

Probe on Cheating in the Examinations : A Small- Scale Case Study

Dr. Ahmed Bashar, Department of Foreign Languages, University of Biskra - Algeria.

المخلص

يهتم هذا البحث أساسا بمحاولة الكشف عن الأسباب الخفية وراء قرار الطلبة الخوض في عملية يائسة، خطيرة، ولا أخلاقية للحصول على امتياز من توقع ما لضمان النجاح. لقد تبين أن عوامل ذاتية وكذا موضوعية تضافرت لتقرز الغش في الإختبارات. في نفس السياق، يمكن الزعم أنه تم -بوعي أو بغيره- برمجة الطلبة على الغش في الإختبارات بما أن محتوى الدروس صعب التحصيل، مربك، ممل، وتم شرحه والقاءه بشكل رديء. هذا ويبدو أن الأساتذة لم يأخذوا على عاتقهم بناء خطة لتدريب الطلبة على الإجابة في الإختبارات. مم يزيد الطين بلة هو شعور الطلبة أن الأساتذة مجحفون عندما يتعلق الأمر بالتنقيط وكذا عجزهم عن بناء خطة لتقديم feedback كاملا.

Abstract

The primary concern of the current paper is to attempt to disclose the underlying reasons behind students' decision to perpetuate a desperate, perilous, and unethical act to gain advantage of some sort to assure success. It attests that both subjective and objective factors coalesce to engender cheating in the examination. Furthermore, it could be claimed that students are conditioned to cheat as the course materials prove to be hard to grasp, confusing, boring, poorly explained and delivered. In the same vein, it appears that teachers do not plan to train students to answer their examination papers. This is most aggravated by the students' feeling that their teachers do not seem to be fair in scoring and fail to come up with thorough feedback.

Introduction

It may appear an exaggeration to put claim that cheating in the examinations (CIE) is an *endemic* phenomenon in the teaching-learning contexts. Historically, examinations and cheating in the examinations have a symbiotic relation like water and life, and which may be extremely difficult to dissociate. Instances of cheating in educational settings does not prove to be a recent phenomenon which cropped up as a result of mass education and/ or easy accessibility to online materials. In fact, instances of cheating in the tests have been recorded as far back as in Imperial China. *Subjective* (i.e., personality) as well as *objective* (i.e., situational) factors seem to coalesce to engender fraud in he examinations. Oftentimes, cheating is considered unethical practice, a wrongdoing, and a serious offense that deserves *unforgiving* sanctions. Still and all, it has rarely been studied dispassionately and scientifically in its own right far from traditional predispositions to impose disciplinary measures to deter this “cardinal sin”.

Cheating in the Examinations : What is it ?

Cheating in the examination is known to different people under different appellations. The available literature on the issue in question counts many phrases such as : malpractice, academic dishonesty, academic cheating, cheating in examination, and cheating on the test, etc. The preference throughout this paper is *cheating in the examination* (*henceforth*, CIE), and it is used occasionally interchangeably with other terms to fit in with some leading scholars’ quoted thoughts. Defining this issue from different perspectives would certainly add to the understanding of the evasive nature of the issue under investigation.

Oxford Advanced Learners’ Dictionary (OALD) identifies CIE as “ ... to act in a dishonest way to gain an advantage, especially in a game, competition, or exam, etc.”. Therefore, *CIE is a trick-intended stratagem to gain a favor in a high-risk situation where gain brings out personal gratification or disgrace in the opposite case.*

As for Kibler & Summer (1993, p. 253 cited in Webb, H. (2006) academic dishonesty or cheating refers to “student’s giving or receiving unauthorized assistance in an academic exercise or receiving

credit for the work that is not their own.” Differently stated, unauthorized assistance and appropriation of others’ work embody academic dishonesty. Hence, ***this definition concerns the procedural aspects of CIE.***

Cizek (2003) (cited in Wankel 2011 : 3-4) defines cheating as “... any action that violates the established rules governing the administration of a test or the completion of an assignment ; any behavior that gives one student an unfair advantage over other students on a test or assignment ; or any action that decreases the accuracy of the intended inferences arising from a student’s performance on a test or assignment”. A priori, three dimensions of cheating seem to characterize CIE according to Cizek : (1) breach of test rules, (2) unfair advantage, (3) lack of references, which, in wide brief, appears ***to outline the instances of CIE.***

Power (2008 : 72) defines cheating in the following terms “Cheating is a form of academic dishonesty, a violation of accepted standards or rules intended by students to gain an unfair advantage with respect to examinations, quizzes, course assignments, or any activity applied by the instructors to gauge students’ progress and/ or knowledge”. In other terms, violation of established rules and unfair advantage are linchpins of CIE according to this definition. ***This definition attests to stress the motivational causes (i.e., intentions) to undertake CIE.***

Overall, CIE is a serious, perennial misconduct, violation, malpractice which is symbiotic with instruction and examinations. By definition, academic dishonesty is usually understood to refer to the relative absence of scruples of any kind in academic undertakings. In a nutshell, CIE proves to be based on three dimensions : agents (*viz.*, students), motives, and procedures.

Nature of CIE

CIE manifests itself in different ways ; scholars point out to as many as five (05) types of procedures undertaken to achieve the schemes of boosting up marks. They can include the following acts of cheating, deception, fabrication, plagiarism, and sabotage. Each of the

aforementioned acts has its specifics. The grid below illustrates the acts of CIE and their illustration.

Types	Illustration
Cheating	Any attempt to give or obtain assistance in a formal academic exercise (like an examination) without due acknowledgment.
Deception	Providing false information to an instructor concerning a formal academic exercise—e.g., giving a false excuse for missing a deadline or falsely claiming to have submitted work.
Fabrication	The falsification of data, information, or citations in any formal academic exercise.
Plagiarism	The adoption or reproduction of ideas or words or statements of another person without due acknowledgment.
Sabotage	Acting to prevent others from completing their work. This includes cutting pages out of library books or willfully disrupting the experiments of others.

Table 1. Types of academic dishonesty

It should be acknowledged that each act (of cheating in examinations) has its controlling circumstances. For instance, *plagiarism*, the act of using the words of another without giving the originator credit, attests to be omnipresent in Master’s students’ theses while *cheating* (i.e., use and passing of unauthorized materials) characterizes periodic examinations.

Stratagems in CIE

In stressful, desperate moments such as CIE, every stratagem is allowed to guarantee a good, passing mark. And therefore, students try to use at least one and occasionally all available means to be able to get ahead. It seems that the more crowded the halls and classrooms, such is the case of the Algerian tertiary institutions, the more tempting CIE is. Oni (2013 : 683) corroborates “Cheating can well be encouraged when the examination halls are crowded ...”. Overcrowdedness makes invigilation a difficult undertaking, which adds to teachers’ discomfort and embarrassment as they find it hard to find another seat for suspects of cheating. On the other hand, “slacker” (or free rider) students, who refuse to furnish the effort to get ahead during the term, the situation proves to be *apropos*. In such situations, both traditional and modern methods coalesce to favor the chances of CIE (*see table below*).

Traditional Methods of CIE	Modern Methods of CIE
Crib notes	Mobile phones
Body “tattooing”	Calculators
Writing on desks and chairs and even walls	Invisible ink pens
Gesture-based signs	MP3
Coded coughs	SMS
Leaving for the Ladies/ Gents	Digital Cameras
Hidden materials in books/ dictionaries, etc.	Bluetooth
	Wireless headphones

Table 2. Methods of cheating

In fact, students’ innovative stratagems are constantly introducing new gadgets to facilitate CIE, which makes invigilation even more challenging and frequently embarrassing for many teachers. The embarrassment is even more intimidating when very poor achievers end up with “unexpected” high marks.

Contents of CIE

The temptation to undertake CIE appears to target certain specific materials. It may be sobering to indicate that students tend particularly

to resort to illicit means when it comes to memory-related contents. Memorization is a strategy that is highly esteemed and the yardstick whereby students' uptake and skills are gaged and eventually streamed (i.e., oriented). For the purpose of the present paper, an investigative round in the classrooms and lecture halls has been planned to collect what students write on the desks and chairs ; it has disclosed a long list of contents intended for cheating. The following list has been categorized in broad classes without reference to specific examples of intended-for cheating content :

- a. Definitions, especially those which are long and confusing ;
- b. Phonological transcriptions in case of phonology/ phonetics ;
- c. Syntactical/ grammatical rules ;
- d. Geographical names, especially if those are difficult to spell and/ or pronounce ;
- e. Biographical notes of famous historical and academic figures ;
- f. Features of theories, schools of thought, etc.
- g. Quotes/ citations to back up argumentation.

As a comment on the nature of the materials above, it turns out that students tend to resort to cheating to overcome memory loss and/ or confusion of certain crucial information which might eventually risk to lower their chances for good grades/ marks. According to Simkin and MacLeod (2010 ; in Schiphorst 2013 : 58) cheating is “not a random, accidental, or impulsive, but rather a premeditated, intentional, deliberate one that requires forethought and planning”. Differently stated, CIE is a premeditated act, which is in its essence *a desperate act carried out by a desperate student in a desperate situation for a desperate goal*.

Ethnography of CIE

CIE is not totally gender- or race-biased. In the common tertiary education lore, female students are, however, thought to be more inclined to undertake CIE. One study seems to support that claim :

Feldman and Feldman (1967, cited in Cizek 1999 : 92) found that female students in elementary schools indulge into CIE more than male students. In the studies conducted in the 1980's and 1990's in high schools and colleges (Baird, 1980 ; Baldwin *et al.*, 1996, cited in *ibid.*) male students attest to engage in CIE more than female students. The claim could be put that female students seem to “ditch” CIE as they grow up while male students seem to be lured by the illicit means as they mature.

In spite of being a universal phenomenon, CIE attests to be negatively perceived in practically all cultures and religions. A host of physical and financial rather than racial or cultural circumstances appear to encourage as well as control the pervasiveness of CIE. Rocha, Teixeira, Lupton and Chapton have drawn the grid below wherein different countries are juxtaposed in reference to the rates and beliefs about CIE :

	Austral ia	Chin a	Finlan d	Portug al	Russi a	U K	USA/Cana da
Exam Cheating	22	83	14	62	70.2	0	21
Plagiaris m	38	N/A	31	N/A	62.1	0	50
Homewo rk copying	40	N/A	22	N/A	84.3	8	8

Table 3. Comparison of cheating rates by country (Rocha & Teixeira 2010, Lupton & Chapman)

The rates clearly demonstrate that, overall, English-speaking countries appear to enjoy the lowest rates of CIE, which urged Pennycook (cited in) to claim that UK and USA champion academic integrity. Paradoxically, Anderman *et al.* report Calabrese and Cochran 1990 :

14-15) who estimate that “Caucasian students are more likely to cheat than their Hispanic and Asian counterparts. ... high SES private school students reported more cheating than students from the comparison public high school”. In multi-cultural societies such as the American, CIE rates prove to be higher in those social strata that traditionally enjoyed prosperous socio-economic status.

From an anthropological perspective, CIE is amazingly not mistaken for any other concept in modern societies. Arab students do not seem to hold different views on what it means a cheating behavior. Sumrain (1987, cited in Cizek, *op.cit.* 85) did not find any statistically significance between the (280 Arab and American) students’ perceptions regarding whether specific behaviors constituted cheating, although the mean ratings were lower. The low mean rating may be accounted on explicit Islam anti-cheating values [1]. In the final analysis, stressful, high stakes, competitive educational institutions are prone to encourage both good and poor achievers to undertake CIE.

Categories of CIE Behavior

What urges students to undertake CIE and undergo the risk of being apprehended in a desperate attempt to cheat ? In students’ self-reported questionnaires, researchers have identified two main categories of reasons : *Subjective* (or Personal) and *Objective* (or Situational).

1. **Subjective (or Personal) Reasons** : Prompted by personal reasons, students decide to engage in fraudulent academic acts. Justifications such as : I have no time to study/ my boss refuses to grant me time to study ; I have absolutely to work to fend for myself and family/ too many modules to study (i.e., lack of effort) / everybody cheats in college, why not me ? etc.
2. **Objective (or Situational) Reasons** : the external concerns such as professors do not seem to care/ professor assign too much assignments or homework/ materials too hard to revise or meaningless/ unfair professors/ overcrowded halls that encourage cheating, etc

Butterfly Effect of CIE

Butterfly effect (BE) refers to those tiny actions, which may seem insignificant in the immediate context, but may lead to drastic changes. Lappa (2009: 51) define this phrase as follows “... a butterfly wings might create tiny changes in the atmosphere that ultimately cause a hurricane to appear (or prevent a hurricane from appearing)”. By extension, CIE occurrence appears to be individual but its impacts on social and economic level may be devastating.

One common trait across the sample of CIE perpetrators is their denial of them being involved on *serious* wrongdoing. Students who have been indicted of CIE see themselves as scapegoats who are paying for others who have been able to get away with it. More to the point, they perceive their acts as purely individual instances with no real impact on other students and/ or their educational institution leave alone their country. Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg, the former German Minister of Defense, stated in the wake of his resignation over plagiarism scandal that he had not deliberately cheated but had seriously made errors. By personalizing the “serious errors”, CIE perpetrators seem to overlook the impact of their behavior on other people, institutions, and country.

Those who decide to experience CIE to solve immediate problems (raising their chances of succes) may never stop even after graduation and engaging in a professional career. In a study by Harding *et al.* (2004), it suggests that students who cheat in high school did carry on the malpractice in college. Professor McCabe “cheating in business starts with cheating on tests” (cited in Happel & Jennings 2008 : 189). With a large number of students who graduated by illicit means on the job market, economy proves to be the biggest loser. Hence, CIE affects the productivity of the economy by furnishing less competitive and less proficient workers.

Academic dishonesty affects the quality of trustworthiness of information commodity, the knowledge performance and abilities of students graduating from colleges and universities. “Cheating compromises the credibility of the educational system and the reputation of the motherland” (*ibid.*, 191). Consequently, CIE turns out to chip away at the reputation of individuals and institutions to which they belong. Hartly (1991) states “Universities are the critical conscience of the human society” (*ibid.*). CIE has proved to spell

indignation and disgrace on the institution and ultimately devalue the degree it provides. Although the modern world is replete with wrongdoing, illegal manufacturing, and fake products, no excuse seems to expiate a wrongdoing whatever its nature seems to be. That makes the English proverb that says “two wrongs do not make a right” even truer in the past as well as now. In the same vein, Olugbenro (2013 : 14) argues :

It is true that the global society is corrupt and instances of immorality are in the news everyday and everywhere, but the academe cannot afford to be caught in this web of corruption for too long ; it has to stand out to be different in order to fulfill its role of social transformation.

Integrity in educational institutions is a non-negotiable attitude and policy however understanding and empathetic should people be toward students’ misfortune of being involved in malpractice.

Research Methodology

By its very nature, the issue of CIE requires a paradigm that meets the drive and scope of the current study, which undertakes to explore the issue from students’ perspectives. On score of that, a descriptive-interpretive methodology appears to be *apropos*. On the *descriptive* level, the attempt is to describe the phenomenon of CIE by collecting quantifiable data through the survey method (i.e., questionnaire) with the premise of disclosing causal relationships between the population and the issue at hand. At the *interpretive* level, the attempt is on trying to understand the CIE phenomenon and find out the motivations of the students. CIE is perceived as a social construct, and therefore, the attempt is on trying to get access to the inner world of the generators of the process, analyze and establish connections, paradigms, and eventually drawing inferences.

Overall, the paper attempts to address the following questions :

1. What is CIE ?

2. What are the underlying reasons behind students' resort to compromised strategies to improve their grades ?
3. What type of exam tasks are more tempting to cheating ?
4. Is CIE gender-related ? Is it culture-related ?

Research Tool

The period of the examination attests to be quite stressful to both teachers and students. The situation becomes even more volatile with the total absence of examination guides, which leave the students uncertain of what they will encounter in the examination paper. This observation urged the present researcher to approach the “culprits” and informally gauge their attitudes toward CIE and their readiness to answer the questionnaire. This officious interview engendered a questionnaire that contains fifty-six (n= 56) question items, which has been specifically designed with a view of understanding the issue of CIE from –exclusively- students' perspective. It should be acknowledged that the questionnaire has been answered by willing students ; those who felt that this questionnaire indicts them of wrongdoing just refused to return it.

Population & Sample

In the inception period, it was planned to investigate only those students who had been indicted in cheating, but very few were apprehended and most “got away with it”. On score of that, it was decided that a larger population needs to be included, which was not an easy undertaking as many students pretended that they were strangers to the practice. As the population of the current investigation is fairly large (*viz.*, all the tertiary students of the English Department), the present researcher decided to restrain to the sample only those students who had the courage to cooperate (n= 150). The return rate, therefore, does not exceed 15% of the total number of surveyed students.

Research limitations

Scholars who have been engaged in researching CIE seem to be unanimous on the seriousness of the issue of academic malpractice which appears to be rampant and out of control. For this research to be

more conclusive, it needs to extend to more students across the Country's universities and over a couple of years.

Findings and discussion

1. Findings

It should be noted that only the most important items have been included for a cogent reason : The Algerian refereed journals require 15 pages at the utmost. To meet such a requirement, the paper will only focus on where surveyed students responded highest. 43.48% of the votes consider statement 1 (Section 4) "I hate the examination period because it is stressful" as reflecting their attitude toward examination periods. 38.46% of the votes assert that statement 7 (Section 5) "I consider cheating as a practice that enables students to compensate for poor teaching and absence of fair chance of evaluation." to account for their incessant attempts of fraud in examinations. 26.92% of the votes deem that statement 5 (Section 1) "I don't like cheating, but I have to do it." as mirroring their readiness to cheat. Another 26.92% of the votes point to statement 3 (Section 2) "The teacher never trains us to answer his/ her examination paper." to account for their being tempted to cheat. Yet another 26.92% of the votes indicate that statement 2 (Section 3) "The course materials are poorly presented." to justify their resort to cheating. Again another 26.92% of the votes go to statement 4 (Section 3) "The course materials are boring and meaningless." As an indicator of their decision to cheat. 23.27% of the votes consider that statement 8 (Section 1) "I cheat because I get confused ; there is too much information." to reflect their willingness to take the risk of cheating. 19.23% of the votes claim that statement 7 (Section 1) "I cheat because of lack of preparation." as a reference for their decision to cheat. Another 19.23% of the votes claim that statement 1 (Section 2) "The teacher's scoring/ evaluation seems unfair." to mean that they have grievances as far as their teachers' unfair approach to students' scoring and/ or evaluation. 14.79% of the votes deem that statement 7 (Section 4) "I hate exam paper because it is never followed by a serious and thorough teacher's feedback." to demonstrate their hopelessness of sticking to integrity standards.

2. Discussion

In their attempt to pass, students often fall prey to their anxiety or fear of failure, or not to rise up to their parents' expectations, and even to their student-student rivalry. Students are usually blamed *offhand* for cheating in the examinations, which may not always be fair. Teachers seem to be unaffected by, on the one hand, their inefficiency in bridging the gap between in-class instruction, content, tasks, and the format, layout, content, instructions, and, on the other hand, type of tasks included in the examination papers.

Students may be prompted to dishonest means on account of some teachers blatant resort to 'rigging' test marks favoring, thus, some students over others. For better or worse, teachers are in part responsible for students' incessant resort to cheating.

For a good many students undertaking a serious academic research is beyond their practice, and therefore, resorting to cheating seems the only way to meet the pressure of submitting a research project.

Teachers and administrators consider themselves in the forefront trying to defeat an enemy. These good samaritan crusaders often forget that they are the direct motors for cheating : When their instructions are hard and their rules a black hole (no one knows soberly about the line that separate academic misconduct and good academic integrity). It is worth of note to state that the websites of most Algerian universities do not spell out what they mean by cheating in exams. In other words, both administrators and staff take that students are well aware of what it means to cheat for granted.

Fair's fair, both teachers and students share responsibility in indulging in cheating. By overlooking students' grievances, teachers are but leading students to fraudulent behavior. By considering cheating as an acceptable practice for whatever reason, students, for better or worse, legalize that which is unlawful.

Unlike fair play which is usually rewarded in football competitions, academic integrity is not rewarded in the Algerian tertiary institutions. The pervasiveness of CIE mirrors the tolerance of the Algerian culture and mores toward other kinds of cheating such as economic monopoly, corruption, and bribes, etc.

Conclusion

Cheating in tests has been with us since times immemorial, but it has developed into a devastating hurricane with the advent of technology and easy access to online information. It seems that CIE has plagued classrooms ever since official and officious schooling was established. CIE is by a common consent (throughout educational institutions) deemed a *cardinal sin* that cannot be expiated. It could be boldly claimed that CIE is a desperate act, undertaken by a desperate student, and incited by a desperate education. CIE attests to occur when students unpreparedly (at least psychologically) feel out of the *comfort zone* out of which some teachers and circumstances coalesce to narrow down its boundaries. A priori, Students are felt to be *conditioned* to cheat : this researcher does not want to sound to victimize students, but they are conditioned to this *cliché* statement [2] *يوم الامتحان يكرم المرء أو يهان*. It might prove itself to be an epiphanical moment when teachers and administrators would come to realize one day that their anti-fraudulent behavior measures, which have as yet targeted to crack down on CIE, have been counterproductive as they have unintentionally enticed students to blatantly cheat in the examinations.

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What is Academic Dishonesty ?

<http://www.berkeleycitycollege.edu/wp/de/for-students/what-is-academic-dishonesty/>

German Defense Minister Resigns Over PhD Plagiarism Row
<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/mar/01/german-defence-minister-resigns-plagiarism>

1. According to Brickman (1961) (cited in Cizek 1999: 75) persons willing to take civil servant posts in China 10, 000 years ago needed to undergo searching for crib sheets in individual cells where they cannot budge for three days.
2. Anderson, J. (1998). Plagiarism, copyright violation, and other theft of Intellectual property. Jefferson, NC : McFarlane.
3. [1] ‘من غشنا فليس منا’ ‘He who cheats us does not belong to us’ Prophet Muhammed (PBUH) said.
4. On the day of the examination, the individual is either lauded or intimidated.

