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To cite this article: Asli Yazici , Sedat Yazici & Meziyet Sema Erdem (2011) Faculty and student perceptions on college cheating: evidence from Turkey, Educational Studies, 37:2, 221-231, DOI: [10.1080/03055698.2010.506321](https://doi.org/10.1080/03055698.2010.506321)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03055698.2010.506321>



Published online: 01 Oct 2010.



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Faculty and student perceptions on college cheating: evidence from Turkey

Asli Yazici^a, Sedat Yazici^{a*} and Meziyet Sema Erdem^b

^a*Department of Secondary Social Studies Education, Gaziosmanpasa University, Tokat, Turkey;* ^b*Department of Business Administration, Gaziosmanpasa University, Tokat, Turkey*

Investigation of academic dishonesty has increased markedly in the past two decades; however, the body of research offers inconclusive evidence for many variables. This study examines faculty and student perceptions of in-class and out-of-class cheating behaviours and provides contextual evidence for the prevalence of assessment practices used. Faculty and students differed only slightly in their attitudes toward collegiate cheating and their views on possible reasons for it. We found that the prevalence of teaching and assessment types used in student grading is significantly correlated with perceptions of out-of-class cheating, but not with out-of-class cheating behaviours. Students with less experience in out-of-class assessment display a less ethical attitude toward out-of-class cheating.

Keywords: academic dishonesty; cheating; plagiarism; higher education; Turkey

Introduction

Cheating is universally considered a serious problem by teachers and educational administrators at every educational level. Until a decade ago, most studies on the subject were undertaken in western countries, notably in the USA (Frankly-Stokes and Newstead 1995; Ashworth, Bannister, and Thorne 1997). A few recent studies conducted in other countries have shed some light on the cultural and national aspects of the issue. There is, however, a need for further studies within different contexts to better understand factors associated with and perceptions toward cheating. It is apparent that the hypothesis that some cultures are permissive or somewhat supportive of cheating is not well evidenced. Some studies show that neither teacher perception nor faculty perception regarding academic dishonesty shows a unique character (Pickard 2006). Pincus and Scmelkin (2003) found that whereas attitudes toward exam-related behaviours are more uniform, attitudes toward paper-related misconducts are less universal. This may be partly due to the fact that the concept of plagiarism is somewhat unclear among college students, and diverse across cultures and institutions, as well as among university professors (Frankly-Stokes and Newstead 1995).

The issue of plagiarism has become increasingly important to academia worldwide. Commensurate with the rapid growth of information technology, teachers at every educational level have been encouraged to employ multiple measurement and assessment techniques to evaluate students' individual work, skills and successes. Traditional methods and assessment procedures have been challenged by the implementation of individualized and alternative methods, which in effect create concern for

*Corresponding author. Email: sedaty@gop.edu.tr

the academic integrity of students. The more the students work out-of-class or perform take-home exams and assessment, the greater the risk to their academic honesty. Empirical studies confirm that the tension and challenges currently faced by members of faculty are real and serious. As frequently reported, cheating behaviours have increased in the last two decades (McCabe and Trevino 1997; Brown and Choong 2003; Leonard and LeBrasseur 2008) with the Internet affording mass opportunity for student plagiarism, a potential threat to academic integrity (Pickard 2006).

Passow et al. (2006) argued that it is a methodological mistake to measure cheating behaviours without differentiating assessment types. It should be noted that the majority of earlier studies assume, without evidence, that students' grades are homogeneously determined in different schools, campuses and countries. For the purposes of this study, we hypothesised that the prevalence of different forms of cheating behaviours depends substantially on the frequency and types of educational measurement and assessment used in particular institutional settings. We have, therefore, taken this variable as an affecting situational factor to be considered.

A brief review of individual and contextual factors

The concept of academic ethics comprises a variety of dimensions, and applies to different institutions, groups and behaviours. Studies examining cheating have focused on individual and contextual factors. The frequency of cheating behaviours, which is typically the most often investigated variable among individual factors, was found to occur in between 65% and 100% of cases when subjects were asked if they were ever involved with cheating "so far, in college, etc". (Baird 1980; McCabe and Bowers 1994; Stearns 1997; Whitley 1998), whereas for a duration of one semester, this behaviour was ranked between 28% and 20.5% (Stearns 2001). Similar evidence was found in cross-cultural and national studies (Diekhoff et al. 1999; McCabe, Feghali, and Abdallah 2008). For example, Lim and See (2001) found that undergraduate students in Singapore conceive of cheating in class exams as the most unethical behaviour, whereas using someone's ideas without citation and allowing someone to copy an assignment was not considered a serious misdemeanour or dishonest behaviour.

Among the individual factors, gender has also been a widely studied variable. The majority of studies found that males are more likely to cheat (Davis et al. 1992; Lin and Wen 2007), yet there are some others indicating conflicting results (Baird 1980; Frankly-Stokes and Newstead 1995). More interestingly, based on their meta-analysis, Whitley, Nelson, and Jones reported that whereas women show a more ethical attitude toward cheating than men, "in practice, women were almost as likely to cheat as men" (1999, 673).

The role of academic major has also produced inconsistent findings (Bowers 1966; Meade 1992; Brown 1996; Coleman and Mahaffey 2000; Park 2003; Smyth and Davis 2004; Iyer and Eastman 2006; Eastman, Eastman, and Iyer 2008). Some studies found that business and economics students conceive of cheating as more socially acceptable and hold more lenient perceptions, although they display no significant difference in cheating behaviours (Smyth and Davis 2004; Klein et al. 2007).

On the other hand, studies that have focused specifically on contextual factors suggest that motivation, perceived social norms, attitude toward cheating and knowledge of institutional policy are significantly related to student cheating behaviours (Jordan 2001). In particular, research indicated that the role of ethical codes, peer

cheating behaviours, peer disapproval, severity of penalties for cheating, the likelihood of being caught, the perceptions that social rules allow cheating and the existence of supportive attitudes toward cheating are significantly correlated with cheating behaviours (McCabe and Trevino 1993, 1997, 2002; Buckley et al. 1998; Whitley, Nelson, and Jones 1999; Smith and Davis 2004).

Although the influence of societal culture in cheating behaviours has often been hypothesised (Salter, Guffey, and McMillan 2001; Hayes and Introna 2005), the research evidence is quite thin and many questions remain unexplored. Is it the general cultural norms and values that support or allow cheating behaviours, or rather the cheating culture itself, the lack of organisational culture, insufficient information or the lack of moral sensitivity toward cheating behaviours? A number of studies reported that students with an Asian background were more likely to cheat (Deckert 1993; Park 2003). However, through similar research in an Australian context, Maxwell, Curtis, and Vardanega (2006) found contrary evidence. So it seems that much depends on what we mean by “culture” in relation to cheating behaviours. Due to their contextual experiences, students may not be fully aware of the serious ethical implications of cheating behaviours. McCabe (1992, 2005), McCabe and Trevino (1993, 1997) and McCabe, Trevino, and Butterfield (1999, 2001) have shown that institutional policies, attitudes of academics and peer behaviour are strong predictors of cheating behaviours, all of which bear a cultural pattern and nonetheless may change from institution to institution.

Compared to in-class cheating, plagiarism is sometimes a controversial concept and has not yet gained universal recognition. Pincus and Scmelkin (2003) suggest that instructors should be cautious not to assume that all students come into class with the same knowledge and perceptions regarding plagiarism. It has also been found that educators vary in their opinions about the levels of dishonesty they associate with different forms of plagiarism. This difference arises not only with regard to the volume of the plagiarised text, but also in the criteria of citation and quotation (Roig 2001).

The majority of students conceive of cheating as an unethical behaviour, and there is an inverse correlation between their attitude toward cheating and cheating behaviours (Davis et al. 1992; Jordan 2001; Lim and See 2001). However, the relationship between cheating behaviour and particular ethical orientations has not yet been empirically supported. Research interested in the relationship between cheating behaviours and ethical orientations did not find a direct correlation (Forsyth and Berger 1982; Allmon, Page, and Robert 2000; West, Ravenscroft, and Shrader 2004). There is however a high correlation between ethical orientations and rationalisation and explanation of cheating behaviours in relation to personality and the type of cheating (Granitz and Loewy 2007).

The context of the study

The aim of this study was to compare the ethical perceptions and judgements of academics and undergraduate students toward cheating behaviours in a Turkish educational context. Cheating on class exams is considered as a student’s misconduct within the Turkish education system starting from primary school through college. According to Article 9/m of the Student Discipline Regulation at Universities, “cheating, assisting cheating, or attempting to cheat on any examination” requires disciplinary action and may be punished with suspension for one or two semesters. Article 10/j states that “having someone else take an exam for herself/himself or taking an exam

for someone else” is a student misbehaviour that deserves university suspension. Some universities raise students’ awareness of cheating behaviours and familiarise them with the concept of plagiarism via booklets, circulars and class syllabuses. However, to our knowledge, only one state university in Turkey has adopted a specific honour code that augments the general academic ethical rules specific to cheating. In addition, we found only one private university which includes plagiarism among unethical academic behaviour with a penalty of suspension for one or two semesters. This situation means that educators in Turkey are largely not obliged to address plagiarism, and certain out-of-class cheating behaviours are not covered by official rules pertaining to student discipline. This study was therefore conducted in a university in which no officially described penalty is imposed for any form of out-of-class cheating behaviour.

Method

Sample

The participants were academics and third and fourth year students enrolled at a variety of departments of a state university located in a small city in Turkey. The sample included a total of 146 academics, of which 114 were male (78.1%) and 32 female (21.9%), and a total of 709 students, of which 344 were male (48.5%) and 365 female (51.5%).

Instruments and procedures

Many researchers caution that many of the findings obtained in cheating studies are incommensurable due in part to the different methodology, sample, class size, items and period used (Baired 1980; Brown 2000). We therefore compiled a standard questionnaire from the scales most widely utilised in the literature. In addition to a demographic sheet, the questionnaire we prepared for data collection included the following instruments.

Frequency of Assessment Types Questionnaire consists of six items and requires the instructor to rank in a five-point scale ranging from one (never) to five (always) “How often do you use the following types of educational measurement and assessment methods in grading your students?” A similar question was prepared for students requiring them to rank “How often have your grades been determined by the following types of educational measurement and assessment methods during your university education?”

Ethical Perceptions of Cheating Questionnaire included a total of 11 items assembled from various studies by McCabe and Trevino (1993, 1997), Brown (1995, 1996, 2000), Brown and Choong (2003) and Etter, Cramer, and Finn (2006). The Cronbach’s alpha reliability of these 11 items was found to be .85, and the two subscales assessing in-class (five items) and out-of-class cheating perceptions (six items) were found to be .83 and .79, respectively.

Cheating Behaviour Questionnaire includes the same items as the ethical perceptions questionnaire, and measures cheating frequency on a five-point scale ranging from zero (never) to five (very often). We found alpha reliability scores for the total scale and subscales to be adequate, ranging from .91 to .85 and .82.

Reasons for Cheating Questionnaire asked both academics and students to identify the reasons for college students to engage in cheating behaviours. Borrowed from Brown (1995, 1996, 2000) and Brown and Choong (2003), the 12 items in this questionnaire assessed reasons for cheating behaviours on a five-point scale ranging from one (not at all likely) to five (very likely).

Data were collected toward the end of the Spring semester of the 2008–2009 academic year. The student survey was completed in a classroom setting. Participants were informed orally and in writing that the researchers were conducting a study; the data would remain confidential and anonymous; and their participation would be appreciated but was in no way mandatory. If the researcher was familiar with a student, this was noted and another researcher was selected to administer the questionnaire in such instances. The questionnaire sheet for academics was administered by the researchers during visits to their offices.

Results

Although some previous studies used separate questionnaires to collect data on in-class and out-of-class cheating and plagiarism to report and analyse cheating perceptions and behaviours, they fail to provide sufficient evidence on the assessment types used in schools. We, therefore, provide descriptive statistics relating to the types of educational measurement and assessment employed by the institution and how frequently they were employed to grade student performance. The mean scores for the prevalence of assessment types reported by the members of faculty and the students are shown in Table 1. Student responses are also shown per school surveyed, namely the schools of economics and administrative sciences (EAS), science and arts (SA), education (Ed) and agriculture (Ag).

As expected, the most common method used was class exams, and there were significant differences between the self-reported responses of faculty and students. The responses of the two groups indicated that the schools of *EAS*, *SA* and *Ag* use mostly exams and tests, while the school of *Ed* was more heterogeneous in terms of the kinds of educational measurement and assessment it used for grading students.

With regard to the top four reasons why students employed cheating behaviours, members of faculty ranked *had time but did not prepare adequately*, *fear of failure*, *to get a high grade* and *feels risk of getting caught is low*. Students ranked the same variables as follows: *difficulty of material or course*, *to get a high grade*, *had time but did not prepare adequately*, *instructor is poor or indifferent*. Students assigned

Table 1. The prevalence of assessment types.

	Total		Students			
	Faculty	Students	EAS	SA	Ed	Ag
Exam	3.84 (1.02)	4.08 (.82)	3.81 (.76)	4.69 (.70)	3.74 (.75)	4.00 (.65)
Test	2.86 (1.33)	3.00 (1.17)	3.48 (.96)	2.02 (1.17)	3.40 (.84)	3.15 (.91)
Research project	3.05 (1.12)	2.45 (.97)	2.20 (.82)	2.49 (.96)	3.00 (.90)	2.37 (.76)
Lab or practical work	2.48 (1.34)	2.03 (1.27)	1.37 (.76)	2.42 (1.56)	2.11 (1.06)	2.60 (1.23)
Presentation	2.69 (1.12)	2.33 (1.10)	1.95 (.80)	2.09 (1.07)	3.65 (1.01)	2.16 (.75)
Group work	2.37 (1.21)	2.31 (1.14)	2.12 (.97)	1.95 (1.16)	3.44 (.94)	2.17 (.94)

Note: Standard deviations are in parentheses.

substantially greater effect to *the difficulty of material or course*, and *instructor is poor or indifferent* and less effect to *had time but did not prepare adequately* and *feels no one is hurt by behaviour*. We also examined statistical differences between academics and students in their responses to questions about the possible reasons for cheating behaviours. A *t*-test comparison between the two groups indicated significant differences for eight of the 12 items (Table 2).

From the data, we compiled descriptive statistics and performed *t*-test analysis to establish whether the ethics of members of faculty were effective on students. Faculty and students similarly ranked cheating behaviours according to their perceptions of how serious they were in terms of academic ethics. Both groups ranked the first five items in the same order. Overall, however, students reported more lenient perceptions than academics. Statistically significant differences in the mean scores between the two groups were found in 10 of the 11 items (Table 3).

A series of one-way analysis of variance tests (ANOVA) were conducted to compare mean scores of academics and students in relation to the four schools that participated in the study. No significant differences were found between schools in the mean scores for the ethical perceptions of faculty toward in-class cheating $F(3, 144) = 1.916; p > .130$. However, there were significant differences among schools in the mean scores for ethical perceptions of members of faculty in relation to out-of-class cheating $F(3, 144) = 3.441; p < .019$. Statistically significant differences were found between the faculty of education and that of agriculture $p < .019$.

According to ANOVA, there was no statistically significant difference in the mean scores for ethical perceptions of students in relation to in-class cheating among schools, $F(3, 706) = .781; p > .505$. Significant differences were found between schools in the mean scores for ethical perceptions of students toward out-of-class cheating, $F(3, 706) = 4.428; p < .004$. Statistically significant differences were found between the faculties of education and agriculture ($p < .006$) and the faculty of education and faculty of science and arts ($p < .011$). This might be evidence for significant cohesion between faculty members and students within schools and for the effect, more or less, of the ethical perceptions of faculty on student perceptions.

Table 2. Means, standard deviations and *t*-test results for reasons for engaging in cheating behaviours.

	Total	Faculty	Students	<i>p</i>
To get a high grade	3.88 (1.25)	3.45 (1.35)	3.97 (1.21)	.000
Difficulty of material or course	3.70 (1.16)	2.95 (1.14)	3.85 (1.10)	.000
Had time but did not prepare adequately	3.95 (1.09)	4.22 (.95)	3.90 (1.12)	.000
Feels no one is hurt by behavior	2.62 (1.41)	2.63 (1.40)	2.62 (1.41)	.895
Does not have adequate time	2.40 (1.27)	1.94 (1.03)	2.49 (1.30)	.000
Feels risk of getting caught is low	2.67 (1.30)	3.11 (1.14)	2.58 (1.32)	.000
Peer pressure	1.87 (1.12)	2.00 (1.03)	1.85 (1.13)	.156
Feels the material or assignment is irrelevant	2.82 (1.32)	2.31 (1.16)	2.92 (1.33)	.000
Everyone does it	2.72 (1.33)	2.23 (.97)	2.82 (1.38)	.000
Is a challenge or thrill	2.06 (1.26)	1.97 (.99)	2.08 (1.31)	.313
Instructor is poor or indifferent	2.84 (1.38)	2.07 (1.12)	3.00 (1.37)	.000
Fear of failure	3.90 (1.17)	3.84 (1.10)	3.91 (1.19)	.496

Notes: 1 (not at all likely) to 5 (very likely).
Standard deviations are in parentheses.

Table 3. *t*-Test results for cheating behaviours and ethical perceptions of faculty and students.

	Cheating Behaviour ^a		Ethical level ^b		<i>p</i>
	%	<i>M</i> (SD)	Faculty	Students	
In-class cheating					
Passing answers during an exam	56.9	3.89 (1.19)	1.38 (.72)	2.19 (1.19)	.000
Taking an exam for someone else	7.9	3.66 (1.43)	1.13 (.65)	1.26 (.78)	.045
Using exam crib notes	42.3	3.98 (1.23)	1.25 (.69)	1.98 (1.16)	.000
Allowing another to see exam answers	73.5	3.57 (1.20)	1.78 (.94)	2.68 (1.24)	.000
Copying off another's exam	55.6	4.02 (1.17)	1.45 (.72)	2.19 (1.24)	.000
Out-of-class cheating					
Taking credit for full participation in a group project without doing a fair share of the work	45.8	4.04 (1.11)	2.17 (1.00)	2.31 (1.19)	.136
Working with others on an individual project	71.8	3.53 (1.19)	2.30 (1.09)	3.28 (1.26)	.000
Turning in work done by someone else as one's own	28.2	4.19 (1.14)	1.14 (.55)	1.64 (1.02)	.000
Using a few sentences in an assignment which are copied and pasted from an Internet or other resource without acknowledging the source	52.3	4.02 (1.16)	2.11 (1.04)	2.97 (1.25)	.000
Using a few paragraphs in an assignment which are copied and pasted from an Internet or other resource without acknowledging the source	48.5	4.01 (1.16)	1.79 (.91)	2.85 (1.25)	.000
Padding a bibliography	41.8	4.02 (1.18)	1.77 (.92)	2.36 (1.21)	.000

Notes: ^a1 (very often), 5 (very rare); "never" was not included.

^b1 (very serious dishonesty) to 5 (not at all dishonesty). Standard deviations are in parentheses.

No significant differences were found in the mean scores of out-of-class cheating behaviours among four schools, $F(3, 706) = .829$; $p > .478$. However, there were significant differences between the mean scores of the in-class cheating behaviours among schools $F(3, 706) = 4.624$; $p < .003$; the results of the Tukey HSD test indicating statistically differences between the EAS and the other three schools (Table 4).

Given the empirical evidence that ethical perceptions of cheating are determinant of cheating behaviours, we compared the mean scores of the in-class cheating perceptions ($M = 2.02$, $SD = .87$) and behaviours ($M = 3.99$, $SD = .98$) of students, and found that the mean scores between out-of-class cheating perceptions ($M = 2.54$, $SD = .82$) and out-of-class cheating behaviours ($M = 4.19$, $SD = .92$) were nominally smaller. In other words, compared to the effects of out-of-class cheating perceptions on behaviours, in-class cheating perceptions were more likely to affect in-class cheating behaviours. This might have been due to the severity of punishment with regard to in-class cheating and the lack of an institutionally defined punishment for out-of-class cheating. A similar relationship is also evident from the Pearson correlation coefficients for the relationship between ethical perceptions and behaviours for in-class cheating ($r = -.411$, $n = 579$, $p < .001$), and ethical perceptions and behaviours for out-of-class cheating ($r = -.245$, $n = 583$, $p < .001$).

t-Test comparisons of the ethical perceptions of male and female students revealed that female students ($M = 1.97$; $SD = .83$) scored significantly lower than male students ($M = 2.16$; $SD = .93$) for the total core cheating scale ($t(707) = -2, 798$, $p < .005$); for out-of-class cheating ($M = 2.55$; $SD = .78$ vs. $M = 2.76$; $SD = .80$; $t(707) = -3, 484$, $p < .001$); for in-class cheating ($M = 1.92$; $SD = .83$ vs. $M = 2.16$; $SD = 1.04$; $t(707) = 5, 780$, $p < .001$). Moreover, female students also scored lower for out-of-class cheating behaviours ($M = 4.29$; $SD = .77$ vs. $M = 4.11$; $SD = .95$; $t(707) = 4, 291$, $p < .001$). In other words, women scored significantly higher ethical attitudes and fewer self-report cheating incidences than men for both in-class cheating and out-of-class cheating.

Table 4. ANOVA analysis and post hoc Turkey test results.

		Sum of squares	df	Mean square	<i>F</i>	Sig.
In-class cheating perceptions	Between groups	1.786	3	.595	.781	.505
	Within groups	538.533	706	.763		
	Total	540.319	709			
In-class cheating behaviours	Between groups	13.323	3	4.441	4.624	.003
	Within groups	552.276	575	.960		
	Total	565.599	578			
Out-of-class cheating perceptions	Between groups	8.895	3	2.965	4.428	.004
	Within groups	472.793	706	.670		
	Total	481.688	709			
Out-of-class cheating behaviours	Between groups	2.117	3	.706	.829	.478
	Within groups	493.057	579	.852		
	Total	495.174	582			

Note: ^aThe mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to gain more insight into international understanding of academic dishonesty. The study corroborates previous research findings that student and faculty perceptions toward plagiarism are divergent, and that gender is significantly related to cheating perceptions and behaviours. We found that, compared to in-class cheating, the ethical seriousness of out-of-class cheating is not sufficiently recognised in a typical context in Turkish higher education.

From a methodological perspective, the findings from this study highlight the importance of taking into account the prevalence and experience of assessment types in a particular higher educational institution to understand cheating perceptions and behaviours. We hypothesised and provided evidence that cheating is significantly related to assessment types per se. Students with less experience in out-of-class assessment display a less ethical attitude toward out-of-class cheating. Assessment experience is likely to have a positive influence on students' ethical perceptions toward cheating. However, without developing relevant institutional policies, implementing this variable alone is insufficient in creating a desirable outcome. We found that although students held very similar ethical attitudes and perceptions toward in-class cheating, their self-report cheating rates differed significantly. As the participants were all Turkish students with a very similar cultural and educational background, factors such as the effectiveness of monitoring during exams, the number of assistants doing in-class monitoring and the attitude of the dean's office toward incidences of cheating might have accounted for the statistical differences found between the various schools in the university we surveyed.

The study implies that, among others, the lack of defined punishment for out-of-class cheating behaviours may be a reason for the greater difference found between in- and out-of-class cheating perceptions and behaviours. Future studies should therefore examine the relationship between assessment types and several other individual and contextual factors associated with cheating behaviours.

Our study confirms that it is methodologically in vain, if not a mistake, to compare and contrast the prevalence of different forms of cheating behaviours without knowledge of the frequency and experience of different assessment types used in the participating school. Moreover, results obtained here indicate once again that cheating is a complex phenomenon and many factors are causal in its occurrence. This study can stimulate reflective thinking for faculty about their teaching materials, methods and assessment types in relation to the reasons underlying cheating behaviours. It may also be useful to educational administrators in revising existing regulations or developing complementary institutional honour codes to address the various forms of cheating behaviours identified in this study and elsewhere in the literature.

Notes on contributors

Asli Yazici is an assistant professor in the Department of Secondary Social Studies Education at Gaziosmanpasa University. Her research interests include ethics, moral psychology and ethical issues in education.

Sedat Yazici is an associate professor in the Department of Secondary Social Studies Education at Gaziosmanpasa University. His major research interests include ethics, political philosophy and philosophy of education.

Meziyet Sema Erdem is a research assistant in the Department of Business Administration at Gaziosmanpasa University. Her main research area is finance. Specifically, she has conducted researches related to capital markets.

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