

What motivates students to cheat?



This research is about what motivates students to cheat during an examination. There are many factors that may contribute in their motivation to cheat such as demands to obtain excellent grades, pressure from parents, self-imposed stress to succeed, and so on (McCabe, Trevino & Butterfield, 1999). 120 students of Sunway University were voluntarily chosen to participate in this study. Survey questionnaire that contains 11 questions was used to determine the factors that motivate them to cheat. Overall, it is found that students have higher tendency to cheat specifically when they have not been caught cheating in the past. Besides that, the confidence level of students in exams could also be a factor, since the result for this factor is normally distributed.

Living in a competitive world, whereby every individual is under pressure to obtain a good future for each of their own, having the motivation to keep oneself motivated to perform and accomplish a certain task successfully is a normal phenomenon. In order to face a world filled with trials and challenge, students this generation have to work hard for their future career but before that, students are almost always required to sit for examinations that determine their level of education which will ensure the standard and the quality of the particular student in the subject they are majoring, before they proceed to a higher level of education. Because of that, students are always aiming to achieve excellent grades in their examinations but unfortunately, in order to do so, some students these days misuse this opportunity of testing themselves by using various unethical methods and dishonest acts to achieve their goals. This is known as cheating. Students tend to find this as an easy way out to achieve their aims (Niels, 1995).

The act of cheating is also described as fraud which has been accomplished by deception. In other words, cheating is a trick, imposition and as well as an imposture. Submitting work that is not of one's own effort but of another person is considered to be an act of cheating. Other examples include, distributing or receiving information during examinations, quizzes and tests, using materials which are not permitted, sitting for an examination in place of the actual candidate, passing up an identical paper or one that is similar to the original, and telling untruths in order to cover for another person who is guilty of any of these academic dishonesties (Jones, Taylor, Irvin & Faircloth, 2001). There also is another perspective that is yet to be defined. In this perspective, acts of cheating include plagiarism, thieving for tests, producing fake documents for academic purposes, buying term papers, as well as copying another's answers during an examination (Nath & Lovaglia, 2008). The acts of cheating that are deemed to be more severe are copying from another student and assisting another to cheat (Mc Cabe & Trevino, 1993; 1996). Shon (2006) has also commented that in addition, preparing and using crib notes, helping out another candidate during an examination, and copying answers from another candidate who is unaware can also be said to be cheating behaviours.

The term motivation may be described as the energy or the driving force that is behind a person's actions and conduct. What strongly influence the direction of an individual's behaviour are his or her aspirations and needs. Motivation in a person is derived from emotions and ambitions which are associated with achievement. There are many types of motivation, and these include, intrinsic, extrinsic, and physiological as well as achievement

motivation. Motivation is essential due to the fact that it plays a large role in one's everyday life. An individual's inner drive to attain success is greatly influenced by every single one of his or her actions, behaviours, thoughts and personal beliefs (Rabideau, 2005).

Moving along, Murdock and Anderman (2006) have concluded that academic cheating is innately a sort of motivational issue. Facts and evidence appear to propose that often, many processes of motivation which have been brought to light in the theories of achievement motivation are quite helpful in clarifying one's behaviour of cheating. There exists students, who are motivated to practice cheating, and in turn, there ought to be grounds for their actions. These are regardless of whether the reasons are extrinsic factors, in which a student cheats in an examination to achieve a higher score, social comparative, in order that the student would not appear to be of incompetence, or social cognitive, which is when a student personally does not think that he or she is effective in completing a certain task. In this research, the need for one to achieve excellence and success is defined by the term achievement motivation. Due to different causes, which include both internal and external reasons, certain individuals are very determined in attaining success and tend to fulfil their needs by means of various methods (Rabideau, 2005). As a result, based on these theories, there ought to be a specific circumstance or factor which plays its part in motivating a student to participate in immoral conduct.

As said by Johnson and Gormly (1972), it has been observed that students are at more risk of being caught in the act at examination venues which have high visibility. Students who decide to cheat at examination venues

which have lower visibility, on the other hand, are less likely to be caught. An experiment had been carried out in which a hundred and fifteen fifth grade students were participants. The students were divided into two groups and placed in two separate classes respectively, one having high visibility and the other, low. A test was conducted to observe if any of the students from both classes cheated.

Besides obtaining results on the frequency of students who had cheated, other observations were also disclosed. Cheating behaviours occurred in accordance with both a student's own personality as well as situational factors. It was determined that female students committed these academic crimes as a reaction toward constant self-perceptions that were unfavourable, whereas in male students, direct or instantaneous situational factors, such as errors in examination, caused them cheat.

A research carried out by Carrell, Malmstrom and West (2008) explored the influence of peers on academic cheating by using a self-report technique. The data for this research came from various sources, namely, the United States Military Academy, the United States Naval Academy, and the United States Air Force Academy, starting from 1959 up until the year 2002. The data was compiled and this investigation uncovered that as the levels of peer cheating increases, the probability that the individual himself will cheat significantly increases as well. The analysis of these data illustrated that students do in fact, more often than not, conform according to how their peers behave.

A review by McCabe, Trevino and Butterfield (2001) asserted that a student's discernment on the behaviours of his or her acquaintances plays the greatest role in influencing him or her to cheat. Besides that, there also is another issue to consider. This has to do with the escalating competitiveness among individuals to have their hold on both the most desirable positions in the working world as well as the coveted handful of places offered at each nation's top institutions for areas of business, medicine, law, and other courses viewed as distinguished by the public. For this reason, many of today's undergraduates inevitably go through a substantial amount of pressure to succeed. With this sort of burden on their shoulders, there may be occasions where they feel compelled to commit academic dishonesty. Another research by this same team (1999) founded that in addition, other factors that may influence cheating behaviours include demands to obtain excellent grades, pressure from parents, self-imposed stress to succeed, the pressure to secure a practical job, laziness, a lack in responsibility and character, low self-esteem, having no satisfaction in a job well done whatsoever, and last of all but not the least, a lack of personal integrity.

Then again, there exist other factors that are believed to contribute to an individual's behavior of cheating. As accounted for, the intrinsic interest of people who originally have little concern toward a particular activity may increase when they are provided with extrinsic reasons to not carry out that activity (Wilson & Lassiter, 1982). This has come to be known as a justification phenomenon. People, in general, will reduce their intrinsic reasons and pursue after their extrinsic reasons which consequently, leads to one finding that activity more appealing. In an experiment conducted by

Wilson and Lassiter, it was established that students which have been threatened sternly are more likely to repeat their cheating behavior as compared to students that have been just mildly warned. Hence, the occurrence of cheating may also be due to extrinsic reasons that prompt students to behave so, and not because of parental pressure.

According to Malinowski and Smith (1985), it is more probable that students having low moral judgement will cheat as opposed to students with high moral judgement. They conducted an experiment which found that different forms of moral reasoning will lead to different habits of resistance towards temptation. Feelings of guilt may surface in some cheating students after the act has been done. Incidences of cheating could also happen due to students with low self-esteem seeking a way to boost their confidence. As said by Aronson and Mettee (1968), an individual who has little self-worth is more likely to practice cheating behaviour. This is said to be because an outward show of achievement and success is able to increase their self-esteem, although the means of attaining this success is by the wrong approach. An individual with higher self-esteem is less likely to behave as such. In Houston's research (1977), he found that there is a higher risk of cheating in students who are highly expectant of success. They cheat on tests deemed important to them. However, if there is a large risk of being caught for an incentive that is minimal, then the student would not carry out the act. Dishonesty in a student appears to be more prevalent when he or she is able to decrease the possible costs of having his or her herself viewed, especially by other students, as an immoral individual. A person's self-image deteriorates when performing acts that defy their own customs of behaviour

that is considered acceptable. An individual would predict that the price to be paid for cheating would be lessened, and hence, the occurrence of cheating behaviour would be at large among students who consider cheating as all right.

Albert Bandura's reciprocal determinism is able to resolve the debate on factors and reasons that cause a phenomenon of cheating to take place. According to Bandura, one of the factors that encourage cheating is the environment. In detail, students learn the cheating behaviour through the observation on the people surrounded them. For example, when a student saw his friend cheated during the exam and got a good result, he will tend to imitate the behaviour because he thinks that he can achieved good result through cheating which proved by his friend. In this realistic world, certificate is the initiate consideration for the employers to hire their employees than the other abilities such as language skill, work ability and morality. This means without a " flying colour result" in the certificate, the fresh graduated student will facing the difficulty to get hired. In addition, some of the university students had the experience that so-called success through cheating which happened surrounded them also strengthens the cheating behaviour in the examination.

Bandura suggested that we cannot regard behaviour to be the outcome of interaction. In a person who does not have any active action in his or her environment, behaviour is the decision factor of interaction. Behaviour has cause effect, consciousness and characteristics of activeness. Students who cheat at university level equally have automatic characteristics and the environment is regarded as an external reason. However, the motives of

these acts are internal reasons. An external reason can only function through an internal reason. The results of cheating in a test clearly enhance the demand and motive of cheating. In the course of it, the students' minds slowly deteriorate and their personalities are often negatively influenced. Cheating behaviour is a social behaviour that may develop into a habit of many university students through mutual influence and practice. It must not be underrated.

According to Bandura, the conclusion which can be derived is, cheating behaviour is mainly determined by relating three factors to another. The factors are individual traits of each university student, a student's social setting and the managing of an institution of higher education. Efforts to put an end to the phenomenon of cheating behaviour would have to start based on three aspects which are the altering the norm of student behaviour creating a good social environment, and ensuring other environments of higher education are on form. Promoting these three aspects so that they interact with one another may just successfully construct an atmosphere that is able to encourage excellence in students so that in time, they may be the ones to respond to social needs of the community.

Method

Participants

A total of 120 students who study in Sunway University were recruited as participants (58 males, 62 females). The age range of participants is 18 to 25 years ($M = 19.88$ years old). The participants consist of different races which are 1.7% of Malay, 80.8% of Chinese, 5.8% of Indian and 11.7% of

other races. 11. 7% of the participants achieved secondary school level, 50% of them achieved Diploma or Pre-university level and 38. 3% of them achieved Bachelor of Degree level. There are 3. 3% of the participants are Muslim, 28. 3% are Christian, 60. 8% are Buddhist, 3. 3% are Hindu, and 4. 2% are other religions. (Refer Table 1 for the exact frequencies of all demographic information and refer Appendix B for the example of demographic form). Since the research paper is investigating on what motivates students to cheat during an examination, participants should be students because they have had experience in examinations during their secondary school, college or university life.

Table 1

Demographic Table

Variables

N

%

Gender

Male

Female

58

62

48. 3

51. 7

Ethnicity

Malay

Chinese

Indian

Others

2

97

7

14

1. 7

80. 8

5. 8

11. 7

Highest Level of education achieved

Secondary School

Diploma or Pre-university

Bachelor Degree or Equivalent

14

60

46

11. 7

50. 0

38. 3

Religion

Islam

Christian

Buddhism

Hinduism

Others

4

34

73

4

5

3. 3

28. 3

60. 8

3. 3

4. 2

Measurement

In this research, the measurement used was a survey questionnaire with 11 questions that are consider relevant to this research (refer to Appendix C). There are 9 questions with yes or no answer with 1 question that has an open ended answer and 2 questions with scale ranging from 1 to 5. For the first question with scale, the answer range from 1 (no confident) to 5 (highly confident) and the second question with scale, the answer range from 1 (never) to 5 (always).

Procedure

Data was collected in Sunway University at the student cafeteria, foyer and the library. It is a convenient sampling. Participants were voluntarily and consent form was given to them before they answer the survey. They were informed that they are taking part in a study of study and examination behaviour of college students in Malaysia to prevent prejudice. It took them 10 minutes to complete the survey form. After completed the data collection,

analysis was done using SPSS program to determine the frequency result of each question.

Results

The table 1 below shows the summary of frequencies for the responses of 120 participants toward the survey questions from 1 to 9 (Refer to Appendix C for the sample of Survey Questionnaire).

Table 2

Frequencies Table for Responses of Participants for Survey Question 1 to 9

Question Number

Questions

Responses

Yes

No

N

%

N

1

I revised my studies at least once a week.

76

63. 3

44

2

I am always prepared for an exam.

56

46. 7

64

3

I have pressure from my parents in getting a good result.

60

50. 0

60

4

I am active in extracurricular activities.

49

40. 8

71

5

I have pressure from my friends during exam.

48

40. 0

72

6

I was caught for cheating in one of my past exam.

8

6. 7

112

7

I have cheated in at least one of my exams in college.

34

28. 3

86

8

Cheating in exam should be allowed.

25

20. 8

95

9

Cheating in an exam is acceptable depending on the situation.

35

29. 2

85

For question 1, 63. 5% of the participants reported that they did revise studies at least once a week and remaining 36. 7% of the participants claimed that they did not revise their studies at least once a week. For question 2, 46. 7% of the participants claimed that they are always prepared for an exam whereas the other 53. 5% of the participants reported that they are not always prepared for an exam.

In terms of pressure from parents in getting a good result for question 3, 50% which is exactly half of the participants reported that they did receive pressure from parents in getting good results while the other half of the participants did not. However, in terms of pressure from friends during exam for question 5, only 40% of the participants claimed that they did receive pressure from their friends while the remaining 60% of the participants did not receive any pressure from friends during exam.

For question 4, 40. 8% of the participants reported that they are active in extracurricular activities whereas the other 59. 2% of the participants are not active in extracurricular activities. In regards of the cheating behaviour during examinations for question 7, 28. 3% of the participants claimed that they have cheated in at least one of their exams in college while the other 71. 7% of the participants have not cheated during their exams in college. However, according to results from question 6, only 6. 7% of the participants were caught cheating in one of the past exam and the other 93. 3% of the students never experiences the situation.

For question 8, 20. 8% of the participants agreed that cheating should be allowed while there are 79. 2% of the participants disagreed with this statement. However, there are more participants responded positively to question 9 compared with question 8 whereby 29. 2% of the participants agreed that cheating is acceptable depending on the situation. The other 70. 8% of the participants claimed that cheating is not acceptable in any situations. Based on the qualitative data gathered for question 9a or 9b after they responded to the question 9, Table 3 below shown the most frequent response by participants whereby in what situation cheating is acceptable and Table 4 shown the most frequent response by participants for the reason why cheating should not be allowed.

Table 3

Most Common Responses of the Participants for In What Situation is Cheating Acceptable?

Responses

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N

During pop quiz / When you are not prepared

11

Exam / subject is too hard

10

To avoid failure / Don't know the answer

8

Open books exam

3

Don't know

2

Table 4

Most Common Responses of the Participants for the Reason Cheating should not be Allowed.

Responses

N

Moral believes and religious beliefs

34

It is unfair

22

Exam is to test yourself

21

Don't know

9

Table 5

Responses for Question 10 and Question 11 for Participants who have Cheated in at least One of the Exams in College.

Responses

N

%

Question 10: Confident level in all exams

Less Confident

Moderate Confident

Somewhat Confident

Highly Confident

9

15

9

1

26. 5

44. 1

26. 5

2. 9

Question 11: Proud of exam result

Never

Sometimes

Neutral

Most of the times

Always

3

12

13

5

1

8. 8

35. 3

38. 2

14. 7

2. 9

Table 5 shows response for question 10 which is the confident level in all exams and question 11 which is the level of proudness of the exam results among 34 participants who have cheated in at least one of the exams in college. Based on the results shown for question 10, 26. 5% of the participants who cheated in at least one of the exam claimed that they have less confident in all exams, 44. 1% of them have moderate confident, 26. 5% , while the other 2. 9% of them are highly confident in all exams. For question 11, 8. 8% of them never proud of their exam result, 35. 3% of them are sometimes proud of their exam result, 38. 2% of them are neither proud nor not proud of their exam result, 14. 7% of them are proud of their exam result most of the time, while only 2. 9% of them are always proud of their exam result.

Table 6

Frequencies of Participants who Revise Studies at least Once a Week among those who Cheated in at least One of the Exam in college.

Cheated in at least one of the exams in college

Revise studies at least once a week

Yes

Yes

18 (52. 9)

Note. Percentages of total appear in brackets beside frequencies.

Result from Table 6 above shows that 52. 9% of the participants who cheated in at least one of the exam in college actually did revise their studies at least once a week, whereas the other 47. 1% of them did not revise their studies at all.

Table 7

Frequencies of Participants who always Prepared for Exams among those who Cheated in at least One of the Exam in college.

Cheated in at least one of the exams in college

Always prepared for exams

Yes

Yes

15 (44. 1)

Note. Percentages of total appear in brackets beside frequencies.

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Result from Table 7 above shows that 44. 1% of the participants who cheated in at least one of the exam in college claimed that they did always prepared for exams. On the other hand, the other 55. 9% of them reported that they are not always prepared for exams.

Table 8

Frequencies of Participants who Have Pressure from Parents in Getting Good Result among those who Cheated in at least One of the Exam in college.

Cheated in at least one of the exams in college

Have pressure from parents

in getting good result

Yes

Yes

19 (55. 9)

Note. Percentages of total appear in brackets beside frequencies.

Result from Table 8 above shows that 55. 9% of the participants who cheated in at least one of the exam in college did receive pressure from their parents in getting good result, whereas the other 44. 1% of them did not receive pressure from their parents.

Table 9

Frequencies of Participants who Have Pressure from Friends during Exam among those who Cheated in at least One of the Exam in college.

Cheated in at least one of the exams in college

Have pressure from friends during exam

Yes

Yes

16 (47. 1)

Note. Percentages of total appear in brackets beside frequencies.

Result from Table 9 above shows that 47. 1% of the participants who cheated in at least one of the exam in college have pressure from their friends during exam, however the other 52. 9% of them reported that they did not receive any pressure from their friends during exam.

Table 10

Frequencies of Participants who Active in Extracurricular Activities among those who Cheated in at least One of the Exam in college.

Cheated in at least one of the exams in college

Active in extracurricular activities

Yes

Yes

16 (47. 1)

Note. Percentages of total appear in brackets beside frequencies.

Result from Table 10 above shows that 47. 1% of the participants who cheated in at least one of the exam in college reported that they are active in extracurricular activities, while the other 52. 9% of them claimed that they are not really active in extracurricular activities.

Table 11

Frequencies for Participants who were Caught Cheating in the Past Exams among who Cheated in at least One of the Exams in College.

Cheated in at least one of the exams in college

Caught for cheating in one of the past exam

Yes

Yes

8 (23. 5)

Note. Percentages appear in brackets beside frequencies.

Result from Table 11 above shows that 23. 5% of the participants who cheated in at least one of the exam in college were caught cheating in exam, however the other 76. 5% of them reported that they were not caught cheating in exam.

Discussion

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The purpose of this study was to find out on the possible sources that motivate college students to cheat in exams. Based on the results obtained, most college and university students regardless of their gender or ethnicity would at least cheat in one of their exam throughout their education period. Firstly, analysing from question number 7 (refer to Appendix C), majority of people reported that they did not cheat in any exam during their tertiary education period. Only a small number of students responded “ yes”. This result is against to the research done by McCabe, Trevino and Butterfield (2009), as they found that majority of the participants engaged in at least one cheating behaviour in exam. One possible explanation to this is that cheating in examination is known as an immoral and serious act. A person caught for breaching the rules of an examination by cheating may be suspended from almost all the exams in the future (Roig, 2006). Hence, participants of this study might not give an honest opinion of theirs to avoid being associated with such problems.

Moving on, the present study suggests that the factor that might contribute to cheating in exam would be the past experience of whether one has been caught in exam or not. According to the results, it is found that students have higher tendency to cheat specifically when they have not been caught cheating in the past. This is supported by the past research done by Thompson, Austin and Walker (2004). In their research, they found that people would be motivated to cheat provided that they have not been caught previously in any exam. The rest of the factors, namely preparedness for an exam, frequency of revision, pressure from friends and family, and

being active in extracurricular activities have no substantial effect towards a person's motivation to cheat in an exam.

Moreover, the confidence level of students in exams could be a factor that explains the motivation to cheat in an exam, since the result for this factor is normally distributed. Besides that, of all the participants that answered, "yes" to cheating, majority of them are sometimes proud and neutral towards their achievement in a particular exam. These results are supported by the study done by Stowell and Bennett (2010). Similarly, they found that students who are not very confident are more likely to cheat, and at the same time, they would not be very pleased with their overall results.

On the other hand, most students believe that cheating should not be allowed in exam. However, there are still a small number of people that thinks that cheating should be allowed. Even so, based on the response given by the participants in question 9, only 29.2% believe that cheating in exam should be allowed depending on situation. In general, most people copy answer from another person when they have not enough time to answer the questions asked in an exam. From the 29.2%, some reported that cheating should be allowed when the question asked were too difficult or when the exam was given without any notification in advance, such as pop-quizzes and random tests. These findings are almost similar to the study done by Passow, Mayhew, Finelli, Harding and Carpenter (2006). For the rest of the participants, 70.8% of them answered that cheating should not be allowed in any situation. This is primarily because many of them believe that students would not know and learn from their mistakes, and others believe that it is plainly unfair. In addition, most of them consider cheating as

unacceptable, whereby some thinks that it is against the code of conduct in examination while others suggest that it is against their moral believes. The current study support the statement proposed by Eisenberg (2004), whereby people having a strong moral believe would less likely to cheat in exam.

The strength of the study that could be an implication to the society would be that it provides educators a hint on what to look for when a student is planning to cheat. According to Beck (2004), students are more likely to view exam as difficult when they have lower self-esteem. Lower self-esteem usually constitute to lower confidence in exams, which is then related to the degree of cheating. From the results of the study, which compared the confidence level of students and degree of cheating, educators might be able to reduce such dishonest act from happening by boosting the confidence of the students who have lower self-esteem. Another strength of the current study is that it is one of the few studies that have been carried out exclusively in regards to students' motivation to cheat in a college and university exam. What is more is that this study is being done in an Eastern country, specifically Malaysia, since most past researches are from the Western side of the world. This may be able to stimulate more researches in the future in regards to motivation and students' cheating behaviour in exam, particularly in Eastern countries.

However, this study shows that it is never one sided to explain the reason leading to the outcomes. A weakness of this study would be the honesty of the respondents. Nevertheless, most participants were approached when they were with a gro