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Cheating uncovered: A deep dive into faculty and student perspectives

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Abstract: The paper explored the perspectives of teacher education faculty and students on behaviors that constitute cheating. A convergent parallel mixed-methods design was used through a questionnaire that sought the respondents' perspectives on behaviors based on five groups of given scenarios: during the test, test preparation, take-home work, research work, and laboratory report and seatwork. One hundred nineteen participants from the College of Teacher Education at a state university in region 02, Philippines, with 19 faculty and 100 students comprised the population for this study. As a result, cheating can be deliberate or accidental, done either for personal benefit or to aid a friend. Based on these and the emerging themes, the study proposes an alternative definition of cheating that is embedded in the academic setting. Any action or attempt that leads a person or group to evaluate their own or another's performance incorrectly is considered cheating.

Keywords: *Academic dishonesty, Behavior, Cheating, Education, Mixed-Methods, Perspective, Philippines.*

1. Introduction

Academic dishonesty, like cheating among students, is rampant and a serious problem in higher education (Gullifer & Tyson, 2022; Collison, 2020; Becker, Connolly, Lentz, & Morrison, 2018; Eret & Ok, 2018; Harding, Mayhew, Finelli, 2017;). Even prestigious academic institutions such as Harvard were not spared from this phenomenon, forcing 70 students to cheat in a final exam in May 2012 (Kirkpatrick, December 2018. Literature shows an increasing and alarming percentage of more than 35 to 90 undergraduate students who engaged in cheating behaviors (Ma, McCabe & Liu, 2021; Park, Park, & Jang, 2020; Paulos, 2020; Yardley, Rodreguez, Bates & Nelson, 2019; Lin & Wen, 2017; Bowen 2016). This phenomenon of weakening academic integrity is often attributed to the change in the value system of students, especially in this generation where attainment of success is priced regardless of what was done to attain it (Eastman, Iyer, & Eastman, 2021; -Gardner as reported by Perez-Pena, 2017).

With the moral nature of teaching (Chang, 2020), the integrity of the teaching profession is important to maintain; thus, an investigation into cheating based on teacher education faculty and students' perspectives can be deemed reasonable. Rather than conducting a study that may gather statistics on cheaters on the effectiveness of intervention programs for cheating behaviors, it may be tenable to first look at the perspectives on what behaviors constitute cheating. From there, a better understanding of the phenomenon may be gained and made useful in managing classes, devising counter-measures to cheating, reviewing university honor codes, and conducting further studies on cheating.

To clarify the concerns presented above, it may be useful to have the viewpoints on cheating of teacher education faculty and their students who will be future teachers. Getting both faculty and students' perspectives may help in arriving at more realistic notions of cheating that govern the accepted norms of behavior for these groups. For that, this paper looked into the following:

1. What are the perspectives of faculty and students on behaviors that constitute cheating?
2. Is there a relationship between being a faculty member or student and the perspectives on behaviors that constitute cheating?

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3. Is there a relationship between the year level of the students and their perspectives on behaviors that constitute cheating?

In seeking to understand if there are differences in perspectives regarding faculty and students and within students' year levels, the following hypotheses were tested:

1. There is no relationship between faculty or students and their perspectives on behaviors that constitute cheating.
2. There is no relationship between the year level of students and their perspectives on behaviors that constitute cheating.

2. Methodology

A converging parallel mixed-methods design was used in this study because it was deemed to be relevant in answering the research questions that it forwarded. Through this design, the quantitative statistical results will be reported, followed by a discussion of the qualitative findings (Creswell, 2016).

The population used for this study was from the College of Teacher Education at a state university in region 02, Philippines. These included 19 faculty members and 100 students at the college. Purposive sampling was used to determine the faculty respondents and cluster random sampling was used for student respondents.

Among the year levels, students in the first and third year were chosen as student samples since the literature presents contradicting results in terms of which the students in lower and higher year levels in college engage more cheating behaviors (Schuhmann, Burrus, Barber, Graham, & Elikai, 2021; Josien, Seeley, Csipak, & Rampal, 2021; Hrabak, Vujaklija, Vodopivec, Hren, Marusic, & Marusic, 2020;) and the principled moral reasoning declines as teacher education students' progress in their academic years (Lampe, 2020). With this, it is deemed that students' perspectives on behaviors that constitute cheating will be better understood by drawing data from a group from a lower year level and a group from a higher year level. This may help in drawing insights into whether the perspectives on behaviors that constitute cheating are related to being at a lower year level or higher year level in college.

To gather quantitative and qualitative data for the study, a combined and modified questionnaire by Higbee, Schultz, & Rampal (2021) and Josien, Seeley, Csipak & Rampal (2021) was employed. The questionnaire has 18 scenarios, and after each one, the respondents were asked whether each of the imaginary persons in the scenario was cheating or not. Asking the respondents, the reason for their choice can provide qualitative data where insights on what behaviors they think constitute cheating can be drawn. Open-ended questions were added since these can help gather better insights into the respondent's perspectives on behaviors that constitute cheating.

The scenarios that were used can be grouped into categories: during a test (4 items), test preparation (3 items), take-home work (6 items), research work (3 items), and laboratory report and seatwork (2 items). These categories were made to see perspectives of behaviors that constitute cheating in different activities often undertaken by students.

Questionnaires were distributed following the university's protocol for conducting research. The objectives of the study were explained, and follow-ups were made to collect 100% of the completed questionnaires. For students, the researcher explained how it should be accomplished, and each of the scenarios was explained in Filipino to avoid any possible confusion or misunderstanding.

To encourage the students to be more open to their answers, the researcher ensures their anonymity by excluding any identifying information in the questionnaire except for the classification of respondents as faculty and students and their year level.

In treating quantitative data, frequencies were used to determine the number of respondents who responded "Yes" or "No" when asked if the particular person in the scenario presented was cheating. Since the respondents in each group were not in equal numbers, percentages were also calculated to be able to compare the number of respondents who provided answers of "Yes" and those who gave answers of "No". To see whether there is a relationship with the group where the respondents belong to their answers, chi-squares were calculated since the data gathered from "Yes" or "No" answers are nominal data. In computing percentages and chi-square tests, SPSS 14 for Windows was used.

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The qualitative data, on the other hand, were analyzed through a grounded theory approach for the researcher to make sense of the lived experiences of the participants (Charmaz, 2021). This will help the researcher avoid being wedded to any preconceived theories and instead focus on information that emerges from the data (Hesse-Biber, Howling, Leavy, & Lovejoy, 2018). The coding process began with initial coding using in vivo coding through N Vivo 11. Here, segments of data were coded by the researcher based on the actual words or interpreted meaning of cheating given by the respondents related to the scenarios given. From there, data analysis moved to focused coding, where the initial codes that were created were sorted and integrated, forming parent nodes from child nodes that can be lumped together. The categories derived from the focused coding or the parent nodes became the basis for drawing themes.

3. Results and Discussion

The study found that faculty and students regarded exam behaviors that fit under the categories of rule violation, help in cheating, and try to cheat cheating (Paulos, 2020). They also consider collusion in test preparation, plagiarism in homework and research, and rule violations in homework, seatwork, and lab reports (Lawson, 2021). Specifically, asking what to review, wanting to gain an unfair advantage in test preparation, and copying answers during an exam were agreed upon by all group respondents as acts of cheating (Lampe, 2020). On the contrary, perceptions of faculty on behaviors that constitute cheating during exams go through the copying of answers, for they include asking for answers, asking for help in the exam, and providing clues for answers (Yardley, 2019). Other behaviors perceived as cheating included owning someone's idea of work and other forms of plagiarism (Ma et al., (2021). Under the rule for take-home work, collaborating with classmates, getting and providing help, not following instructions, resubmitting a requirement, comparing and copying, or changing one's answer were also included (Paulos, 2020). In research work scenarios, behaviors perceived as cheating included copying and pasting, not citing sources, owning someone's idea or work, and violating research ethics (Lofstrom & Kupila, 2023). For laboratory reports and seatwork, behaviors such as collaborating with classmates, copying answers, consulting with classmates, and changing classmate's answers were also part of the perceived acts of cheating (Park et.al, 2020).

Table 1.
Respondents' answers on the cheating scenarios.

Scenarios		**Frequency and percentage**					
		Faculty		**Freshmen**		**Juniors**	
During exam		**Yes**	**No**	**Yes**	**No**	**Yes**	**No**
During a test, Ana shows Kim the formula which she is thinking of using in solving a problem to confirm whether it is correct. Upon seeing the formula Kim gives the thumbs up.							
	Ana is cheating.	14(76.68)	5(26.32)	20(24.45)	24(54.55)	21(42)	29(58)
	Kim is cheating.	13(68.42)	6(31.58)	23(52.27)	21(47.73)	17(34)	33(66)
Red asks help from his friend Ben for the enumeration part of the test. Ben writes an acronym and shows it to help his friend Red remember the answers.							
	Red is cheating.	17(89.47)	2(10.53)	38(86.36)	6(13.64	38(76)	12(24)
	Ben is cheating	17(89.47)	2(10.53)	25(56.82)	19(43.18)	27(54)	23(46)
May doesn't know the answer to exam question number 12. When she looks at her seatmate's paper, she sees that his answer for number 12 is A. May remembers that indeed that is the correct answer so she writes it.							
	May is cheating.	19(100)	0	44(100)	0	47(94)	3(6)
Pam while taking a special test is confounded by a question, she texts her friend Kim for help. Her							

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friend does not reply though.							
	Pam is cheating.	16(84.21)	3(15.79)	35(79.55)	9(20.45)	41(82)	9(18)
Test preparation							
Tim took the exam this morning. His friend May asked him what to review for she will take the same exam in the afternoon. Tim tells May to review the topics covered by the exam.							
	May is cheating	10(52.63)	9(47.37)	23(52.27)	21(47.73)	31(63.27)	18(36.73)
	Tim is cheating	9(47.37)	10(52.63)	9(20.45	35(79.55)	17(34)	33(66)
Ana found a first-term exam given by Ms. Cruz last year in her brother's box. Finding that the exam and the one she will be taking next week under Ms. Cruz cover the same topics, she uses her brother's exam paper to guide her in her review.							
	Ana is cheating.	1(5.26)	18(94.74)	22(50)	22(50)	16(32)	34(68)
Ted, having Mr. Dela Cruz as one of his teachers last semesters, knows the test types that this teacher loves to include in the exam, so based on his knowledge he created a reviewer in their subject this semester under the same teacher. When asked by his friend Ray for a photocopy of this reviewer, Ted gave him one.							
	Ted is cheating.	0	19(100)	5(11.36)	39(88.64)	5(10)	45(90)
	Ray is cheating.	1(5.26)	18(94.74)	9(20.45)	35(79.55)	5(10)	45(90)
Take home work							
The students were given a take-home test. Lyn asks Rea to check if her answers in the problem-solving part are correct. Rea looks at them and says that they are correct. Their friend Pia asks if Rea and Lyn got the same answer as her in question number two. When she finds that they don't do it, she looks at her answer and finds an error. She immediately corrects it and feels happy that she has the same answer as her friends.							
	Lyn is cheating.	6(31.58)	13(68.42)	12(27.27)	32(72.73)	18(36.73)	31(63.27)
	Rea is cheating.	5(26.32)	14(73.68)	9(20.45)	35(79.55)	10(20.83)	38(79.17)
	Pia is cheating.	8(42.11)	11(57.89)	38(86.36)	6(13.64)	33(66)	17(34)
Lea doesn't know how to proceed in solving the math problems which were given to them as assignments. She asks her friend and classmate Rex to solve the math problems. Rex teaches her how he solves the assignment. After understanding what she should do, Lea answers her assignment.							
	Lea is cheating.	1(5.26)	18(94.74)	0	43(100)	3(6)	47(94)
	Rex is cheating.	1(5.26)	18(94.74)	1(2.27)	42(97.67)	5(10.2)	44(89.8)
Ken asks his friend Ana to check his answers in their assignment. Ana encircles each item that she thinks is incorrect.							
	Ken is cheating.	4(21.05)	15(78.95)	18(40.91)	26(59.09)	13(26.53)	36(73.47)
	Ana is cheating.	5(26.32)	14(73.68)	12(27.27)	32(72.73)	9(18.37)	40(81.63)
As a final requirement, Mr. Cruz asked his class to read a book and then individually write a summary and a critique of it. One of his students, Rod doesn't have enough time to read the book							

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since he is juggling classes with his work to enroll in Students Teaching next term. To comply with the requirement Rod watches the movie version of the book and then writes a summary and a critique paper which he submits.							
	Rod is cheating.	6(31.58)	13(68.42)	8(18.18)	36(81.82)	11(22)	39(78)
As a final requirement, Mr. Cruz asked his class to read a book, and then individually write a summary and a critique of it. One of his students, Fe doesn't have enough time to read the book since he is juggling classes with his work to enroll in Students Teaching next term. To comply with the requirement Fe searches the internet for a summary and critique of the book. She copies what she finds and submits these as her summary and critique.							
	Fe is cheating.	19(100)	0	40(90.91)	4(9.09)	49(98)	1(2)
Joy just got her lesson plan approved for demonstration in her Principles of Teaching 2 this term. Another subject this term requires them to submit a lesson plan for the subject and topic of their choice. Joy submits a copy of the same approved lesson plan from her Principles of Teaching 2 in this other subject.							
	Joy is cheating.	1(5.26)	18(94.74)	15(34.88)	28(65.12)	8(16)	42(84)
Research work							
Ian is working on a research paper. The research paper that he is reading mentions a research result from another paper that he finds useful. He tries to look for the paper that is cited but fails to find it. He then copies the citation mentioned without acknowledging the paper where it is cited.							
	Ian is cheating.	18(94.74)	1(5.26)	40(90.91)	4(9.09)	49(98)	1(2)
Mia is researching for a paper when she found an article on the internet on the topic given by her instructor. She thought that one of the paragraphs from the article would be a great addition to her paper. She copied and pasted the entire paragraph in her paper. At the end of the paragraph, she pasted inside the parenthesis the website where she got the paragraph.							
	Mia is cheating.	5(26.32)	14(73.68)	9(20.45)	35(79.55	6(12)	44(88)
For his research paper, Rey copied sentences and paragraphs from different internet sites, and then, he put them together, pasting them as to which he thought should go together. At the end of his paper, there is a reference section where he pasted all the websites where he got all the sentences and paragraphs that were pasted to create a paper.							
	Rey is cheating.	8(42.11)	11(58.89)	8(18.18)	36(81.82)	18(36)	32(64)
Laboratory report and seatwork							
Lea asks Ben to check his laboratory report. Ben looks at it and changes those which he thinks are incorrect.							
	Lea is cheating.	4(21.05)	15(78.95)	17(38.64)	27(61.36)	15(30)	35(70)
	Ben is cheating.	8(44.44)	10(55.56)	35(79.55)	9(20.45)	29(58)	21(52)
During seatwork, Kim doesn't know what to do with the math problem given to them. She looks at what her seatmate is doing and imitates it.							
	Kim is cheating.	15(78.95)	4(21.05)	43(97.73)	1(2.27)	50(100)	0

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From the analysis of results in this study, it can be concluded that the three groups of respondents' perceptions of what behaviors constitute cheating may be similar at some points. Still, there are variations in their perspectives on showing a formula during an exam and asking for confirmation if it is correct. The majority of the faculty respondents see this as an act of cheating, yet more than half of the freshmen and junior student respondents do not consider the behavior as cheating. "She didn't ask for the exact answer; she just confirmed if her formula was correct", This freshman's view is similar to that of a junior student who said, "She asked only if she had the correct formula and not the answer". This is quite different from how the majority of the faculty respondents saw the action; one of them stated "Confirming the formula is similar to asking an answer during a test" while based on another's answer "Students should work on their own during the exam".

Table 2.
Relationship of perspectives on cheating behaviors.

Scenarios		**Frequency and percentage**		
During exam		**Faculty**	**Freshmen**	**Juniors**
During a test, Ana shows Kim the formula that she is thinking of using in solving a problem to confirm whether it is correct. Upon seeing the formula Kim gives the thumbs up.				
	Ana is cheating.	4.257*	5.530*	0.114^{ns}
	Kim is cheating.	1.413^{ns}	6.638*	3.197^{ns}
Red asks help from his friend Ben for the enumeration part of the test. Ben writes an acronym and shows it to help his friend Red remember the answers.				
	Ben is cheating	6.368*	7.499**	0.075^{ns}
Test preparation				
Tim took the exam this morning. His friend May asked him what to review for she will take the same exam in the afternoon. Tim tells May to review the topics covered by the exam.				
	Tim is cheating	4.710*	1.048^{ns}	2.146^{ns}
Ana found a first-term exam given by Ms. Cruz last year in her brother's box. Finding that the exam and the one she will be taking next week under Ms. Cruz cover the same topics, she uses her brother's exam paper to guide her in her review.				
	Ana is cheating.	11.457**	5.301*	3.149^{ns}
Take home work				
The students were given a take-home test. Lyn asks Rea to check if her answers in the problem-solving part are correct. Rea looks at them and says that they are correct. Their friend Pia asks if Rea and Lyn got the same answer as her in question number two. When she finds that they don't do it, she looks at her answer and finds an error. She immediately corrects it and feels happy that she has the same answer as her friends.				
	Pia is cheating.	13.193***	3.260^{ns}	5.251*
Joy just got her lesson plan approved for demonstration in her Principles of Teaching 2 this term. Another subject this term requires them to submit a lesson plan for the subject and topic of their choice. Joy submits a copy of the same approved lesson plan from her Principles of Teaching 2 in this other subject.				
	Joy is cheating.	6.038*	1.399^{ns}	4.429*
Research work				
For his research paper, Rey copied sentences and paragraphs from different internet sites, and then, he put them together, pasting them as to which he thought should go together. At the end of his paper, there is a reference section where he pasted all the websites where he got all the sentences and paragraphs that were pasted to create a paper.				
	Rey is cheating.	4.008*	0.219^{ns}	3.714^{ns}
Laboratory report and seatwork				
Lea asks Ben to check his laboratory report. Ben looks at it and changes those which he thinks				

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are incorrect.				
	Ben is cheating.	7.405**	0.980^{ns}	5.000*
During seatwork, Kim doesn't know what to do with the math problem given to them. She looks at what her seatmate is doing and imitates it.				
	Kim is cheating.	6.405*	11.174**	1.149^{ns}

Note: ***Correlation is significant at < 0.001 level (2-tailed), **Correlation is significant at < 0.01 level (2-tailed), *Correlation is significant at < 0.05 level (2-tailed), ns Correlation is not significant at ≥ 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The results of the chi-square tests in Table 2 show that there is evidence of a relationship between faculty or students and their perspectives on behaviors that constitute cheating. This is the same as the existence of evidence of a relationship between the year level of students and their perspectives on behaviors that constitute cheating. With this evidence, the two null hypotheses that were forwarded in this study are therefore negated.

This relationship of perspective on behaviors that constitute cheating to being faculty, freshman, or junior students was evident in more than one area of school activity, not just in behaviors during examinations, as proven in this study (Eastman et al., 2021; DiPietro, 2020; Bachore, 2016). This evident disagreement between the perspectives of faculty and students about what behaviors can be considered cheating may be addressed by the faculty members who are giving the activity by setting clear rules for each activity that they would give.

The word "help" became the most frequent word that was used by the students when they thought that a behavior should not be considered cheating. The answers that used this word were often under the codes getting help and providing help, though the latter code was used with a higher frequency. From this point, it seems that students also place much weight on the intention of the individual when considering whether a behavior is cheating or not. This can be supported by the theme, which was generated from the coded "no" answers in cheating, absence of personal gain, and unintentional plagiarism. Since it will be rather difficult to see for the faculty what the intentions of the students are, clear guidelines on how much help could be asked for and extended in activities should be given emphasis. It should also be clarified that getting (without consent) and receiving answers from classmates, though both involve personal gain, are considered to be the same as giving an answer or providing prohibited information (Harding, et.al, 2017). The faculty should also consider reminding students to ask them when they are in doubt if what they are thinking of doing is acceptable or not (Josien, et. Al, 2021). It is worth noting that none of the student respondents answered that they needed to ask the faculty if the activity given allows collaboration or not.

Confusion in terms of cheating through plagiarism is also worth noting since students' emphasis on the absence of intention to own one's work, not breaking any rules, and citing the source kept on reappearing in their answers (Lofstrom & Kupila, 2023; Gullifer & Tyson, 2022). In the words of a freshman, "She copies it and puts it on the website, so it is not cheating. Cheating is the way you copy an answer during a quiz/exam…." For this, codes like an unintentional breach of research rules, without intent to claim other people's ideas, and lack of awareness in the proper citing of sources were used, the latter being the most frequently used code under the theme of unintentional plagiarism. This is the same as what Blum (2019) found, that plagiarism in college is often committed by students who do not know about it and/or that it is unacceptable.

4. Conclusions

Based on the above discussion, it can be seen that cheating can either be intentional or not; it may have the intention of gaining an unfair advantage or just the intention of helping a friend. With these as bases, together with the generated themes, this study is forwarding another definition of cheating, a definition that is situated in the school context. Cheating is any behavior or attempt made by an individual(s) that may cause inaccuracy in their fair judgment of their or others' activities. Analyzing differences in answers from faculty and students revealed that students would often use the term "just helping" or "just asking for help" when they disagreed that a person in a given scenario was cheating. This can also be observed in the themes created, where gaining help, providing help, and the absence of

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personal gain were created. With these, it can be said that students have the tendency to rationalize certain actions when they defend them as morally neutral rather than morally wrong, which can be seen from the perspective of neutralizing theory (DiPietro, 2020).

As such, further studies on cheating perspectives may be undertaken to ensure the reliability of what really constitutes cheating in school activities. A more detailed quantitative study may also be taken to gain more specificity on cheating behaviors.

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