

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS ON STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS ACADEMIC DISHONESTY BETWEEN STUDENTS IN CHINA AND IN THE UNITED STATES

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Abstract

Many recent studies reported that academic dishonesty became a distressing concern across university campuses in the United States. Meanwhile, it was also reported that foreign students were more actively involved in cheating activities and that in Asian countries, especially in China, where the definitions of academic dishonesty were “looser” than in the U.S., academic dishonesty was running out of control (Grose, 2006).

This paper investigated if there were significant differences between students in China and in the U.S., in regard to their perceptions and attitudes towards academic dishonesty. The purpose of this research was to develop some understanding of perceptions and attitudes towards cheating for students coming from different cultural and educational settings.

The research first analyzed, in China and in the U.S., the perceptions and attitudes towards academic dishonesty based on the results of two sets of self-reported surveys adopted from a recent study (Carpenter, Harding, Finelli, Montgomery, & Passow, 2006).

The actual sample included electronics students at a four-year university in the U.S. and a comparable university in Beijing, China. About 124 (sixty-two from each country) had valid data. The statistical tools used in the research included independent *t*-tests and Mann-Whitney U tests.

The research found that there were statistical commonalities as well as statistical differences between Chinese university students and American university students, in regard to their

perceptions and attitudes towards academic dishonesty. Some findings might reflect cultural differences. The paper discussed in details the findings and cultural implications.

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Introduction

Carpenter et al. (2006) conducted a “PASE-1 Survey” using a seven-page questionnaire instrument to test students’ attitudes and perceptions towards academic dishonesty. 643 engineering students from eleven educational institutions including community colleges and large research universities participated in the study. They concluded that students participated in the survey were likely to take part in the behaviors that they perceived as mistaken and that they recognized that they would take the risks of being penalized. They further concluded that students’ perceptions and attitudes towards academic dishonesty would have direct impact on their behavior (Carpenter et al., 2006).

In analyzing a recent cheating scandal at Ohio University’s engineering school, Grose (2006) stated that academic dishonesty became a distressing concern across university campuses in the United States. The author also reported that foreign students were more actively involved in cheating activities and that in Asian countries, especially in China, where the definitions of academic dishonesty were “looser” than in the U.S., academic dishonesty was running out of control (Grose, 2006).

In searching the similar studies in China, the authors found large number of papers from 1994 to 2006 on related subjects. Generally speaking, these studies showed that the academic dishonesty and the cheating behaviors were severe issues throughout the higher educational institutions. The causes were analyzed from various social, cultural, institutional, and instructional perspectives (Luo, 2006).

Although there were many studies on students’ perspectives, attitudes, and their behaviors towards academic dishonesty, including those of foreign students, there was little empirical research that focused on the comparisons of commonalities and differences between students in Asian countries and in the U.S., in regard to their perceptions and attitudes. This research was attempted to find whether there were statistically significant differences between students in China and students in the United States, in regard to their perceptions and attitudes towards academic dishonesty.

The actual sample included electronics students at a four-year university in the U.S. and a comparable university in Beijing, China. About 124 (sixty-two from each country) had valid data. Independent *t*-tests and Mann-Whitney U tests were used as appropriate inferential statistics based on the analysis of independent variable and dependent variables in this research.

As far as the attitudes were concerned, the research found the following commonalities. Both groups of students strongly agreed or agreed that it was a cheating behavior to (a) copy from another student during a test or quiz; (b) add fake references to term papers to expand the

bibliography; (c) copy an old term paper or lab-report from a previous year; (d) submit or copy homework assignments from previous terms; (e) store answers to a test in a calculator or Personal Digital Assistant (PDA); and (f) pay someone else to take an exam/write a paper for you. However, it was found that both groups of students felt neutral when answering “whether copying a passage from the textbook for homework assignments was a cheating behavior.” On the other hand, the research found the following significant differences. On average, students sampled in the United States tended to feel significantly stronger that permitting another student to look at your answer during a quiz or exam was a cheating behavior, that taking an exam for another student was a cheating behavior, that copying another student’s homework when it was not permitted by the instructor was a cheating behavior, and that changing the answer on your test/homework after it was graded and then telling the instructor a grading mistake was a cheating behaviors. The research further found that, on average, students sampled in China tended to think significantly stronger that asking another student about questions on an exam you have not yet taken was a cheating behavior.

Meanwhile, as far as the perceptions were concerned, the research found the following commonalities. Both groups of students tended to agree with the statements “it is the instructor or institution’s responsibility to prevent cheating,” “it is wrong to cheat no matter what the circumstances,” and “it is wrong to cheat even if the course material was too hard.” Also, both groups of students tended to feel neutral (slightly agree) with the statements “it is wrong to cheat even if the instructor has done an inadequate job of teaching the course,” and “it is wrong for me to cheat even if the instructor does not grade fairly.” Both groups of students tended to disagree with the statement “I would cheat to avoid getting a poor or failing grade in class.” On the other hand, the research found that, on average, students sampled in the United States tended to significantly more disagree with the statements “helping someone else cheat is not as bad as cheating myself,” “it is my responsibility to prevent cheating,” “I have to cheat just to get grades good enough to compete with other students at this school,” “if a good friend asked me to cheat for them, I wouldn’t be able to say no,” and “I would cheat in a class if it seemed that everyone else was cheating.” Contrarily, students sampled in China tended to significantly more disagree with the statements “If I saw another student cheating I would do nothing.”

Some of the differences found in this research might be attributed to different cultural perspectives. Students in China grew up in an environment emphasizing collectivism, which was to attach great importance to collaboration, while students in the United States grew up in an environment stressing individualism, which was to emphasize competition. This factor alone might explain several important findings presented in this research.

Research Questions

The first research question was whether there were statistically significant differences between students in China and students in the United States, in regard to their *attitudes* towards academic dishonesty. The second research question was whether there were statistically significant differences between students in China and students in the United States, in regard to their *perceptions* towards academic dishonesty. Under either category, twelve questions were surveyed to both students sampled in China and in the United States. The questions were adopted with permission from Carpenter et al. (2006) in a recent research.

Methodology

Population. The population for this research was intended to target at all students both in China and in the United States. The students were across all grade levels (first-year freshmen through fourth-year seniors) in the pursuit of their studies in electronics. The actual sample was limited to the students in electronics program at a four-year university campus at Chicago, and the students in a comparable electronics program at a four-year university campus at Beijing. Both programs were selected from atypical engineering schools in both countries (one was from an engineering technology school and the other from a technology school). The sample selection was based on the consideration of the factors of cost, time, and effectiveness (Gliner & Morgan, 2000).

Variables and Inferential Statistical Tools. The independent variable in this research had two categories. The first category was the group of students sampled in China, while the second category was the group of students sampled in the United States.

There were multiple dependent variables (DV) describing student *attitudes* and *perceptions* towards academic dishonesty.

The attitudes variables included whether students strongly agreed, agreed, felt neutral, disagreed, or strongly disagreed that (Carpenter et al. 2006):

1. Copying from another student during a test or quiz is a cheating behavior;
2. Permitting another student to look at your answer during a quiz or exam is a cheating behavior;
3. Taking an exam for another student is a cheating behavior;
4. Asking another student about questions on an exam you have not yet taken is a cheating behavior;
5. Adding fake references to term papers to expand the bibliography is a cheating behavior;
6. Copying an old term paper or lab-report from a previous year is a cheating behavior;
7. Copying another student's homework when it is not permitted by the instructor is a cheating behavior;
8. Copying a passage from the textbook for homework assignments is a cheating behavior;
9. Submitting or copying homework assignments from previous terms is a cheating behavior;
10. Storing answers to a test in a calculator or Personal Digital Assistant(PDA) is a cheating behavior;
11. Changing the answer on your test/homework after it was graded and then telling the instructor a grading mistake is a cheating behavior;
12. Paying someone else to take an exam/write a paper for you is a cheating behavior.

The perceptions variables included whether students strongly agreed, agreed, felt neutral, disagreed, or strongly disagreed with the following statements (Carpenter et al. 2006):

1. Helping someone else cheat is not as bad as cheating myself;
2. It is my responsibility to prevent cheating;
3. It is the instructor or institution's responsibility to prevent cheating;
4. If I saw another student cheating I would do nothing;
5. I would cheat to avoid getting a poor or failing grade in class;
6. I have to cheat just to get grades good enough to compete with other students at this school;
7. If a good friend asked me to cheat for them, I wouldn't be able to say no;
8. I would cheat in a class if it seemed that everyone else was cheating;
9. It is wrong to cheat no matter what the circumstances;
10. It is wrong to cheat even if the instructor has done an inadequate job of teaching the course;
11. It is wrong to cheat even if the course material was too hard; and
12. It is wrong for me to cheat even if the instructor does not grade fairly.

Due to the nature of independent and dependent variables, the nature of research questions, and the normality of data distributions, independent *t*-tests and Mann-Whitney U tests were used as appropriate inferential statistics.

Instrument. The primary instrument used in the research was the survey questionnaire adopted with permission from Carpenter et al. (2006) The survey questions in the questionnaire were addressing the student attitudes and perceptions regarding academic dishonesty. The questions were originally adopted in English for students sampled in the United States; they were then translated into Chinese for students sampled in China.

Findings

Findings Regarding Student Attitudes towards Academic Dishonesty. Independent *t* tests were executed to determine whether there were significant differences between the two nationality groups (China versus the United States). The *t* tests indicated that there were *no significant differences* between students sampled in China and sampled in the United States, in regard to their *attitudes* towards whether

- a. Copying from another student during a test or quiz was a cheating behavior;
- b. Adding fake references to term papers to expand the bibliography was a cheating behavior;
- c. Copying an old term paper or lab-report from a previous year was a cheating behavior;
- d. Copying a passage from the textbook for homework assignments was a cheating behavior;
- e. Submitting or copying homework assignments from previous terms was a cheating behavior;
- f. Storing answers to a test in a calculator or Personal Digital Assistant(PDA) was a cheating behavior; and
- g. Paying someone else to take an exam/write a paper for you was a cheating behavior.

Both groups of students strongly agreed or agreed that it was a cheating behavior to (a) copy from another student during a test or quiz; (b) add fake references to term papers to expand the bibliography; (c) copy an old term paper or lab-report from a previous year; (d) copy a passage from the textbook for homework assignments was a cheating behavior; (e) submit or copy homework assignments from previous terms; (f) store answers to a test in a calculator or Personal Digital Assistant (PDA); and (g) pay someone else to take an exam/write a paper for you. However, it was interesting to note that both groups of students felt neutral when answering whether copying a passage from the textbook for homework assignments was a cheating behavior.

Meanwhile, the t tests indicated that there was a significant difference between the electronics students sampled in China and the electronics students sampled in the United States, in regard to their attitude towards “permitting another student to look at your answer during a quiz or exam,” $t(114) = 5.30, p < 0.01$. On average, electronics students sampled in the United States tended to feel significantly stronger that permitting another student to look at your answer during a quiz or exam was a cheating behavior than their counterparts in China.

The t tests also indicated that there was a significant difference between the electronics students sampled in China and the electronics students sampled in the United States in regard to their attitudes towards “taking an exam for another student,” $t(84) = 11.89, p < 0.01$. On average, electronics students sampled in the United States tended to think significantly stronger that taking an exam for another student was a cheating behavior than their counterparts in China.

The t tests further illustrated that there were significant differences between the electronics students sampled in China and the electronics students sampled in the United States in regard to their attitudes towards “asking another student about questions on an exam you have not yet taken,” $t(90) = 5.394, p < 0.01$; “copying another student’s homework when it is not permitted by the instructor,” $t(121) = 4.19, p < 0.01$; and “changing the answer on your test/homework after it was graded and then telling the instructor a grading mistake,” $t(118) = 3.08, p < 0.01$. On average, electronics students sampled in China tended to think significantly stronger that asking another student about questions on an exam you have not yet taken was a cheating behavior, while electronics students sampled in the United States tended to feel significantly stronger that copying another student’s homework when it is not permitted by the instructor and changing the answer on your test/homework after it was graded and then telling the instructor a grading mistake were cheating behaviors.

Due to the violation of homogeneity and non-normality of the data, the Mann-Whitney U tests were used to examine the above findings. The Mann-Whitney U tests showed very similar results as discussed above, in regard to the attitudes towards academic dishonesty.

Findings Regarding Student Perceptions towards Academic Dishonesty. As far as the students’ perceptions were concerned, the independent t tests indicated that there were no significant differences between students sampled in China and sampled in the United States, regarding their *perceptions* towards the following statements:

- a. It was the instructor or institution’s responsibility to prevent cheating;

- b. I would cheat to avoid getting a poor or failing grade in class;
- c. It was wrong to cheat no matter what the circumstances;
- d. It was wrong to cheat even if the instructor has done an inadequate job of teaching the course;
- e. It was wrong to cheat even if the course material was too hard; and
- f. It was wrong for me to cheat even if the instructor does not grade fairly.

Both groups of students tended to agree with the statements “it is the instructor or institution’s responsibility to prevent cheating,” “it is wrong to cheat no matter what the circumstances,” and “it is wrong to cheat even if the course material was too hard.” Meanwhile, both groups of students tended to feel neutral (slightly agree) with the statements “it is wrong to cheat even if the instructor has done an inadequate job of teaching the course,” and “it is wrong for me to cheat even if the instructor does not grade fairly.” Both groups of students tended to disagree with the statement “I would cheat to avoid getting a poor or failing grade in class.”

The t tests indicated that there was a significant difference between the electronics students sampled in China and the electronics students sampled in the United States, in regard to their perception towards “helping someone else cheat is not as bad as cheating myself,” $t(97) = 4.084$, $p < 0.01$. On average, electronics students sampled in the United States tended to significantly more disagree with the statement “helping someone else cheat is not as bad as cheating myself,” than their counterparts in China.

The t tests also indicated that there was a significant difference between the electronics students sampled in China and the electronics students sampled in the United States, in regard to their perception towards “it is my responsibility to prevent cheating,” $t(99) = 2.872$, $p < 0.01$. On average, electronics students sampled in the United States tended to significantly more disagree with the statement “it is my responsibility to prevent cheating,” than their counterparts in China.

The t tests further illustrated that there were significant differences between the electronics students sampled in China and the electronics students sampled in the United States in regard to their perceptions towards “If I saw another student cheating I would do nothing,” $t(110) = 2.91$, $p < 0.01$; “I have to cheat just to get grades good enough to compete with other students at this school,” $t(121) = 2.7$, $p < 0.01$; “if a good friend asked me to cheat for them, I wouldn’t be able to say no,” $t(107) = 2.97$, $p < 0.01$; and “I would cheat in a class if it seemed that everyone else was cheating,” $t(1138) = 3.84$, $p < 0.01$. On average, electronics students sampled in the United States tended to significantly more disagree with the statements “I have to cheat just to get grades good enough to compete with other students at this school,” “if a good friend asked me to cheat for them, I wouldn’t be able to say no,” and “I would cheat in a class if it seemed that everyone else was cheating.” Meanwhile, electronics students sampled in China tended to significantly more disagree with the statements “If I saw another student cheating I would do nothing.”

Due to the violation of homogeneity and non-normality of the perception data, the Mann-Whitney U tests were executed to check these findings. The Mann-Whitney U tests again showed very similar results as being found above, in regard to the perceptions of academic dishonesty.

Conclusion

The tables in the following pages summarize the findings in this research. Table 1 summarizes research findings on students' attitudes towards academic dishonesty, while Table 2 summarizes research findings on students' perceptions towards academic dishonesty.

Implications and Future Studies

The comparative research findings clearly demonstrated that there were differences between university students in China and in the United States as to their perceptions and attitudes towards academic dishonesty. Some differences might be attributed to different cultural perspectives. Students in China grew up in a collectivistic environment, where the importance of collaboration was greatly emphasized, while students in the United States grew up in an individualistic environment emphasizing competition. Detailed analyses on cultural implications, some of them are subtle and sophisticated, will be discussed in a subsequent paper.

This paper is a pilot study in a comprehensive, ongoing international research project undertaken by the authors, to investigate and compare students' perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors towards academic dishonesty in different cultural and educational settings, and to develop mechanisms to prevent and reduce academic cheating.

Table 1: Comparisons of Students' Attitudes towards Academic Dishonesty.

<u>Dependent Variables</u>	<u>Sig. or not</u>	<u>Findings</u>
Copying from another student during a test or quiz is a cheating behavior	NS	Both strongly agree or agree
Permitting another student to look at your answer during a quiz or exam is a cheating behavior	Sig.	U.S. Students feel stronger that it was a cheating behavior
Taking an exam for another student is a cheating behavior	Sig.	U.S. Students feel stronger that it was a cheating behavior
Asking another student about questions on an exam you have not yet taken is a cheating behavior	Sig.	Students in China feel stronger that it was a cheating behavior
Adding fake references to term papers to expand the bibliography is a cheating behavior	NS	Both strongly agree or agree
Copying an old term paper or lab-report from a previous year is a cheating behavior	NS	Both strongly agree or agree
Copying another student's homework when it is not permitted by the instructor is a cheating behavior;	Sig.	U.S. Students feel stronger that it was a cheating behavior
Copying a passage from the textbook for homework assignments is a cheating behavior	NS	Both feel neutral
Submitting or copying homework assignments from previous terms is a cheating behavior	NS	Both strongly agree or agree
Storing answers to a test in a calculator or Personal Digital Assistant (PDA) is a cheating behavior;	NS	Both strongly agree or agree
Changing the answer on your test/homework after it was graded and then telling the instructor a grading mistake is a cheating behavior	Sig.	U.S. Students feel stronger that it was a cheating behavior
Paying someone else to take an exam/write a paper for you is a cheating behavior.	NS	Both strongly agree or agree

NS: No Significant Difference

Sig. Significant Difference

Table 2: Comparisons of Students' Perceptions towards Academic Dishonesty.

<u>Dependent Variables</u>	<u>Sig. or NS</u>	<u>Findings</u>
Helping someone else cheat is not as bad as cheating myself	Sig.	U.S. Students significantly more disagree with the statement
It is my responsibility to prevent cheating	Sig.	U.S. Students significantly more disagree with the statement
It is the instructor or institution's responsibility to prevent cheating	NS	Both groups agree with the statement
If I saw another student cheating I would do nothing	Sig.	Students in China significantly more disagree with the statement
I would cheat to avoid getting a poor or failing grade in class	NS	Both groups disagree with the statement
I have to cheat just to get grades good enough to compete with other students at this school	Sig.	U.S. Students significantly more disagree with the statement
If a good friend asked me to cheat for them, I wouldn't be able to say no	Sig.	U.S. Students significantly more disagree with the statement
I would cheat in a class if it seemed that everyone else was cheating	Sig.	U.S. Students significantly more disagree with the statement
It is wrong to cheat no matter what the circumstances	NS	Both groups agree with the statement
It is wrong to cheat even if the instructor has done an inadequate job of teaching the course	NS	Both groups feel neutral (slightly agree) with the statement
It is wrong to cheat even if the course material was too hard	NS	Both groups agree with the statement
It is wrong for me to cheat even if the instructor does not grade fairly.	NS	Both groups felt neutral (slightly agreed) with the statement

NS: No Significant Difference

Sig. Significant Difference

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