike text-based disciplines, copying, appropriating, and imitating are considered acceptable in the creative learning process. These guiding principles are fundamental in the creative arts, where originality, creativity, and innovation are highly valued. However, the increasing prevalence of academic dishonesty among students in applied arts raises concerns about the erosion of these principles (Macfarlane et al., 2014).

4. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative reflexive narrative approach, focusing entirely on non-data-driven inquiry. Rather than employing external datasets or statistical analysis, the researchers serve as the primary participants, drawing on their professional engagement with students to critically reflect on academic integrity within creative arts education. Through auto ethnographic inquiry, the study situates the researchers' lived experiences within broader institutional and pedagogical contexts, enabling a deeply situated, interpretive exploration of contract cheating in applied arts.

In her exploration of a philosophical foundation for phenomenological Art-Based Research (ABR), Merel Visse explicates how emerging methodologies in ABR increasingly incorporate diverse artistic

modalities, such as performative play, poetry, visual narrative, painting, music, and dance. She asserts that, these forms are not merely viewed as representational tools; instead, they serve as epistemic practices that provoke critical inquiry, enhance understanding, and facilitate sociopolitical transformation (Visse, Hansen & Leget, 2019; Goopy & Kassan, 2019; Søndergaard & Reventlow, 2019; Bagley & Castro-Salazar, 2012; Barone & Eisner, 2012).
In alignment with arts-based phenomenological research (Van Manen, 1990; Giorgi, 2009; Gupta & Zieske, 2024), the study leverages immersive studio-based observations, narrative analysis, and reflexive engagement to examine student behaviours and institutional challenges. The methodological approach embraces subjectivity and lived experience as epistemic tools, rejecting standardised data metrics in favour of contextualised meaning-making.

Indeed, this study transcends conventional methodologies reliant on detached empirical data. Instead, it foregrounds the nuanced realities of creative pedagogy, offering a critically embodied perspective on how institutional academic integrity policies intersect with artistic education. This approach ensures a holistic, experience-driven exploration, providing insights that quantitative analyses or third-party observations might overlook.

5. Discussion of Findings

In creative arts education, particularly within studio-based learning, creative works comprise multiple components known as the elements of art—colour, line, shape, texture, value, space, and form. These elements are the foundational building blocks of all applied arts, ensuring that artworks feel intentional, cohesive, and impactful. Artists employ design principles, such as pattern, emphasis, rhythm, movement, contrast, unity, balance, variety, proportion, and harmony, to transform these elements into meaningful narratives. This process acts as the grammar of visual language, shaping compositions to evoke emotions, tell stories, or convey ideas (Artlex, 2025). However, the expectations and requirements regarding using existing materials can differ based on the specific task, medium, and discipline. Given that the elements and principles of design are fundamental to all practices in applied arts, it is common to observe similarities and parallels among various artworks within the field. Therefore, pedagogical instructions and assessment frameworks must be specific and explicit, ensuring clarity and eliminating potential ambiguities. The insights presented in this paper reflect the authors' experiences teaching applied arts, firsthand knowledge of students' academic dishonesty in studio-based and experiential learning at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

As a practice, creative works are typically not produced under conventional examination conditions; instead, they arise from an extensive creative process in which the creator engages with various research materials and sources, often collaborating with others (TEQSA, 2022) within established parameters. Despite these examination protocols designed to cultivate an environment conducive to creativity, academic dishonesty among students remains prevalent. The study reveals that some students tend to engage the services of a third party to execute their academic tasks (partially or in whole) for a fee, which they pass off as their own effort for credit. Similarly, due to the lack of skills and competences, some students may develop their concepts and sketches but outsource the final execution of the work to a third party. Some students copy from their colleagues, while others engage the services of practising craftsmen or artisans from studios outside campus. Others misrepresent old works as their creations. In most cases, such students cannot explain the process from conceptualisation to finishing, which exposes their dishonest behaviour. This unethical practice is synonymous with 'contract cheating.' In academic integrity literature, contract cheating is generally defined as the practice whereby students engage the services of an unauthorised third party to complete academic tasks on their behalf (Bretag et al., 2019), including but not limited to essays, assignments, and examinations. Draper et al. (2021) explicated it further as "a basic relationship between three actors: a student, their university and a third party who completes assignments for the former to be submitted to the latter, but whose input is not permitted (p.

10). The ‘abettor’ could be a fellow student, friend, staff member volunteering their assistance for free (gratis), or a family member providing financial support to facilitate the violation. Lancaster (2024) declares that this practice violates ethical academic standards, as it involves students misrepresenting their own efforts.

The findings reveal that intrinsic and extrinsic factors shape arts students' cheating behaviours, as highlighted in numerous research studies. The most significant influences include a generational shift from valuing personal integrity to prioritising a performance-oriented identity, a deficiency in authentic self-expression, and the unethical use of technology. Again, the widespread misconception that applied art is an innate ability, rather than a skill that can be developed, significantly contributes to an unnecessary fear of failure and a reluctance to confront challenges. This faulty belief leads to diminished self-esteem, directly undermining an individual's capacity to complete academic tasks at an acceptable level.

5. 1 “Studio-Based/Portfolio” Assessments

"Portfolio" assessments are a common practice in the applied arts. Typically, these assessments require submitting a curated collection of subject-specific artefacts. The portfolio may include drawings, designs, illustrations, photographs, book works, videos, and more. The format can vary, encompassing a physical portfolio of a specific size, a book portfolio, a box portfolio, a ‘virtual’ portfolio, or a compilation of artworks. The content may consist of predetermined projects or those negotiated with the tutor. Specific details regarding the portfolio assessment submission will be outlined by the instructor and detailed in the module guide. In addition to the portfolio, all submissions will necessitate a body of “supporting work.” This could include a “research folder,” “sketchbooks,” or a “learning journal,” with further guidance provided by the tutor and in the module guide. During studio-based assessments, assessors may evaluate conceptualisation, originality, aesthetics, functionality, materials, methods (skill), and professionalism. However, the assessment criteria are subject to variation from task to task. Engaging with materials in studio-based learning is essential to fostering creativity.

5. 2 “Presentation” Assessments

Presentation assessments typically require students to formally present their work before a panel of tutors acting as jurors who will evaluate their presentation, work and performance. Student presentations are often integrated into class activities as part of the learning and teaching methodology. These presentations can be conducted individually or in groups, incorporating text, images, or video samples. During the presentation, students can clearly articulate their concepts, materials, and methodologies, outlining the techniques and challenges they face throughout their creative process. After the presentation, colleagues and lecturers will pose questions designed to deepen understanding. This collaborative environment encourages constructive critique, allowing students to receive valuable feedback and suggestions for improvement, ultimately resulting in enhanced outcomes and a greater mastery of their subject matter.

Keith (2024) discusses various types of assessments in creative arts education. A staged assessment involves a systematic evaluation process that takes place in multiple phases or steps. This approach often measures progress, abilities, or compliance over time. Each stage of the assessment builds on the previous one, enabling a gradual evaluation and allowing for adjustments based on the outcomes of earlier phases. Morgan (2011), cited by Keith (2024), opines that staged assessment is the most used approach in creative arts. Authentic assessment is a method of evaluation that measures a person's ability to apply knowledge and skills in real-world or practical contexts. This approach requires learners to demonstrate their abilities through hands-on activities, projects, or presentations. Vlachopoulos and Makri (2024) found that authentic assessment enhances critical thinking, problem-solving, and meaningful collaboration skills. These approaches involve initial proposal, work-in-progress discussions, studio juries, presentations, art talks and portfolio assessment, all focusing on tangible

artworks. While many of these assessments may require accompanying written texts, such as project proposals, preliminary sketches, exegeses, or artist statements, they aim not only to evaluate originality, creativity, skill and the student's actual knowledge or effort but also to acknowledge students' individual contributions and deter cheating and dishonesty. However, if students' work is judged solely on completion, this could lead to contract cheating and other forms of academic dishonesty. Therefore, work-in-progress discussions serve as essential tools in discouraging dishonest practices among students. The process and procedure in creative arts often hold greater significance than the aesthetic appeal or the final product. Keith (2024), Thomson et al. (2023), Press et al. (2023), Amigud and Dawson (2020), Dawson (2020) postulate that authentic assessment is often regarded as a viable strategy to address academic integrity challenges, including plagiarism and contract cheating. Similarly, Vlachopoulos et al. (2024), citing OAA (2017), argue that authentic assessment can curb cheating and promote academic integrity. Nevertheless, the concept has recently been criticised for being overly focused on professional applications rather than the learning process itself. In contrast, Ellis et al. (2019), cited by Keith (2024), contend that "authentic assessment does not inherently guarantee academic integrity" (p.530). McArthur (2023) suggests that we should transition from a sole emphasis on authentic tasks to a deeper consideration of the significance of those tasks in the context of learning. This recognises the importance of context in assessment design and focuses on the aims and objectives of assessment, which underscores the importance of ensuring that effective assessments are task-specific and aligned with the intended learning outcomes.

5.3 Democratisation of Art Practice

Interestingly, emerging trends and experimentation in contemporary art practice promote dematerialisation and encourage innovation, allowing for artistic experimentation. Mixed and tactical media, social practice, performative, time-based and participatory art and ecological projects fundamentally challenge traditional notions of art as static or physical objects. This shift allows for the democratisation of art practice, opening new possibilities that have inspired artists to explore diverse forms of creativity, where the legitimate artworks are no longer limited to set materials. This practice has been embraced by many other creatives, dismantling conventional concepts and boundaries within artistic practice. karî'kachä seid'ou, the initiator of the "Emancipatory Art Teaching Project" and supported by Edwin Bodjawah, Kwaku Boafo Kissiedu (Castro), George Buma Ampratwum, Dorothy Amenuke and other exponents of the acclaimed blaxTARLINES collectively, transformed the fine art curriculum of the Department of Painting and Sculpture, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi (KNUST), at the turn of the century (seid'ou & Bodjawah, 2025; seid'ou, 2021). This paradigmatic shift in curriculum has evolved art into a socially engaged, pedagogical practice aligned with Bourriaud's (1998) notion of relational aesthetics, where art is embedded in social contexts rather than confined to isolated studio spaces (Visse et a., 2019; Savin-Baden & Wimpenny, 2014). The new curriculum has produced a generation of artists, such as Ibrahim Mahama, who have been interested in using the residues of history and time as a medium of reflective production.

5. 4 The Artist-Researcher

Applied art practitioners increasingly transcend the role of creators of aesthetic objects, positioning themselves as active contributors to interdisciplinary research through exegeses, artist statements, and critical reflection. Within this evolving landscape, arts-based research (ABR) has emerged as a preferred methodological framework, legitimising artistic practice as a rigorous mode of inquiry. Visse et al., (2019) conceptualise ABR through the lens of four epistemological "turns", narrative, linguistic, nonlinguistic, and pragmatic, each representing a distinct orientation toward knowledge construction and dissemination. While some researchers adopt a phenomenological approach, they often do so without explicitly aligning with formal philosophical traditions. Notably, the nonlinguistic turn holds relevance for applied arts, signifying a paradigmatic shift toward embodied, sensory, and practice-led epistemologies. This orientation challenges conventional, text-dominant research paradigms by

privileging ontic engagement, knowledge that arises through the acts of making, doing, and experiencing.

Building on Eisner's material-centred approach, researchers began incorporating artistic modalities, such as visual art and performance, not merely as representational tools, but as integral to the production and dissemination of knowledge. According to Visse et al., (2019), this shift was grounded in Schön's (1984) concept of "knowing-in-action" and Lave and Wenger's (1991) theory of situated learning. It fostered hybrid roles of artist, researcher, and educator within communities of practice (Visse, Hansen and Leget, 2019; Irwin, 2004; Irwin and Springgay, 2008). In this context, the artist-researcher is redefined not only as a creator but as a producer of situated, affective, and socially embedded knowledge.

5. 5 Challenges in Tertiary Education for Textiles, Styling and Fashion

The Department of Industrial Art at Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) offers a diverse range of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes within the Applied Arts and Sciences. These include, among others, the Bachelor of Science (BSc) in Fashion Design and BSc in Textile Design and Technology. These programmes are structured to deliver a holistic education that integrates creative expression with technical proficiency and entrepreneurial insight, thereby equipping students with the comprehensive skill set required for success in the contemporary fashion and textile industries (Department of Industrial Art, 2018).

Nevertheless, a critical review of these programmes reveals underlying pedagogical and academic integrity challenges, particularly due to the non-textual and practice-based nature of the disciplines. These challenges raise important questions regarding the assessment of creative outputs, the standardisation of evaluation criteria, and the maintenance of academic rigour in disciplines that rely heavily on visual, tactile, practice-based learning and material forms of knowledge production. Unlike text-centric disciplines, fashion education necessitates a curriculum that integrates material engagement, aesthetic judgment, and technical proficiency, which are not easily accommodated within traditional academic structures. Traditional academic frameworks, which prioritise textual and theoretical knowledge, often marginalise fashion education's embodied and experiential dimensions (Yang & Ng, 2025). This misalignment is further complicated by the subjective nature of assessing creative outputs and the tension between fostering artistic expression, academic integrity and meeting industry standards.

Fashion education's interdisciplinary nature—spanning material science, cultural studies, sustainability, and entrepreneurship—is often constrained by institutional silos, limiting curricular integration and responsiveness to industry needs. Additionally, ethical concerns such as cultural appropriation, labour rights, and environmental sustainability remain underrepresented in many programmes, despite their growing relevance in the global fashion industry (Yang & Ng, 2025). Given the non-text-based and embodied nature of textile and fashion education, the researchers hold the view that it is important to broaden students' conceptual and practical understanding through complementary disciplines. To that end, integrating photography and human anatomy subjects into textile and fashion programmes can enhance students' visual literacy and deepen their comprehension of the human form, an essential foundation for effective garment design, styling, and presentation. As highlighted by Appiah (2023), the effective delivery of fashion education requires significant investment in specialised infrastructure, including textile laboratories, digital fabrication technologies, and other advanced studio equipment. However, such investments often pose substantial financial challenges, particularly for under-resourced institutions. Consequently, the absence or inadequacy of these critical resources within many textile and fashion studios severely limits students' capacity for creative exploration and hands-on learning. When learners are deprived of access to essential tools and materials, their ability to experiment, prototype, and innovate is significantly constrained. This infrastructural deficit not only

impedes the acquisition of practical competencies but also undermines the development of creative confidence and critical design thinking, core attributes essential for success in the fashion industry. Moreover, such resource-constrained learning environments may inadvertently foster conditions conducive to academic dishonesty. The recent shift toward digital and hybrid modes of instruction has further exposed the limitations of remote learning in disciplines that are inherently material and spatial. In these contexts, students may be more inclined to outsource academic tasks, thereby compromising the integrity of the learning process. These challenges underscore the urgent need for robust assessment frameworks that are grounded in principles of academic integrity and tailored to the unique demands of practice-based education.

6. Implications of Findings

Academic dishonesty in creative arts education is concerning, but institutional policies often fail to address it effectively. Most academic policies are designed for text-based disciplines and are implemented with a "one-size-fits-all" approach, which can be inapplicable to non-text-based disciplines. While cheating among students is unacceptable and must be addressed, it is important to consider the learning environment as well, because factors such as inadequate studio space and obsolete tools, equipment, and technology can contribute to students' misconduct. Furthermore, Geddes (2011), citing Bisping et al. (2008), asserts that students' perceptions of academic dishonesty significantly influence their propensity to engage in unethical practices. Nevertheless, he concludes that a practical educational approach, driven by educators, can help mitigate instances of cheating. Keith (2024) underscores the importance of the assessor's pedagogical insight in fostering academic integrity among students, especially in the absence of practical detection tools. Thus, educators are key to fostering academic integrity in creative arts assessment. Drawing on the insights of Murdock et al. (2008), Geddes (2011) suggests that shifting from traditional assessment approaches to innovative alternatives, such as performance assessments and portfolio evaluations, can greatly reduce the prevalence of exam cheating. Moreover, these approaches to assessment offer a far more accurate depiction of students' true mastery and capabilities, ultimately fostering a more authentic learning environment. This transition enhances integrity in the educational process and ensures that assessments genuinely reflect student effort, achievement and potential.

7. Conclusions

The paper examines the issue of academic dishonesty within the context of creative arts education, with a particular focus on studio-based learning. It underscores the necessity of a nuanced understanding of the unique characteristics inherent to this discipline. Conventional definitions of academic integrity may not always apply directly to creative works, as similarities and resemblances often emerge from art's fundamental elements and principles. This paper, grounded in art-based phenomenological research, investigates the motivations behind academic dishonesty among creative arts students and explores the pedagogical challenges and insights from the perspective of art educators. The findings highlight the critical need to dispel the misconception that creative arts are innate talents and reveal the importance of educational strategies promoting skill development, self-esteem, and ethical academic practices. Additionally, this paper emphasises the necessity for clear guidelines regarding using existing materials and promoting academic integrity in portfolio and presentation assessments. In this regard, institutions can foster a culture of integrity and support students in creating original, meaningful work.

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