

Why Business Students Cheat? A study from Pakistan

Muhammad Asif Tanveer

Lecturer, Department of Management Sciences, The Islamia University of Bahawalpur
asiftanveer01@gmail.com

Humaira Gill

Department of Management Sciences, The Islamia University of Bahawalpur

Humeragill040@gmail.com

Ishtiaq Ahmed

Department of Management Sciences, The Islamia University of Bahawalpur

Ishtiaq_31@yahoo.com

Abstract

Cheating incidence has been rampant in higher education for decades, and business graduates and undergraduates cheat more than any other majors. The aim of this study is to find out the most imperative reasons of academic misconduct behavior. This study is based on sample size of graduates and undergraduates of Department of Management Sciences, The Islamia University Bahawalpur, comparing means, standard deviation, skewness and kurtosis, to predict the influential variables which force them to cheat like peer pressure, family pressure, institutional policies for cheating, role of teachers, to show mastery on subject, to get high grades, opportunity for cheating, and perception that cheating is common part of life. Results found cheating rate increases due to perceived peer pressure, perceived low involvement of teachers for cheating, low understanding and enforcement of academic integrity, family pressure, and tough educational system. But, analysis results propose that perceived teacher role to prevent cheating is the most influential factor to modify this unethical behavior. Finally, this study offers some suggestions to deal with this ever increasing phenomenon from students and teachers prospective.

Keywords: Student, Peer Pressure, Teacher Responsibility, Motivation, Family.

Introduction

Cheating among universities students has become a significant issues, and also great source of concern for the teachers and professors. There is steady heightening in the cheating behavior of students, and more than 70% students have admitted some form of cheating (Hutton, 2006). In developing countries like Pakistan, Cheating among students (cheating on exam, copying the work of other people) is the most common practice. There are many researchers, who have proved cheating behavior among students. Whitley (1998) study showed that 70% students involved in cheating behavior, 43% out of these cheated in exam, and rest of them involved in plagiarizing and assignments. The study of McCabe and Trevino (1996) also showed three types of cheating among students with different rate. Cheating on exam was reported by 70% students, cheating on written assignment and improper assistance for assignments were reported by 84% and 50% respectively. Over the years, cheating rate is moving upward. This increase in student cheating behavior is also proven by the study of Schab (1991). According to this study, in 1969 33% students admitted cheating behavior, in 1979 60% admitted while in 1989 it was increased to 67%. The study of Ogilby (1995) also shows the rise in cheating behavior as 23 % in 1940 and 84% in 1982.

Cheating cannot be grade only as a student problem- it has long term impact and implications (Wideman, 2008). It is societal, institutional and as well as an individual problem. Although, most of individuals and organizations have concern for this ever increasing trend, they are unable to provide any ready to made solution and reverse back this trend. Therefore, it is essential to explore the reasons of cheating. Students are complaining about ever increasing workload and pressure and also doubtful about the usefulness and viability of study makes them to cheat (Parameswaran & Devi, 2006). Students participate in learning environment, but rewarded on the bases of achievements and success in exam. Cheating has become acceptable in most of societies; it justified to cheat more, to move ahead from others (Callahan, 2004). According to Vojak (2007) cheating is growing at faster pace, more importantly, it is also becoming socially acceptable. Non existence of penalties, lack of institutional policies, poor instructors, and more opportunities for cheating are equally responsible for heightening this trend.

Regrettably, previous studies indicate that cheating rate in business students is higher than other studies (McCabe & Trevino, 1995; Rettinger & Jordan, 2005). Both, Graduates and undergraduates of business studies have similar attitude for academic dishonesty (McCabe et al, 2006). Despite, widespread course contents and importance of business ethics in management studies, business students have shown more cheating behavior than others. Harris (1989) also found that they also exhibit lower ethical behavior compare to others. Similarly, Caruana & Ewing (2000) study revealed that cheating rate in business students is much higher compared to engineering, sciences, and humanities students.

The study of cheating behavior among students is very important because this has relationship with misconduct behavior at workplace. As, some studies proves the relationship between frequency of cheating at college and

propensity to cheat at workplace (Nonis and Swift, 2001; Lawson, 2004). The students who have likelihood of cheating at school will definitely show the same behavior at workplace (Sims, 1993; Crown & Spiller, 1998; Granitz & Loewy, 2007). According to Fass (1990) students who are dishonest, like to be more corrupt and cheat in athletics, taxes, and all the other part of business. Dishonesty at work place is a common feature of business graduates, who cheat. Therefore, cheating is warning and alarming situation for future unethical behavior, which will prevail in all parts of business and may be root cause of another financial crises.

Literature Review on “Why student cheat”

Almost, all the concerned parties and stakeholders of higher education in Pakistan are in agreement that cheating has become challenging issue. In literature, we would found many causes, to answer the question why student cheat.

Many studies have been conducted to find the relationship between student cheating behavior and his/her motivation. There are two types of students motivation, internal motivation (e.g. to gain knowledge) and external motivation (to get good marks in tests). Most of studies showed that the students who are internally motivated cheat less, compared to the students whose motivation is external. According to the study of Rettinger & Jordan (2004), students having internal motivation to learn the material show less cheating behavior, than those having external motivation to get good grades. Student, whose motivation to become master of subject (internal motivation), cheat less than of those whose motivation is to get good marks in the class (external motivation) (Eison et al, 1986; Murdock et al, 2001). Therefore, it confirms that students who are internally motivated likely to be more seeker for knowledge, and show less cheating behavior, compared to their counterpart (Newstead et al., 1996). The fundamental motivation for students to cheat is to get good grades and ultimately good jobs. Rettinger & Jordan (2005) found that students have high concern for their grades which make them to indulge in cheating. Most of study students study with primary goal to get handsome jobs- but they remain indifferent to find out ways to get the job (either by getting high grades or skills and knowledge) (Timiraos, 2002).

Cheating attitude among the peers or friends consider to be very influential factor for the adoption of cheating behavior (Del Carlo & Bonder, 2003). However, in previous studies, some controversial results have been found. The research of Jordan (2001) showed the relationship among the student cheating behavior and its peer behavior towards cheating. The students, who cheat have higher estimation of cheating among students as compared to the non cheaters (Myrick, 2004). Genereux and McLeod (1995) also state that cheating behavior among student is influenced extensively due to the estimation of occurrence of cheating among the peers.

Lack of institutional policies regarding cheating, no effective communication from institution towards students, encourages them to cheat (Martin, 2005). According to McCabe and Trevino (1993) students understanding of institutional policy and their academic dishonest behavior have strong links with each other. If students have little information about institutional policy for cheating, they show more dishonest behavior (Macdonlad & Carroll, 2006). Students who have little information about institutional policy cheat more as compared to those having better information (Jordan, 2001). Aaron (1992) found that cheating behavior of students can be successfully reduced through effective communication and implementation of institutional policies.

Poor instructor can also be a major of source academic dishonest behavior of students (Rabi et al, 2006). If instructor remains unable to deliver knowledge effectively, also fails to raise internal motivation among students, students may get involve in cheating behavior (Anderman, 2007). Jensen et al (2002) found 19 reasons to cheat among the students and poor instructor was responsible for one of the main five reasons. Students consider low moral responsibility to avoid cheating, if instructor is too poor to actively involved in learning process (Ashworth, Bannister, & Thorne, 1997).

Courses, student study may also determine the cheating behavior of students. Some researches proved that the business students cheat more than non business students. One reason of this, may be business students are more concerned for jobs than non business students. According to McCabe and Trevino (1995) cheating behavior is relatively higher among business students as compared to others. The study of Crown and Spiller (1998) also proved that there is more tendency of unethical behavior among business students than non business students.

Mostly, students have desire to get good marks. They want to get ahead of other fellows. This desire may lead them towards cheating behavior. According to Simkin & McLeod (2010) study, most of students cheat, due to their desire to remain ahead of their fellows. Existing trend of cheating may also encourage student to indulge in this behavior (Simkin & McLeod, 2010).

If students are punished like assigning zero mark for cheating in test or copying the assignments, cheating trend may be reduced. Due to the lack of these penalties, cheating behavior may be raised (Simkin & McLeod, 2010). Presence of perceived penalties risk will make students less willing to take risk of cheating (Michaels & Miethe, 1989). Moreover, if students realize that they may be able to hide their cheating, cheating becomes common feature (McCabe & Trevino, 1993).

Technology has created some new and easier ways of cheating (McCabe et al, 2006; McCabe, 2009; Lipka, 2009; Mayhew et al, 2010). Abdolmohammadi and Baker (2008) found that one-third of their undergraduate students and over 20 percent of their graduate students were copied from web sources. One possible explanatory

factor may simply be “opportunity.” Although such happenstance might not apply in proctored-examination environments, this explanation seems more appropriate in situations where students have access to online resources. In a study of plagiarism, for example, Abdolmohammadi and Baker (2008) found that the papers from over one-third of their undergraduate students and over 20 percent of their graduate students were copied from web sources. Neither “opportunity to cheat” (“availability”) nor “time demands” seemed to strongly influence student cheating behavior.

Methodology

The key question researchers would like to ask “why business students cheat?” this study began with a basic tenant, in depth literature, highlights that cheating is not accidental, infrequent, and impulse deed, instead it is deliberate, intentional, and desperate act of students, which demand some key attention and planning.

The study included the entire undergraduate and graduates students of Management Sciences of The Islamia University of Bahawalpur for the academic year 2011-12. Taking only discipline from one University is appropriate for three reasons. First, cheating rate varies in different disciples. Second, business students have highest cheating rate (Harding et al, 2004). Third, business students have to face ethical issues more frequent than any other discipline. Total population of study was 760 and sample size of this study was 150. The ages of participant lie 18-25.

The survey designed to explore the perception and attitude of students regarding cheating, it typically includes cheating in exam, assignments, and projects. Questions were strongly influences from the studies of McCabe & Trevino (1993), Cochran et al (1999), McCabe, Trevino & Butterfield (1999), Kisamore et al. (2007). The questions of why students adopt cheating behavior, which were general as well as specific, designed to get empirical finding, not based on the theory. 31 questions items included in this study in the form of multiple choice and Likert scale questions. Five point Likert scale with 1 representing strongly agree and 5 shows strong disagree, to measure the response of students why they cheat. The measure on the bases of some useful and successful research and survey conducted in previous studies, as well as considering literature review.

Findings and Discussion

Table: 1 Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	No. of Items
.693	.690	31

Table: 2 Why Student Cheat

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
1. It is instructor 's responsibility to prevent cheating	2.02	1.144	1.270	.972
2. I would cheat because other students cheat more frequently than I do	2.17	1.134	.605	-.525
3. I would cheat because helping someone else cheat is not as bad as cheating myself	2.34	1.104	1.080	.587
4. I would cheat because to avoid getting a poor or failing grade in class	2.35	1.205	.642	-.497
5. I would cheat because if I had studied really hard for an exam but it was not going well	2.43	1.183	.621	-.679
6. I would cheat because just to get grades good enough to compete with other students at this department	2.43	1.071	.492	-.619
7. I would cheat because exams are too hard	2.45	1.213	.419	-.885
8. If a good friend asked me to cheat for them I would not be able to say no	2.47	1.191	.648	-.448
9. It is my responsibility to prevent cheating	2.51	1.151	.492	-.300
10. If I saw another student is cheating I would nothing	2.55	1.207	.515	-.537
11. I would cheat because to avoid letting my family down if I failed	2.59	1.248	.414	-.820
12. I would cheat because too great a workload at University	2.63	1.277	.457	-.849
13. I would cheat for monetary and other reward everyone does cheating in my class	2.69	1.238	.187	-1.047
14. I would cheat because will fail otherwise	2.69	1.300	.403	-.964
15. I would cheat because in a class if it seemed that everyone else was cheating	2.72	1.106	.123	-.583
16. I would cheat because not enough time to make preparation for exam	2.72	1.332	.459	-.997
17. It is student 's responsibility to prevent cheating	2.73	1.384	.198	-1.225
18. I would cheat because I had not time to study properly for a test	2.75	1.274	.297	-1.027
19. I would cheat because I want to claim command and understanding of subject	2.84	1.100	.261	-.553
20. I would cheat because I want to prove that I am genius by getting CGPA and marks by any mean	2.90	1.191	-.094	-1.068
21. I would cheat because the instructors had not discussed the penalties for cheating in their courses	2.95	1.219	-.099	-.987
22. I would cheat because the classes are small	3.01	1.207	-.059	-.922
23. I would cheat because the institution had not an honor code that clearly described what constituted cheating and penalties for cheating	3.02	1.338	-.020	-1.148
24. I would cheat because invigilators are not perform their duty well	3.05	1.338	-.137	-1.184
25. I would cheat because invigilators are not in required number	3.08	1.354	-.015	-1.211
26. I would cheat because if doing so helped me retain my financial assistance	3.09	1.101	-.065	-.737
27. I would cheat because of parental pressure	3.12	1.366	-.027	-1.235
28. I would cheat because I am very lazy	3.24	1.413	-.247	-1.292
29. If I saw another student is cheating I would confront the student	3.37	1.039	-.311	-.232
30. Cheating is necessary part of life	3.51	1.294	-.505	-.869
31. If I saw another student is cheating I would report the student to the instructor	3.72	1.165	-.597	-.701

The aim of this study was to investigate major factors for rising cheating behavior among business students. In order to know the most important factors for cheat, we computed means and standard deviations.

The results indicate that teacher is the most responsible person for cheating behavior among the students. Previous studies also confirm, teacher has most influential role on cheating (Crown & Spiller, 1998; Whitely, 1998; Rebecca et al, 2008). Lenient teacher attitude and less vigilance from him, increase the cheating rate (McLoed, 1995), on the other hand, more vigilance, taking essay type exams, and creating appropriate distance between them reduce the chances of cheating. Similarly, exam structure and content also crucial, students cheat when they face confusing and out of course exam.

Like previous studies, too many students perceive cheating is common, and they cheat because other does so. Results show, after teacher, peer behavior is the second most influential factor for students to cheat. This study confirmed that teachers and peers are much more important than perceived certainty of being reported and fear of penalties (McCabe et al., 2002; McCabe et al., 2006). It is also more important than understanding of institutional policies and integrity. Academic integrity policies and invigilation policies are not significant factors for students, it may be enforced weakly and have some loop fall in the system.

Students grade their laziness, no punishment system, and making complains about others about their cheating behavior is little source of concern for them- when cheating practices are common. Results also indicate that for students, cheating is not misconduct act as well as not because of they cannot good grades and marks, it is just because it is common.

Major findings of this study reveals that contextual factors (like teachers' attitude, peer cheating behavior, and perceived level of penalties from institution), compared to individual factors. Students perceive that faculty members are not take academic dishonest insensitively, this conduct makes cheating more acceptable (MaCabe, 1993).

Suggestions

Faculty members can play most powerful role to eradicate academic misconduct. They need to develop some strategies to lessen the students' perception that other peers cheat. They should develop multiple versions of question papers, it will help in two ways, one student may not be able to cheat, and second it will send a message to student that teacher has high concern for unethical behavior. Faculty should academic integrity policies among student, and also follows them firmly; otherwise cheating will become norm of the department. Academic institutions should built intolerant approach toward academic dishonest behavior. Most of student cheat, listening from other students that they remain ahead through cheating, in counter part of this, promote those who suffer from negative consequences of cheat.

Institution must emphasize about cheating act and honesty, especially to 1st semester student, trough orientation programs and in context of some specific courses. These programs should motivate the students by showing the importance of personal excellence and having a command on subject rather to get good grades, this may reduce the academic dishonesty, both in situation of course and institution. Higher extrinsic motivation and low mastery boost the cheating. Therefore, internal motivation and mastery should be enhancing, focusing on weak students individually.

Conclusion and Limitation

This study provides most important reasons for cheating in business students, contributes to rising literature on why student cheat, and provides the ways to reduce its incidence. Meanwhile, the reasons are so many for cheating, ranging from low involvement of teachers to peer pressure, external motivation to express his command on subject, family pressure to extra workload, easy opportunity for cheating to lower enforcement of academic integrity. This paper concludes that external environment-peer pressure and attitude of teacher to stop cheating are the leading factors on the propensity to cheat.

The study was restricted in extent to business students, one department of one university. Even though, results may relevant to business students, but may not relevant to other region and disciplines. Data were collected on the bases of self-reported; there are chances of some biased responses. Study also had not collect required information of personal data like GPA.

This study characterizes a step onward to understand and get justification of business student in context of developing country, to know why student cheat. Some, longitudinal studies are required to confirm the findings of this study.

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