

## Academic Integrity: Perceived Level of Seriousness of Academic Dishonesty among University Students

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**Abstract:** Students hold different level of seriousness towards the different types of academic dishonesty due to various contextual reasons and factors. Surprisingly, students perceived cheating as a survival skill that provides them with the competitive edge and mastering cheating methods in order to excel academically. This study is conducted in one of the Malaysian universities. It aims to discover the perceived rate of seriousness when students witness their friends committed the following academic dishonesty behaviors: (1) Cheating on quiz, (2) Cheating on exam, (3) Cheating on coursework (i.e., assignment) and (4) Plagiarism. Significantly, this study found that university students perceived cheating on exam as the most serious act of academic dishonesty behavior as compare to cheating in quiz, coursework and plagiarism. In conclusion, students perceived the engagement in academic dishonesty behaviors as moderately serious cheatings. In depth study should be conducted to explore more contextual factors that contribute to the perceived level of seriousness of academic dishonesty among university students.

**Key words:** academic integrity, academic dishonesty, perceived level

### 1. Introduction

Today, there are many conflict issues arose with regards to the issues of academic dishonesty. Miller, et al. (2017) found out that students perceived academic dishonesty as not a serious problem at the institution. Interestingly, a few respondents hold contradict expressions such as the institution has “a culture of academic dishonesty,” and “students get away” with cheating (Simpson, 2016, p. 50). Reflection on national statistics revealed that the percentage students cheat has rapidly increased over the years. These types of cheating mostly involve serious cheating. For example, 98% of undergraduates and 62% of college students admitted to cheating at some time during their school careers (McCabe, 2001). In extension to this, McCabe later surveyed in 2005 revealed that 70% of the 18, 000 high school students surveyed admitted to at least one incidence of “serious cheating” (McCabe, 2005).

### 2. Literature Review

A study by Brimble and Stevenson-Clarke (2005, p. 40) described this phenomenon of academic dishonesty

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as “a spreading moral panic”. Interestingly, De Lambert (2016) highlighted that 95 percent said that these students were never get caught of committing cheating. This indicates that students are either unaware of the academic dishonesty or are aware but refuse to accept the reality. Local universities have implemented the use of plagiarism detection tool namely Turnitin in order to curb the prevalence of academic dishonesty behaviors (Smith, Ghazali & Siti Fatimah, 2007). As far as the context is concerned, few Australian empirical research studies have justified the issues of perceptions and prevalence of academic dishonesty and therefore, suggest Turnitin to curb the cheating (Knapp, John & Azalea, 2017). However, the software Turnitin is only capable of detecting academic dishonesty concerning plagiarism. It should be alerted that there are various types of academic dishonesty. The academic dishonesty behaviors seem to be getting serious with students’ desire to achieve outstanding results.

### 3. Case Study

This study aims to address the issue of academic dishonesty by analyzing the seriousness of cheating on quiz, exam, coursework (i.e., assignment), and plagiarism with hope of gaining a better insight of how students perceive such academic dishonesty. There are 96 respondents involved in this study with 29.2% male respondents and 70.8% female respondents. The study employed a descriptive study that examines the responses of a total of 96 students through a stratified random sampling from different semesters by using a structured questionnaire with Cronbach’s Alpha reliability coefficients of 0.890 ( $\alpha = 0.890$ ), indicating reliable and acceptable level of internal consistency. This study aims to discover the research question as follow:

To what extent do students rate the level of seriousness when committed in the following academic dishonesty behaviors?

- (1) Cheating on quiz
- (2) Cheating on exam
- (3) Cheating on coursework (i.e., assignment)

### 4. Case Study

#### (1) Cheating on Quiz

**Table 1 Perceived Seriousness of Cheating on Quiz**

Cheating on Quiz	Mean	Std. Deviation
Referred to forbidden materials (notes) during a quiz?	3.24	1.39
Arranged with friends to look at each others’ answers during a quiz?	3.02	1.31
Looked at your friend’s answers during a quiz?	2.83	1.21
Allowed your friend/s to look at your answers during a quiz?	2.82	1.18
Average Mean Value	2.95	1.37

Scale: 1 = Not Cheating, 2 = Trivial Cheating, 3 = Moderate Cheating, 4 = Serious, Cheating, 5 = Very Serious Cheating

Table 1 focuses the level of seriousness rate by students when engaging in cheating on quiz. The highest mean for the seriousness of engaging in cheating on quiz is “referred to forbidden materials (notes) during a quiz” with mean value 3.24 (SD = 1.39). This is followed by “arranged with friends to look at each others’ answers during a quiz”, 3.02 (SD = 1.31). The lowest mean value is 2.82 (SD = 1.18) which is “allowed your friend/s to look at your answers during a quiz”. The average mean value is 2.95 (SD = 1.37). Overall, this finding indicates that students’ perceived of cheating on quiz as trivial cheating.

**(2) Cheating on Exam****Table 2 Perceived Seriousness of Cheating on Exam**

Cheating on Exam	Mean	Std. Deviation
Looked at your friend's answers during an exam?	3.45	1.61
Allowed your friend/s to look at your answers during an exam?	3.41	1.52
Arranged with friends to look at each others' answers during an exam?	3.40	1.61
Referred to forbidden materials (notes) during an exam?	3.40	1.67
Average Mean Value	3.41	1.56

Scale: 1 = Not Cheating, 2 = Trivial Cheating, 3 = Moderate Cheating, 4 = Serious Cheating, 5 = Very Serious Cheating

Table 2 illustrates the level of seriousness rate by students when engaging in cheating on exam. The highest mean for the seriousness of engaging in cheating on exam is "looked at your friend's answers during an exam" with mean value 3.45 (SD = 1.61). Subsequently, this is followed by "allowed your friend/s to look at your answers during an exam" (mean = 3.41, SD = 1.52). Finally, the lowest mean value is 3.40 (SD = 1.61) which is similar for both following behaviors: 1) "arranged with friends to look at each others' answers during an exam" and 2) "referred to forbidden materials (notes) during an exam". Generally, the average mean value is 3.34 (SD = 1.60). The average mean value indicates that overall students perceived that cheating on exam as moderately serious cheating.

**(3) Cheating on Coursework (i.e., Assignment)****Table 3 Perceived Seriousness of Cheating on Coursework (i.e., Assignment)**

Cheating on Coursework (i.e. assignment)	Mean	Std. Deviation
Copied another student's work and passed it off as your own?	3.48	1.54
Allowed your course-mate to submit your work and pass it off as his/her?	3.47	1.61
Allowed your coursework to be copied by your coursemates?	3.44	1.68
Submitted coursework done by another student?	3.37	1.71
Not contributed at all in a group project but insist that you have to the lecturer?	3.33	1.69
Done your course-mate's work for him/her?	3.32	1.64
Paid someone to do your coursework for you?	3.23	1.66
Collaborated with friend/s on coursework that was supposed to be done as an individual assignment?	3.20	1.35
Not contributed at all in a group project and create reasons to put blame on the other team members?	3.00	1.47
Average Mean Value	3.37	1.64

Scale: 1 = Not Cheating, 2 = Trivial Cheating, 3 = Moderate Cheating, 4 = Serious Cheating, 5 = Very Serious Cheating

Table 3 presents the level of seriousness rate by students when engaging in cheating on coursework (i.e., assignment). The highest mean value for the seriousness of engaging in cheating on exam is "Copied another student's work and passed it off as your own" with mean value 3.48 (SD = 1.54). This followed by "Allowed your course-mate to submit your work and pass it off as his/her" (mean = 3.47, SD = 1.61). The lowest mean value is 3.00 (SD = 1.47) which is "Not contributed at all in a group project and create reasons to put blame on the other team members". Overall, the average mean value is 3.32 (SD = 1.64). This implies that students perceived the seriousness of cheating on coursework (i.e., assignment) as moderately serious cheating.

**Table 4 Summary on the Perceived Level of Seriousness**

Academic Dishonesty Behaviors	Mean	Std. Deviation
Cheating on exam	3.41	1.56
Cheating on coursework (i.e. assignment)	3.37	1.64
Cheating on quiz	2.95	1.37
Average Mean Value	3.24	1.52

Scale: 1 = Not Cheating, 2 = Trivial Cheating, 3 = Moderate Cheating, 4 = Serious Cheating, 5 = Very Serious Cheating

Table 4 summarizes the whole findings on the seriousness when engaging in such academic dishonesty behaviors. Based on the students' perceptions, the most serious cheating behaviors is "cheating on exam" with mean value 3.41 (SD = 1.56). This is followed closely by "cheating on coursework (i.e., assignment)" with mean value 3.37 (SD = 1.64) and subsequent by "cheating on quiz" with mean value 2.95 (SD = 1.37). The lowest mean value is 2.93 (SD = 1.39) which is the seriousness to cheat in "plagiarism". To summarize, the average mean value on the seriousness on academic cheating behaviors is 3.24 (SD = 1.52). This indicates that students' perceived the engagement in academic dishonesty behaviors as moderately serious cheatings.

## 5. Conclusion

Overall, the mean value for the perceived level of seriousness of academic dishonesty is 3.24 (SD = 1.52) which indicates a moderately serious cheating. Based on students' perceptions, this indicates that cheating on exam is perceived as more serious cheating than any other academic dishonesty behaviors. However, we would expect the students to perceived academic dishonesty behaviors as very serious cheating despite of the different types of academic dishonesty behaviors.

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