

Cheating on Exams : A Justifiable behavior ?

A Case Study in Causes and Remediation

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Abstract :

Academic honesty has been a perennial issue in higher education. Unfortunately, the advent of technological devices has spurred much concern regarding the inappropriate use of these tools and their impact on the ethical behavior of the students. This study is designed to (a) obtain an estimate of the extent of cheating in examinations **from the perspective of university students**. And (b) to find out the 'whys' which push the students to resort to cheating. The results, based on a sample of 100 hundred students from the English language department indicate that 85 % the students have cheated during their higher education examinations. 70 % of the sample admit that they will cheat whenever an opportunity develops. 75 % of the population held the perception that cheating in exams is caused by the focus on memory rather comprehension. 64 % think that they cheat on exams because they are not prepared. The currents results might be applicable to students in other academic disciplines.

Key words: Assessment, examinations, cheating in exams, causes, remediation, Multiple Intelligences theory.

Introduction:

Historically, academic honesty has been a crucial element in the advance of research and education. However, with the advent of technological

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devices, cheating has become omnipresent in our classrooms. This academic misbehavior, though considered illogic, immoral, and even sinful for some students, has invaded schools and is destroying the ethics of education. Recent estimates indicate that most of the students all over the world cheat to some extent and the number of cheater is rising more and more (Paton, 2010) . The USA, the cradle of education development and innovation, is also suffering from this phenomenon. A CNN investigation (2012) has found that “ For years, doctors around the country taking an exam to become board certified in radiology have cheated by memorizing test questions, creating sophisticated banks of what are known as "recalls" . In an article entitled “Today's kids view cheating as part of the path to success” , Dorff (2012) wrote that “Students, parents, teachers and administrators complain that there is too much cheating going on in our schools, but they tend to point at each other when asked who should be responsible for fixing the problem”. In UK, the situation is not different at all. According to an investigation by the Independent (2012) “Tens of thousands of students in universities across Britain have been caught cheating in exams and coursework – and the trend is on the rise”.

Almost everybody has succumbed to the use of inappropriate resources to get high grades in exams. Grades have become the major focus of most students. Verily, cheating has turned a big dilemma and has reached epidemic proportions in our schools. It is not stopping. On the contrary, it is skyrocketing. What is wrong with higher education today? How can we remedy?

This article is an attempt to highlight the main causes of this academic misconduct, its causes and suggest some solutions to plummet it.

Research questions

- What are the main motivations behind cheating in class?
- What are the factors that influence dishonest academic behavior?
- What, if anything, should be done to prevent it?

Method

The study was conducted by formulating a survey consisting of twelve multiple choice items pertaining to academic cheating (see appendix). The purpose of these questions was to analyze whether cheating is more common on examinations in the English language department as well as to find out the main motivations behind this academic dishonest behavior. The study stressed confidentiality and the student's anonymity in order to increase students' participation and obtain reliable responses.

The survey was randomly distributed to second-year students in the department of English, during class time. This manner of distribution was an attempt to ensure the participation of most of the students. Out of the 120 surveys distributed only 100 were returned. By combining each student's individual results, we could determine the factors which motivate students to cheat and student's attitude to cheating. Finally, the results were tabulated as percentages.

Results

Following the collection of data, it was found that 85% of the students surveyed had personally engaged in cheating. Another very high number, 70%, expressed their readiness and willingness to cheat on exams whenever possible. As for the factors which motivated students to cheat, analysis yielded the following results:

Motivating factors	Percentages
a. Low instructor vigilance.	17%
b. Exams focus on memory rather than comprehension	75%
c. Academic overload	45%
d. Narrowly spaced exam seating	14%
e. Lack of self-confidence that they can pass	46%
f. Students are not prepared for the examination.	64%
g. Students like cheating.	28%
h. Students believe everyone cheats	18%

Table 1. Motivating factors

Attitudes towards cheating	Percentages
1. Have you ever cheated in exams?	Yes: 85%
2. If the teacher leaves the exam hall for one reason or another, and you notice that students start cheating, will you do the same?	Yes: 70%

Table 2. Attitudes towards cheating

As can be seen in the table, 75% of the participants believe that item b, 'Exams focus on memory rather than comprehension', is the main factor behind cheating. , Item f, 'Students are not prepared for the examination, comes as close second with 64%. The lack of self-confidence with 46% is another important factor behind misbehaviour during exams.

When the respondents were asked whether they had ever cheated on

exams, it was found that an alarming rate, 85% had cheated on exams. Answers to the last question, which surveyed the students' readiness and willingness to cheat on exams whenever possible, 70% of the students responded with 'yes'.

We may deduce that cheating is a causing so much harm to education, and we have to think deeply and scientifically about how to reduce it, because eradicating it appears to be an impossible mission.

Teacher should remember that cheating is an art and a skill. It is not an easy task. It requires a war like training. Students use it as a response to a threat and they have the right to defend themselves. Remove this threat and students will stop cheating.

We might learn a lesson from a student cheater who sent the following letter to his teacher explaining why students are motivated to cheat on exams:

Dear teachtator,

Yes, I know you are bored to death by academic dishonesty. YOU are complaining about my cheating in exams. YOU are working hard to prevent me from cheating. YOU can't do it simply because YOU are the source of cheating. Remember, Cheating is unstoppable. It ends only when YOU end..... Check, Cheat and Teach" are one same word. same letters... and a same meaning.

YOUR examinations are boring and painful.They caused my breakdowns...No one can help. Cheating is my saver, my aspirin, the killer of the pain.

Teacher, YOU should remember that cheating is an art and a skill. It is not an easy task. It is a war job. Students use it as a response to a threat and they have the right to defend themselves. And the threat is YOU. Remove this threat and students will stop cheating.

You covered my eyes with blinkers to keep me looking in the direction YOU are dictating. Cheating rescued me. It taught me how to roll my eyes here and there to see the answer sheets of my schoolmates. My visual style has considerably improved.

YOU trained me how to keep quiet and stick to my seat like the statue of liberty. Cheating broke my handcuffs and freed me. My hands moved everywhere to gather answers. They copied the answers smarter and faster than ever. They broke the record.They are very useful now.

My feet engaged their brain and became practical and helpful. They kicked the chairs, the tables and the legs of my classmates to let them know that I want to cheat and I got what I want.

My poor neck who used to obey the position of my head (I would say YOUR head) won its liberty. Of course, thanks to cheating, it could stretch either ways to search for answers. It's become a true gymnast. I can say that cheating has improved my kinesthetic intelligence.

Teacher, my ears were allergic to knowledge. They turned sick and deaf whenever they heard YOUR voice. Cheating healed them. It gave them their true role: they became sensitive to the softest whispers and got what schoolmates said. Cheating has developed my auditory learning style.

Teacher, YOU wanted me to learn everything by heart, to store YOUR huge futile stuff in my brain. YOU wanted me to become a parrot. But cheating taught me that the best place to store information is the cell phone and the MP3. I did it and these devices helped me to cheat on exams and get high scores. Now, technology is my partner. I love it and can manipulate it efficiently. Before, I was technology illiterate. I hated to use it. YOU were the cause, teachtator.

Cheating has turned me Healthy, Smart, and successful. It has solved my problems and has helped me develop my multiple intelligences.

Sincerely yours,

Recommendations / Suggestions

A lot of developed countries educational authorities are now targeting schools with detection equipment designed to identify pupils using illegal technological devices. Still, they are unsuccessful: students cheat, beat the records and succeed. They must know that cheating cannot be stopped as far as exams design encourages and motivates students to cheat. We can suggest tips to eliminate cheating until doomsday, but cheating remains omnipresent. Abolishing it starts with providing students with exams which offer a variety of questions that appeal to the various intelligences that exist in the average classroom. Then, all the students will have exercises that appeal to them based on their multiple intelligences. When they feel they are likely to be successful in these activities, they do not think of cheating at all. On the contrary, the feeling of success enhances additional learning.

Hence, teachers should avoid tests which put too much emphasis on rote learning. Instead, they should emphasize higher-order thinking which sets students to analyze, synthesize and create.

Traditional testing methods are inherently biased in favor of students with strong linguistic and mathematical skills and do not reflect the diversity of intelligences in the classroom. (teachervision , 2012) To differentiate between

traditional and MI based assessment we suggest the following table:

Traditional Assessment	MI Based Assessment
Mastery of Facts and Contents	Genuine understanding of the process of learning
Facts are mastered for a test	Facts are used as tools for solving problems
Testing memory	Comprehension and problem solving

Table 3 Traditional and MI Based Assessment

Thus, in order not to get lost, teachers should focus on the features of MI based assessment (table above) whenever designing a test. They should also bear in mind that testing based on MI should be closely related to authentic assessment. It should link classwork to authentic experiences. According to teachervision (2012) MI based assessment offers efficient tips to design a fair assessment

- Emphasize ongoing assessment and progress.
- Introduce assessment to your students as a regular part of classroom life
- Make assessment a part of the learning process, not a stressful, intimidating "event."
- Try to use instruments, tools, and procedures that embrace some, if not all, of the multiple intelligences.
- Use a wide range of assessment tools to measure students' skills and abilities.

Furthermore, to create efficient assessment strategies, educators should familiarize themselves with students' multiple intelligences. Knowing these intelligences can help teachers build tests accordingly and successfully. They can help you choose approaches that will reach them most effectively. Here are some very important strategies that can make assessment fair and intelligent: (teachervision ibid)

Linguistic

- Ask students to write in a journal regularly.
- Give oral exams and/or essay tests.
- Emphasize creative writing – have students write poems, plays, and stories.

Logical/Mathematical

- Have students complete logic problems and games.

Bodily/Kinesthetic

- Challenge students to write and perform plays.
- Have students build models or use other hands-on techniques to show what they learned.

Visual/Spatial

- Invite students to create collages, murals, and posters.
- Encourage students to illustrate their ideas using maps, charts, and graphs.
- Help students use school equipment to make a video or slide show.

Interpersonal

- Stage a classroom debate.
- Have students work collaboratively to brainstorm and prepare a project.

Intrapersonal

- Ask students to identify their own academic strengths and weaknesses.
- Have students think of personal goals and give progress reports.

Musical

- Challenge students to identify and explain patterns in music or poetry.
- Ask students to write new lyrics to familiar melodies or to compose a new song.

Naturalist.

Invite students to lead classmates on a nature walk to point out interesting plants and animals they found during independent study.

Ask students to keep environmental journals and to share their observations

Conclusion

Cheating is a problem we will continue to face. It undermines integrity and fairness at all levels. It can lead to weak life performance and corrode our society. Educational testing services should remember that students are not born to cheat. They are pushed to cheat because of the way teachers design tests. Implementing multiple intelligences assessment strategies would solve the problem and ensure better performance.

Combining authentic assessments with multiple intelligence strategies provides students with the appropriate opportunity to meet high performance standards. Thanks to them, students' attention switches from mastery of facts and contents

to a genuine understanding of the process of learning. Facts and figures are mastered not for a test but as efficient tools for solving problems, achieving projects and above all, exploring new dimensions of learning. Assessment, according to the theory of multiple intelligences begins with a focus on problem-based learning. This type of learning starts with the assumption that students, whatever the grade, may know a little about a particular problem, but thanks to the appropriate use of the different intelligences, the students can solve the problem. This strategy helps the teacher forget the "memory tests" and urges him or her to help students assess their knowledge of any subject as well as their problem solving logic. Knowing how they solve a given problem, students grow rich in the development of their multiple abilities to solve any problem they might encounter in any other domain. In this context, assessment, instead of focusing on memory, encourages students to promote insight and challenges them to make creative use of their many intelligences not only in class but in their daily life as well.

Appendix

Survey

Date: Gender : male /___/ Female /___/

Instruction: Please tick the appropriate box or complete the answer.
Choose the answer which represents your opinion.

Question 1: Why do students cheat in exams?

1. Low instructor vigilance. /___/
2. Exams focus on memory rather than comprehension /___/
3. Heavy overload /___/
4. Narrowly spaced exam seating . /___/
5. Lack of self-confidence that they can pass. /___/
6. Students are not prepared for the examination. /___/
7. Students like cheating. /___/
8. Students believe everyone cheats /___/

Question 2: Have you ever cheated in exams?

Yes : /___/ No:

Question 3: If the teacher leaves the exam hall for one reason or another, and you notice that students start cheating, will you do the same?

Yes: /___/ No: /___/

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