

COLLEGE STUDENTS' CHEATING BEHAVIORS

SEVAL EMINOĞLU KÜÇÜKTEPE
Marmara University

I explored the reasons given by college students for cheating during scholastic examinations. The participants were 26 students from Marmara University in Turkey. It was observed that most of the students identified cheating as taking reminder notes into an examination, getting help during the examination, or theft of knowledge. The tendency to cheat in a variety of ways was found to be high, particularly with regard to the preparation of cheating materials before the examination. While some students justified helping friends they are close to or who they observe as having difficulties, others considered it immoral and refused to be involved in the activity of cheating. Lastly, students generally did not feel regret if the examination consisted of questions where the answers depend solely on memorization or if there was a common belief that the lesson would have no use for their future career or lives.

Keywords: college students, academic dishonesty, cheating, plagiarism, scholastic examinations.

The institutional concept of cheating or plagiarism is considered a form of academic dishonesty (Godden, 2001; McCabe & Pavela, 2000). The Turkish Language Association (1988) defined *cheating* as “secretly benefiting by preparing correct answers to examinations in advance from a source or obtaining them directly from a person during the examination.” Cheating, therefore, means accessing unauthorized sources during examinations or academic homework, or coercing others to prepare work for you, instead of answering the questions yourself. It can also involve planning to secretly access sources during the examination or helping others to cheat (Semerci & Sağlam, 2005; Tan, 2001). *Plagiarism*, as defined in the Grand Dictionary of Turkish Language (Turkish Language Association, 1988), is the partial or total appropriation of another

Seval Eminoğlu Küçüktepe, Curriculum and Instruction Department, Atatürk Education Faculty, Marmara University.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to: Seval Eminoğlu Küçüktepe, Curriculum and Instruction Department, Atatürk Education Faculty, Marmara University, Turkey.
Email: sevalek@marmara.edu.tr

individual's work, theft of words and script, or literal theft. Kibler, Nuss, Peterson, and Pavela (1988) defined academic dishonesty as forms of cheating and plagiarism that involve students giving or receiving unauthorized assistance in an academic exercise or receiving credit for work that is not their own. Pavela (1978, p.78) provided the following definitions of the various types of *academic dishonesty*: Cheating is "intentionally using or attempting to use unauthorized materials, information, or study aids in an academic exercise." Fabrication is "the intentional and unauthorized falsification or invention of any information or citation in any academic exercise." Facilitating academic dishonesty is "intentionally or knowingly helping or attempting to help another violate a provision of the institutional code of academic integrity." Plagiarism is "the deliberate adoption or reproduction of ideas, words, or statements of another person as one's own without acknowledgement."

In 1964 Bill Bowers conducted the first studies on academic cheating, revealing that 75% of respondents had cheated at least once in their lives (as cited in Blachnio & Weremko, 2011). Since that time the tendency towards cheating – which is, in essence, dishonesty and, therefore, a serious problem – has increased in many countries, including Turkey (Blachnio & Weremko, 2011; Bozdoğan & Öztürk, 2008; Diekhoff, LaBeff, Shinohara, & Yasukawa, 1999; Grimes, 2004; Lin & Wen, 2007; Lupton & Chapman, 2002; Paldy, 1996). Cheating can be viewed as both a moral and a social decision. Thus, a student's attitude about whether he/she personally believes cheating to be right or wrong is considered to be of great importance (O'Rourke et al., 2010). Researchers have noted that the tendency towards cheating increases during the later years of university study (Bekaroğlu, 2002; Carpenter, Harding, Finelli, Montgomery, & Passow, 2006; Paldy, 1996; Roig & Caso, 2005; Semerci, 2004; Semerci & Sağlam, 2005). Cheating is a conscious behavior that changes over time throughout the period of learning and acquisition in educational science faculties. In light of this, lecturers believe that a students' tendency to cheat will result in a decreasing quality of work in their future professional lives.

By investigating university students who are frequently involved in cheating, my aim in this study was to identify the behaviors students utilize to cheat and to find out why they do so rather than relying on their own ideas or knowledge.

Method

Participants

During the 2012–2013 academic year, 26 students from the University of Marmara volunteered to participate in this study. Of these students, 8 were from the Music Teaching Division, 3 from the French Language Teaching division, 6 from the Art Teaching division, 6 from the Turkish Language Teaching division, and 3 from the German Language Teaching division.

Data Collection

Data were gathered and derived from the students using semistructured interviews, a qualitative research technique, logged using voice recording devices. Results were gathered by two measurement and evaluation specialists and one Turkish language specialist, all of whom provided input into the necessary adjustments and revisions to the interview process. In order to determine if the questions included were comprehensive, I administered the interview to four students. The interview questions were suitable and we continued with this version of the interview form.

Data Analysis

Descriptive analysis was used to analyze the data by summarizing and commenting on each data point according to predetermined themes (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2008). Data were digitized and are presented in tables here.

Results and Discussion

On the semi-structured interview forms students were first asked how they would describe cheating. Responses are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. *Students' Descriptions of Types of Cheating*

Descriptions	<i>f</i>	%
It is the method that I chose in order to get a high mark for the lesson that I did not study all semester.	2	5.13
It is the help that I take from anybody nearby or from a piece of paper on which I have written answers beforehand when I feel my knowledge is insufficient.	4	10.26
It is a style of learning in the examination.	1	2.56
It is carbon paper on which I have copied answers, which is a reminder for the examination.	9	23.08
It is information written on the desk or on a piece of paper.	1	2.56
It is instant information.	2	5.13
It is sharing of information at a time you feel yourself hesitating.	1	2.56
It is a type of equipment, which makes you pass the examination.	1	2.56
It is a way to decrease the level of stress.	2	5.13
It is a thing that is very necessary.	1	2.56
It is a way for those who do not study to pass the examination.	1	2.56
It is a need for university students to cheat.	2	5.13
It is a method of knowledge theft.	4	10.26
It is labor force theft.	1	2.56
It is caused by the ambition to get a higher mark on the examination.	1	2.56
It is paper with the answers written on it.	2	5.13
It is laziness.	1	2.56
It is insolence.	1	2.56
It is caused by students not studying and cheating from their friends.	2	5.13
Total	39	100

In response to the questions “What is your idea of cheating?” and “How do you identify cheating?”, almost one fourth of participants said that they keep reminder notes and more than 10% solicited help from a person sitting nearby or from external reminder paper when they realized they were incapable of answering for themselves. Kaymakcan (2002) found that the number of students who claim that cheating is a theft of knowledge was 6.4%, which is lower than the figure of 10.26% gained in this study. This does not support Kaymakcan’s research findings. Most of the students in this study considered cheating as a simple reminder and an innocent way to get help, and tended to describe it in an innocuous way.

When students take an examination, they may encounter other students who are cheating. More than three quarters of the participants in this study had cheated from other students’ examination papers. According to the data I obtained, higher levels of interest in looking at the examination papers of others who are cheating had a positive relationship with increased tendency to cheat.

Table 2. *Reasons for Using Others’ Papers to Cheat During the Examination*

Reasons	f	%
I cheat if I did not prepare for the examination myself.	1	2.63
I cheat if I am not sure about my own knowledge.	1	2.63
I cheat as a way of confirming to myself what I have understood by looking at what others have done.	1	2.63
I cheat to help my close friends if they need my information.	3	7.89
I cheat in order to control the truth of my own written knowledge.	5	13.16
I cheat when I feel a contradiction among the questions.	8	21.05
I cheat when I have no idea about the answer to the questions.	10	26.32
I cheat as a result of overworking when it causes a loss of memory of knowledge I need in the examination.	2	5.26
I cheat even if I do not need to.	1	2.63
I cheat in order to get better marks than the students I dislike most.	2	5.26
I cheat when the examination will be graded by a curve system.	1	2.63
I cheat because I am afraid of not being able to graduate on time.	2	5.26
I cheat because I am much older than others and I need to start my career.	1	2.63
Total:	38	100

As can be seen in Table 2, students cheat when they do not know the answer to the question, if they are unsure of which of two plausible answers is correct, or if they feel the need to correct or control what they have previously written. Feeling the need to cheat by looking at others’ examination papers during the examination is primarily explained by either not knowing or being unable to answer the question, or vacillating between two similar answers to the question.

When asked “Do you cheat on every examination?” over 65% of participants responded affirmatively. This finding is similar to that of Kaymakcan (2002) who found that 63.5% of students had a tendency towards cheating with varying frequency

Table 3. *Reasons for Cheating on an Examination*

Reasons	f	%
The teachers cannot present the lesson effectively.	4	9.76
The teachers present the lesson as more difficult than it needs to be.	5	12.20
Students get low results from the first examinations.	2	4.88
Examinations are based on memorization.	18	43.90
Examinations are based on interpretation.	1	2.44
A teacher who comes from a different branch of education gives the lesson.	4	9.76
Students feel difficulty during the examination.	1	2.44
Students do not study for the examination.	2	4.88
The teachers overlook cheating during the examination.	4	9.76
Total	41	100

As can be seen in Table 3, almost half of students cheated when examinations were based on memorization; more than 10% cheated when teachers presented the lesson as more difficult than it actually is; and almost 10% cheated when teachers overlooked cheating during the examination, if lessons were taught by a teacher from a different branch of education, or when it was considered that a teacher could not teach the lesson effectively. Carpenter et al. (2006) found that perceptions of a teacher being incapable of effectively presenting a lecture caused an increase in the rate of cheating during examinations.

When students were asked “Before entering the examination room, do students really prepare cheating materials?” more than half of the students admitted to doing so. Most stated that they prepare cheating materials for only the examination itself. Over 65% of students attempted to cheat, close to 12% of whom claimed not to have made any advance preparation.

Table 4. *Methods of Preparing Cheating Materials*

The Methods	f	%
Writing on the desk.	17	8.06
Folding a piece of A4 paper into small sections into the shape of an accordion, and writing small cheats in the folds.	1	0.47
Writing cheats on the wall.	8	3.79
Folding a piece of paper with cheats written on it and inserting it into a rubber eraser.	4	1.90
Writing cheats on small pieces of papers.	17	8.06
Writing poems on the desk of cheats in English, German and French.	4	1.90
Downsizing worksheets using a photocopier machine.	5	2.37

Table 4 continued

The Methods	<i>f</i>	%
Writing or creating special schemes for cheating (such as DNA scheme).	12	5.69
Writing sentences using small letters into foreign language dictionaries, and noting those dictionary page numbers on the desk.	3	1.42
Arranging the seating plan to obtain the best angle for cheating from other students' papers.	20	9.48
Accessing Internet sources.	12	5.69
Using a transparent pen to prepare accordion-shaped, small pieces of papers and squeezing them into the pen.	2	0.95
Writing cheats using a special pen and tape to transfer script onto the paper from the tape, which is stuck to a friend's back.	5	2.37
Using SMS instant message services on mobile phones.	16	7.58
Using body language.	14	6.64
Exchanging examination papers with other students.	6	2.84
Hiding a book under the desk.	4	1.90
Preparing cheats in a different language, especially to be used in Turkish language lessons.	3	1.42
Preparing cheats by writing on their arms.	3	1.42
Recording cheats onto a mobile device.	3	1.42
Writing the cheats on a large piece of paper, downsizing them using acetate paper and putting them onto the desk.	6	2.84
Preparing a summary of examination topics and giving them to a friend who takes the written topics out of the classroom and during the examination attempts to transfer the answers using mobile device applications e.g., Bluetooth.	8	3.79
Writing cheats onto a plastic bottle.	11	5.22
Writing cheats on the underside of the desk.	3	1.42
Recording cheats onto an MP3 recording device and hiding it under their jackets so they can listen secretly using a hidden earphone.	1	0.47
Hiding written cheats in a pencil box.	4	1.90
Writing cheats on a rolled up piece of paper and hiding them under the desk.	4	1.90
Writing cheats on paper tissues and hiding them in a pocket.	3	1.42
Writing cheats on the palms of hands.	5	2.37
Writing cheats on a piece of A4 paper and placing it under the examination papers.	4	1.90
Using electronic devices, such as watches, which can take photographs.	3	1.42
On multiple-choice examinations, attempting to arrange a seating plan in order to cheat effectively.	5	2.37
Total	216	100

As can be seen in Table 4, students attempted to arrange seating positions in order to gain a vantage point to cheat from their friends, wrote notes on the desk, prepared small cheating notepads in advance, used mobile phone SMS instant messaging services, and used body language and signs to cheat. These research results are similar to those of Kaymakcan (2002) and Eraslan (2011), whose participants admitted that they tend to write on desks, cheat from a friend's

examination papers, and expose his/her examination paper to others during the examination. Conversely, the least used methods for cheating were using a transparent pen, using a piece of A4 paper folded in half like an accordion, and recording the examination information into a mobile recording MP3 device and attempting to listen through headphones hidden in a jacket.

Over three quarters of students who attempted to cheat planned to do so in advance.

Table 5. *Techniques to Aid Cheating Which are Prepared Before the Examination*

Technique	f	%
Sitting beside or behind students who have prepared well for the examination.	21	48.83
Developing secret codes or special body language for cheating.	4	9.30
Studying the lesson topics by sharing them with the other students.	1	2.33
Sitting either by the window or the door, but not at the front of the classroom.	2	4.65
Sitting by a trusted friend, one behind the other.	5	11.63
Sitting in a place where the lecturer cannot observe or follow the classroom properly.	3	6.98
Sitting near those who have studied hard, in order to copy from them for multiple-choice examinations.	7	16.28
Total	43	100

As can be seen in Table 5, the most commonly used cheating technique was sitting behind a friend who had studied well in advance for the examination. Sitting beside or behind a trusted friend, sitting by or near the classroom wall or preferring to sit by a window, and sitting near students who had worked hard, in order to copy from them, in multiple-choice examinations were also popular methods. I found that it is common practice to plan and organize the cheating technique before the examination. According to my findings, students who received help cheating on examinations are the same ones who help their friends to cheat, while those who did not want help to cheat are also the ones who refused to help others to cheat.

Table 6. *Reasons Given for Helping Others Cheat*

Reason	f	%
Because my friend has not studied for the examination.	12	10.43
To help someone who is in need.	18	15.65
To help friends not fail the examination.	8	6.96
Because I may need the same help in future examinations.	6	5.22
Because I studied with them before the examination.	8	6.96
If I realize that he/she is making a mistake on the examination.	3	2.61
If I have a close friendship with the person.	26	22.61

Table 6 continued

Reasons	<i>f</i>	%
Because I do not want them to fail the examination if it means that they will not graduate on schedule.	5	4.35
Because I feel sorry for them.	7	6.09
Because I put myself in their shoes.	3	2.61
To protect them from low scores that would affect their graduating marks.	3	2.61
To make him/her happy.	2	1.74
If I am sure I did well on my own examination.	1	0.87
To not break up a friendship.	7	6.09
To initiate a close friendship or to be social.	6	5.22
Total	115	100

As can be seen in Table 6, reasons for cheating were found to include the intention to help someone during the examination, to initiate a personal relationship, to help someone who is in trouble, and to help a friend who has not studied for the examination. The least common reason for helping others cheat was when the student's own examination went well and then they helped others cheat. Based on results from this study, the most common reason why a student would help another cheat during an examination was to initiate a personal friendship.

Table 7. Reasons Given For Not Helping Others Cheat on an Examination

Reasons	<i>f</i>	%
Helping others to cheat is immoral.	6	20.69
The person who wants to cheat does not attend the class regularly.	4	13.79
I do not want to share class notes with others.	3	10.35
The bell-shaped curve scoring method is not being used.	5	17.24
I do not want cheating students to get good grades.	4	13.79
I want to prevent cheating students from getting higher marks than others.	5	17.24
I do not want to help others cheat if they did not study for the examination.	2	6.90
Total	29	100

As can be seen in Table 7, the most common reason given for not helping others cheat during the examination was the belief that helping someone to cheat is immoral. The least common reason was that the students did not want to help if others had not prepared by themselves or had not studied for the examination.

Half of those who cheated stated that they felt disturbed or ashamed. Of note, over half of the students attempted to cheat on every examination despite feeling ashamed or disturbed.

Table 8. *Reason for Experiencing a Guilty Conscience During an Examination*

Reasons	<i>f</i>	%
I feel ashamed for cheating when I like the teacher.	3	25.00
I feel ashamed for cheating because I do not deserve the mark I will get.	5	41.67
I feel disturbed because what I am doing is fraudulent.	4	33.33
Total	12	100

As can be seen in Table 8, almost half of the students stated that they had a guilty conscience when they cheated on an examination because they think it is unfair to exploit another person's rights. One quarter of students felt guilty because they liked the teacher overseeing the examination.

Table 9. *Reasons for Not Experiencing a Guilty Conscience When Attempting to Cheat During an Examination*

Reasons	<i>f</i>	%
I do not feel guilty if the examination depends on memorization.	8	44.44
I do not feel disturbed because I do not think that what I am doing is fraudulent.	5	27.7
I do not feel disturbed if the information in this examination will not be needed in my future profession.	5	27.78
Total	18	100

As can be seen in Table 9, the most prevalent reason for not feeling guilt for cheating was when an examination depended on memorization. Students also did not feel guilty for cheating if they perceived that the information from the examination would not be needed in their future professions. It can be said that when examinations are designed to test nonfunctional information and skills, students are less likely to refrain from cheating.

Conclusion

Recommendation

In order to reduce the rate of cheating during examinations, lecturers should prepare relevant questions and ensure correct answers do not depend solely on memorization. Also, with regard to multiple-choice examinations, seating arrangements should be allocated by the lecturer rather than being influenced by the students. In order to prevent cheating preparation in the classroom, students should not be allowed in the classroom before the examination begins. Enforcing heavier penalties for probable cheating is also crucial for decreasing the rate of cheating. The prospective teachers who are studying at the Faculty of Education, in anticipation of future work in classrooms should be role models for their own

students in future years after graduation. For this reason, the cheating behaviors of college students requires further attention from researchers.

References

- Bekaroğlu, Ö. (2002). Scientific dishonesty in the world and in Turkey [In Turkish]. *Tuba Bulletin, Diary*, 22, 12-13.
- Blachnio, A., & Weremko, M. (2011). Academic cheating is contagious: The influence of the presence of others on honesty. A study report. *International Journal of Applied Psychology*, 1, 14-19.
- Bozdoğan, A. E., & Öztürk, Ç. (2008). Why do teacher' candidates cheat? *Elementary Education Online*, 7, 141-149.
- Carpenter, D. D., Harding, T. S., Finelli, C. J., Montgomery, S. M., & Passow, H. J. (2006). Engineering students' perceptions of and attitudes towards cheating. *Journal of Engineering Education*, 95, 181-194. <http://doi.org/q5j>
- Godden, D. (2001). *Plagiarism: A brief survey and report written for Education 750: Principles and Practice of University Teaching*. Retrieved from: http://www.researchgate.net/publication/237445892_Plagiarism_A_Brief_Survey_Report_Written_for_Education_750_Principles_and_Practice_of_University_Teaching
- Diekhoff, G. M., LaBeff, E. E., Shinohara, K., & Yasukawa, H. (1999). College cheating in Japan and the United States. *Research in Higher Education*, 40, 343-353. <http://doi.org/fvbk7g>
- Grimes, P. W. (2004). Dishonesty in academics and business: A cross-cultural evaluation of student attitudes. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 49, 273-290. <http://doi.org/dpf297>
- Eraslan, A. (2011). Prospective mathematics teachers and cheating: It is a lie if I say I have never cheated! [In Turkish]. *Education and Science*, 36, 52-64.
- Kaymakcan, R. (2002). Theology faculty students' attitudes about cheating [In Turkish]. *Sakarya University, Journal of Theology Faculty*, 5, 121-138.
- Kibler, W., Nuss, E., Peterson, B., & Pavela, G. (1988). *Academic integrity and student development: Legal issues, policy perspectives*. Asheville, NC: College Administration.
- Lin, C.-H. S., & Wen, L.-Y. M. (2007). Academic dishonesty in higher education: A nationwide study in Taiwan. *Higher Education*, 54, 85-97. <http://doi.org/dx25mp>
- Lupton, R. A., & Chapman, K. J. (2002). Russian and American college students' attitudes, perceptions, and tendencies towards cheating. *Educational Research*, 44, 17-27. <http://doi.org/bgbwxn>
- McCabe, D., & Pavela, G. (2000). Some good news about academic integrity. *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning*, 32, 32-38. <http://doi.org/cn2tct>
- Paldy, L. G. (1996). The problem that won't go away: Addressing the causes of cheating. *Journal of College Science Teaching*, 26, 4-6.
- Pavela, G. (1978). Judicial review of academic decisionmaking after Horowitz. *NOLPE School Law Journal*, 55, 55-75.
- O'Rourke, J., Barnes, J., Deaton, A., Fulks, K., Ryan, K., & Rettinger, D. (2010). Imitation is the sincerest form of cheating: The influence of direct knowledge and attitudes on academic dishonesty. *Ethics & Behavior*, 20, 47-64. <http://doi.org/cw3zvj>
- Roig, M., & Caso, M. (2005). Lying and cheating: Fraudulent excuse making, cheating, and plagiarism. *The Journal of Psychology: Interdisciplinary and Applied*, 139, 485-494. <http://doi.org/b76xct>
- Semerci, C. (2004). Medical faculty students' attitudes and opinions towards cheating [In Turkish]. *Firat University Journal of Health Sciences*, 18, 139-146.
- Semerci, C., & Sağlam, Z. (2005). Attitudes and ideas towards cheating of policeman candidates in exams [In Turkish]. *Firat University Journal of Social Science*, 15, 163-177.

- Tan, S. (2001). Prevention of cheating in exams [In Turkish]. *Education and Science*, 26, 32-40.
- Turkish Language Association. (1988). *Official dictionary of the Turkish language* [In Turkish]. Istanbul: Beyand.
- Yıldırım, A., & Şimşek, H. (2008). *Qualitative research methods in social sciences* (8th ed.) [In Turkish]. Ankara: Seckin.

