Cheating Behavior among Undergraduate Students

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Abstract

This research paper has taken into consideration the factors that persuade students at the undergraduate level to cheat. The basic purpose of this research paper is to analyze the reasons that persuade students to cheat at the undergraduate level. In this paper, the factors taken in to account are student CGPA, parental pressure, lack of preparation for a particular exam, student's time consumed in extracurricular activities and gender on the level of cheating done by students. Specifically, for this paper the term 'cheating' means the following; cheating on quizzes, exams and assignments. For research and data collection purposes, the total sample size taken is 300 undergraduate students from five different universities. With the data that was collected, analysis was done through cross-tabulation and other tools for defining the relationship between the dependent and independent variables. Lastly, this paper also talks about the relationship between the factors due to which undergraduate

Introduction

Cheating has always been a problem in academic settings, and with advances in technology such as cell phones, and more pressure for students to score well so that they get into top rated universities, cheating has become an epidemic. At the same time, it has been argued, the moral fiber of society as a whole has started to look less down upon cheating than it did before. A great deal of research has been conducted to study and analyze the growing concern of cheating at the undergraduate level. Over the years, cheating has been considered to be pervasive, irrespective of the fact that academic integrity is one of the most important values of higher education (Pulvers&Diekhoff, 1999). Cheating takes many forms from simply copying another student's paper to stealing an exam paper to forging an official university transcript (Pincus&Schmelkin, 2003). Cheating has become a disturbing phenomenon for many undergraduate universities around the world. Cheating unfortunately has become a very ordinary part of the lives of many students (Bunn, Caudill, & Gropper, 1992).

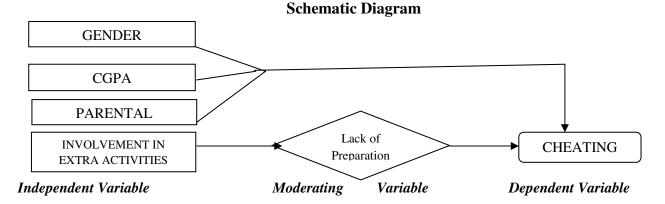
While surveying some American universities it was seen that a shocking percentage of students present there in fact cheat, these percentages range from a low of 15% to 20% to a sure high of an astonishing 81 % (Maramark&Maline, 1993). A lot of novel ideas have been used by researchers in order to measure cheating behavior and to identify its determinants. Research studies conducted by Nowell and Laufer (1997) attributed the fear of not passing as a result of and a cause of cheating in itself. In the study, 433 students were taken as a sample population and the following results tally with our research objectives, 19 students in this research stated that the fear of displeasing their respective parents was the major cause. 11 students said they cheated so as to get better grades than certain other students who they are in competition with. 83 students said that they cheated because it was easier to cheat than it was to study and work hard.

According to findings of Nowell and Laufer (1997), there is decided lack of uniformity in mental responses in college students. Kerkvliet (1994) used the RR technique to ensure that more truthful answers can be obtained, and he figured that men are more inclined towards cheating than women. Males may perceive larger benefits from cheating because of possibly greater pressure to obtain good grades and there is no significant correlation between gender and cheating (Diekhoff, LaBeff, Clark, Williams, Francis, & Haines, 1996). Haines et al. (1996) found little relationship between year in school and cheating, but Nowell and Laufer (1997) reported that third and fourth year students are more likely to cheat than first- and second-year students. Another assumption that can be stated is that students with High CGPA's are not inclined towards cheating when compared to those students who less CGPA's. Although some researchers have found CGPA and cheating to be negatively correlated (Bunn et al., 1992) however, Kerkvliet (1994) found no relation between CGPA and cheating. An increase in the level of other activities can cause students to cheat as less attention will be given to studies (Diekhoff, LaBeff, Clark, Williams, Francis, & Haines, 1996).

The benefits that students may obtain from cheating include a higher exam score, a higher subsequent course grade, a higher subsequent cumulative grade point average (CGPA), and possibly a better job offer upon graduation (Bunn, Caudill, & Gropper, 1992). All these incentives indeed, do increase the probability of students cheating at the undergraduate level. In a similar study by Diekhoff et al. (1996) it was found that 54 percent of students admitted to cheating in some form. Cheating behavior is inversely related to CGPA (Bunn, Caudill, & Gropper, 1992). Spiegal and Whitley (2001) concludes about the powerful influence of institutional context on student decisions to cheat, between the 1960s and 1990, most of the research on student cheating focused on the role of individual factors related to cheating behavior. This stream of research revealed that factors such as gender, cumulative grade point average (CGPA), work ethics, type A behavior, competitive achievement striving, and self-esteem can significantly influence the prevalence of cheating. Prior to 1990, only a few studies focused on contextual factors that influence cheating behavior.

Hypothesis Development

Several studies have been conducted on this topic and various individualistic characteristics have been identified. The dependent variable, cheat is a discrete variable. With regards to this paper, the term cheating implied to that particular student who copied content from another student. There were basically five independent variables that we assumed were the causes that lead to cheating. The first variable was CGPA which measured two factors. It included those students who wanted to maintain their respective CGPAs, being the toppers and secondly for those whose CGPA was very less and wanted to cheat as a survival tool. The second variable was parental pressure which basically meant that the parents were pushing their children to get good CGPAs with strict actions and consequences if they were unable to do so. Lack of preparation was the third variable and involvement in extracurricular activities was the fourth variable which included a part time job that the students were doing or other activities that were not a part of their study life. Gender was the fifth variable which was defined as being a male or female.



Hypothesis 1- Students with high CGPAs are not inclined to cheat

Cheating has an inverse relationship with CGPA of the student as the literature suggests. There is a low probability of a high CGPA student cheating or helping out others. There could be various reasons for that: since the student is satisfied with their result, many other aspects such as ethics and morality may come up. There may also be fear of getting caught while they are cheating. Alternatively, students who are not pressurized by parents for grades are less inclined to cheat.

Hypothesis 2- Males have a higher tendency for cheating than females

Gender plays a big role as far as cheating is concerned. Psychologically, cheating could be taken as something that stimulates the mental process and excites the student. It could also be taken as a threat, a cause of fear but nonetheless it creates a thrilling factor. Study suggests that males are more inclined towards cheating because of their threat-liking nature. They like to take risks. Whereas when females are concerned, they are perceived as being of a careful and of a cautious nature/attitude. Therefore there is a direct relationship between males and their possibility of cheating where as there is an inverse relationship between females and cheating.

Hypothesis 3- A high degree of parental pressure with respect to getting good grades causes the students to cheat.

Parental pressure has a direct link with cheating. When parents pressurize their children to score well in exams and marked assignments, the pressure increases on students to score well. As a result students who do not have enough motivation to work hard or who cannot give time to studies due to various reasons, take up different means of cheating to get good grades.

Hypothesis 4- *Lack of preparation for an assignment, quiz or exam increases the chances of cheating* Lack of preparation also poses a direct link to students' tendency towards cheating. If a student is well prepared, there are very few chances that s/he would cheat from others. However, the student may experience peer pressure to help others during the exam/test. While if the student is not prepared, then there is a high possibility that the student would try to cheat using unfair means or cheat from fellow peers.

Hypothesis 5- Involvement in extracurricular activities reduces the time students devote to their studies which in turn causes them to cheat.

Involvement in extracurricular activities in other words means lack of preparation due to there being less time for preparation. This variable, therefore, has a direct relationship with students' tendency towards cheating. However, if the student does not take part in a lot of extracurricular activities, then their chances of cheating would be minimal.

Sample Selection and Instrument

The sample consisted of 300 undergraduate students from the five different institutions namely NUST Business School (NBS), Bahria University, FAST, Islamic International University (IIU) and Shifa Medical College, Islamabad as the target population. The sample size was 60 students from each university to have a homogeneous sample size from various institutions. It is important to note that the universities were not chosen at random. The universities chosen were based on the authors' ability to conduct the study. The questionnaire was administered by the authors in all the universities themselves. All five universities were located in Islamabad. The instrument (see Appendix) used in this study was a questionnaire consisting of two parts. The first section includes four cases which would give a brief background of the respondent. It states the respondent's university, current semester, gender and CGPA. The second section of the study asked students to rate each factor according to the response they thought was plausible. It is important to note that students were told in the beginning that all responses would remain confidential and all students taking part in this study would remain anonymous.

Results

The correlation analysis shows that all variables are positively linked together. The occurrence of one somehow causes the other factors to appear as well. Table 4 (see Table) shows that parental pressure has a significant positive relationship with the respondent being grade oriented. This means, that when a student is grade oriented, there would be the existence of parental pressure up to some extent. There is also high positive correlation of parental pressure with the students' willingness to cheat during an exam depending upon its difficulty level. If the exam is difficult and the student is willing to cheat, then again, there would be parental pressure for scoring well in tests/exams. There is close to a zero level of relationship between parental pressure and the students' urge to cheat. This shows that these two variables are not linked together. The test also shows that when a student is grade oriented, then s/he is willing to cheat due to lack of preparation and/or because of lenient invigilation and examination environment. If a student has not prepared well for their exam, then there is high probability that they would try to cheat whether the exam invigilation is strict or not.

A positive relationship was found between the students' lack of preparation and their urge to cheat. This leads to the theory that many students do not prepare well for their exams because of their urge to cheat. Many students are thrilled by the idea of cheating and for them it somehow fulfills their social acceptability criteria. Therefore, students with a high urge to cheat would usually not prepare well for the exam and cheat as a result. Another finding of the study was, that if a student is grade oriented, then they would cheat if the environment and the invigilation allows. Any student who is grade oriented, would want to get good grades whether it includes them using unfair means like cheating. The chances of such occurrences increase when the exam difficulty level increases or when there is lack of preparation. Students' involvement in extracurricular activities has a strong correlation with the student being grade oriented. This proves that students who are grade oriented are the ones who would usually take part in extracurricular activities because they want to be good at their curriculum and extra activities as well. However, the study shows, those students who are involved in extracurricular activities have a high probability for existence of their urge to cheat during examinations.

A very important finding was that when the exam difficulty level is high, then the student would want/try to cheat despite the strict invigilation. If the environment allows, then they would definitely cheat. The table titled 'Coefficients' shows the variables included in the study that highly cause the dependent variable, the students' urge to cheat, vary. The most significant variable that causes a change in the students' urge to cheat is the students' involvement in extracurricular activities. This variable has the highest beta value i.e. 0.202. since the value is positive, then the students' urge to cheat could be reduced if they have low level of involvement in extracurricular activities and vice versa. Bringing our focus to the hypotheses we have stated for this specific study, and the action of proving or disproving those hypotheses. Narrowing into the first hypothesis stated in one of the pre-mentioned sections, that being students with high CGPA's are not inclined to cheat. Out of the total 300 students surveyed (Table 5), 65 belonged to the high achievers category with a CGPA in between the range of 3.50-4.

Taking into focus these 65 students only, a meager 26% of them said that they believed that cheating was wrong and that their high CGPA did not force them to indulge into this immoral act. This specific fact aims at disproving our stated hypothesis because 26% is not considered a majority. To second this fact taking into consideration the coefficients table (Table 1) we see that the factor grade oriented has a beta value of 0.031 which although is not very significant nor does it signal a strong relationship, but still keeping in mind its positive inclination it does raise the possibility of students with high CGPA's wanting to cheat, even though a minority of these students may be biased towards cheating in this specific regard. Moving onto the correlations table (Table 4) we evidently see that the factor grade oriented has a significant positive relationship with all the other factors outlined which may encourage a student to cheat.

Taking into considering all the facets mentioned above it won't be wrong to imply that students with high CGPA's or wanting high CGPA's are indeed inclined towards cheating thereby disproving this specific hypothesis. Moving onto our second hypothesis and that being *males have a higher tendency for cheating than females.* To bring out a result for this specific hypothesis, if we just look at the frequency of questions table (Table 5), we would evidently see that out of the 300 students that we surveyed for the purpose of this study 53% of the respondents that said that they do indeed cheat were males and the remaining 47% were females, thus proving this specific hypotheses that *males have a higher tendency for cheating than females.* Taking into consideration the third hypothesis that we have stated for the purpose of this study and that being *a high degree of parental pressure with respect to getting good grades causes the students to cheat.* If we cogitate the frequency of questions table (Table5) we would conclude that only 19.3% of the total 300 respondents surveyed said that parental pressure was a major factor that caused them to cheat, thus this detail dismisses the influence of high degree of parental pressure with regards to leading students to cheat.

Further to support this negating of the stated hypothesis, if we focus on the coefficients table (Table 1) we see that parental pressure has a beta value of -0.014 which signifies itsnon-importance with regards to leading students to cheat. Lastly, if we consider the correlations table (Table 4) we see that parental pressure has a significant positive correlation with nearly all the factors we have defined for the purpose of this study, but parental pressure does not have a significant positive relationship with the most important factor in itself and that being urge to cheat, thus showing this parental pressure may cause students to indirectly cheat, but in direct terms it does not have a strong hold on students inclination towards cheating. Thus all the above stated facts lead us to reject this specific hypothesis. Analyzing the fourth hypothesis which is *lack of preparation for an assignment, quiz or exam increases the chances of cheating.* To come up with a result for this specific hypothesis we need to take into consideration the frequency of questions table (Table 5). We conclude that out of the total 300 respondents that we surveyed, 126 stated that lack of preparation for any academic venture would increase the chance of them cheating which tends to prove this specific hypothesis.

To support this stance in favor of the stated hypothesis, we could look at the coefficients table (Table 1) from that specific table we see that lack of preparation has a beta value of 0.046 which means that it does have a positive relationship with a student's urge to cheat albeit not a strong one. Moving onto the correlation table (Table 4) we evidently see that lack of preparation has a significant positive correlation with all the other factors that we have demarcated in this study, thus showing that lack of preparation indeed does increase the chances of a particular student cheating thus proving our hypothesis.Lastly moving onto the fifth and last hypothesis that we have stated for the purpose of this study, *involvement in extracurricular activities reduces the time students devote to their studies which in turn causes them to cheat.* To come up with a conclusion regarding this specific hypothesis, we could glance at the frequency of questions table (Table 5) we can conclude that out of the 300 respondents surveyed for the purpose of this paper 113 stated that this specific factor had a major influence in causing them to cheat.

This detail tends to prove our hypothesis, but before we jump to any premature conclusion, regarding our hypothesis, we ought to look at the coefficients table (Table 1), this specific table shows us that involvement in extracurricular activities has a beta value of 0.202 which is the highest amongst all the factors that we have outlined for this study, and shows that this factor has a significant impact on students inclination to cheat, supporting our earlier conclusion. Furthermore, moving on the to the correlations table (Table 4) it is clearly evident that this specific factor has a positive significant correlation with all the other factors outlined in this paper. Thus, after aggregating all these views about involvement in extracurricular activities and taking into consideration our hypothesis for this factor, we conclude that the hypothesis stands proven. Taking into consideration Table 2 i.e. the model summary table; we see that our R square value and adjusted R square value lies at 0.179 and 0.162 respectively.

These values for R square and adjusted R square are not at all healthy and speak about the loop holes present in the model we have designed. In simpler words, this means that our dependent variable in this case that is the urge to cheat is very weakly defined by the independent variables those being parental pressure, lack of preparation, involvement in extracurricular activities, environment/invigilation, exam level of difficulty and grade orientation nature of the students. The standard error of estimate is also minimal which statuses the fact that the independent variables mentioned do not have a strong influence on the dependent variable which is urge to cheat. Table 3 shows the reliability of this specific model, displays the cronbach's alpha to have a value of 0.683, which indicates that this model has a mediocre level of reliability.

Discussion

In this paper, those variables have been discussed that affect students' cheating behavior and the factors that are dominant amongst students with high or low CGPAs, gender differentiation or the overall university environment. Out of the total 300 surveyed, a minority falls in the below 2.50 CGPA i.e. 10.3% and the number of respondents with CGPAs between 2.51-3.00 and 3.01-3.50 was found to be equal with 35%. Respondents with CGPA 3.51-4.00 formed a second minority with 21.7%. In the universities visited, overall more than 40% of the students have very low parental pressure on them to achieve well in academics and only 7% believe they have very high parental pressure. However, in contrast to that, more than 50% students are neutral to high grade orientation i.e. they aim to achieve good grades. The results to the survey showed that the overall students' involvement in extracurricular is subjective. A majority of them voted neutral responses i.e. sometimes they take part in extra activities and sometimes they don't. A second majority said that their participation in extracurricular activities is low.In response to the respondents' urge to cheat, 33% said their urge to cheat is very low, while 21% said that their urge is impartial.

Conclusion

At the end of this paper it would be safe to say that the numerous variables we have outlined as potential factors that could cause students at the undergraduate level to cheat do provide a significant view of what causes students to cheat but does not give us a holistic view which is what was required when we initiated this project. Summing up the hypothesis that we had outlined at the initiation of this paper; the hypothesis that students with high CGPA's were not inclined to cheat stands disproved, meaning that students with high CGPA also are potential cheating candidates. The second hypothesis that males tend to be more inclined towards cheating than females stands proven, reasserting the universal belief that males are likely to cheat more than their opposite genders. The third hypothesis that a high degree of parental pressure causes students to cheat stands disproved, connoting that parental pressure to perform well in academics does not enforce their children to cheat.

The fourth hypothesis which is lack of preparation increasing the chances of cheating stands proved, implying the common intuition that if a student is not well prepared for an academic endeavor he/she is more likely to cheat in order to cover up for his/her lack of preparation. The fifth and the last hypothesis that was outlined for this paper, which is involvement in extracurricular activities and students inclination towards cheating also stands to be proven, thus indicating that if a student is involved in extracurricular activities he/she would eventually end up cheating as he/she would not be able to devote the required time to his studies. The reliability of the model that was devised as a result of the factors singled out was also mediocre, further the model with respect to the linkage between the dependent and independent variables was also weak, showing that there is significant room for improvement in the model we have created.

Further areas of Research

With regards to the further areas of research that could be undertaken keeping as a foundation this research paper, we conclude that for the purpose of this study and due to time and scope limitations we only surveyed 300 respondents from five universities present in the federal capital,

to gain an accurate estimate of what causes students at the undergraduate level to cheat we could enlarge our scope and include more universities from various cities of Pakistan.Furthermore, this research paper only takes into consideration what factors out of the limited ones we have mentioned cause students to cheat, but this paper does not mention why these factors cause students to cheat. So this why factor, could be further investigated. Lastly, more factors could be introduced into the model we have designed and the inter relationship between them could also be studied.

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		Unstandardized	Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients			
Model		В	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	
1	(Constant)	.429	.312		1.374	.170	
	Parental Pressure	016	.063	014	261	.795	
	Lack of Preparation	.051	.065	.046	.793	.428	
	Involvement in Extracurricular activities	.225	.063	.202	3.597	.000	
	Exam level of difficulty	.177	.066	.162	2.695	.007	
	Invigilation/Environment	.211	.065	.191	3.227	.001	
	Grade oriented	.037	.070	.031	.519	.604	

Table 1 - Coefficients^a

a. Dependent Variable: Urge to cheat

Table 2-Model Summary

					Change Statistics				
Model	R			Std. Error of the Estimate			df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.423 ^a	.179	.162	1.352	.179	10.655	6	293	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), Grade oriented, Parental Pressure, Involvement in Extracurricular activities, Invigilation/Environment, Lack of Preparation, Exam level of difficulty

Table 3-Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.683	7

Table 4- Correlations

	-		Lack of Preparation	Grade oriented	Involvement in Extracurricular activities	Invigilation/E nvironment	Urge to cheat	Exam level of difficulty
Parental Pressure	Pearson Correlation	1	.154**	.205**	.170**	.108	.094	.249**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.007	.000	.003	.061	.103	.000
Lack of Preparation	Pearson Correlation	.154**	1	.304**	.221**	.261**	.187**	.244**
-	Sig. (2-tailed)	.007		.000	.000	.000	.001	.000
Grade oriented	Pearson Correlation	.205**	.304**	1	.242**	.323**	.203**	.312**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000	.000	.000	.000
Involvement in	Pearson Correlation	.170**	.221**	.242**	1	.194**	.292**	.235**
Extracurricu lar activities	Sig. (2-tailed)	.003	.000	.000		.001	.000	.000
 Invigilation/ Environment	Pearson Correlation	.108	.261**	.323**	.194**	1	.308**	.359**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.061	.000	.000	.001		.000	.000
Urge to cheat	Pearson Correlation	.094	.187**	.203**	.292**	.308**	1	.295**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.103	.001	.000	.000	.000		.000
Exam level of difficulty	Pearson Correlation	.249**	.244**	.312**	.235**	.359**	.295**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 5- Frequency of Questions

Question 1		Question 2		Question 3		Question 4		Question 5		Question 6	
University		Semester		Gender		CGPA		Parental Pressure		Lack of preparation	
NUST	20.00%	1	6.70%	Female	47.00%	< 2.5	10.35%	V. Low	47.00%	V. Low	15.00%
Bahria	20.00%	2	19.70%	Male	53.00%	2.51-3.00	34.00%	Low	16.30%	Low	18.70%
Shifa	20.00%	3	5.30%			3.01-3.50	34.00%	Neutral	22.70%	Neutral	24.30%
FAST	20.00%	4	18.70%			3.51-4.00	21.70%	High	12.30%	High	25.00%
IIU	20.00%	5	5.70%					V. High	7.00%	V. High	17.00%
		6	21.70%								
		7	7.05%								
		8	15.00%								

Question 7		Question 8		Question 9		Question 1	.0	Question 11		
Involvement in Extra Activities		Grade Oriented		Invigilation/Environ ment		Urge to Cheat		Exam difficulty	Level of	
			13.30				33.00			
V. Low	14.70%	V. Low	%	V. Low	14.00%	V. Low	%	V. Low	12.00%	
			12.00				16.30			
Low	23.00%	Low	%	Low	17.30%	Low	%	Low	13.30%	
			29.30				21.00			
Neutral	24.70%	Neutral	%	Neutral	24.00%	Neutral	%	Neutral	18.30%	
			28.30				12.30			
High	19.00%	High	%	High	23.30%	High	%	High	27.00%	
			17.00				17.30			
V. High	18.70%	V. High	%	V. High	21.40%	V. High	%	V. High	29.30%	

APPENDIX



QUESTIONNAIRE NUST Business School (NBS) H-12, Islamabad Serial#____

Date: 3rd May 2010

Dear Student,

We, students of NUST Business School are interested in conducting a questionnaire that would help us measure the behavior pattern of students that indulge in cheating under various circumstances.

By answering these questions honestly, you would be helping us to uncover factors that lead to cheating and their severity that causes an individual to indulge in that behavior. Through this information we would be looking at ways to reduce the menace of cheating.

Thank you for your response.

Best Wishes Anam& Zahra

All answers are confidential and you will not be able to be identified from the information you provide.

INA	line						
Co	ntact	Number (Optional)					
Ple	ease m	ark the appropriate box with a tick or a	a cross.				
		versity					
		NUST FAST	Bahria Islamic Interna		Shifa Medical		
2.	Curr	ent Semester:	J				
	3.	Gender					
		Female	Male				
3.	CGP	PA					
		Under 2.50	2.51-3.00				
		3.01-3.50 3.51-	4.00				
		Rank the following factors from ver	y low to very hig	gh that would	l cause you t	o cheat in e	xams.
			Very Low	Low	Neutral	High	Very High
	5.	Parental Pressure	1	2	3	4	5
	6.	Lack of Preparation	1	2	3	4	5
	7.	Involvement in extra activities	1	2	3	4	5
	8.	Grade oriented	1	2	3	4	5
	9.	Invigilation/Environment	1	2	3	4	5
	10.	Urge to cheat	1	2	3	4	5
	11.	Exam level of difficulty	1	2	3	4	5