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Investigation of exam cheating attitudes of university students (Case of Kocaeli University)

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Abstract

Exam cheating is one of the biggest problems of the educational system of many different countries, from past to present. This problem is still continuing in many branches of education today. The aim of this study was to determine the attitudes of the students of Kocaeli University towards exam cheating. 254 students studying at Kocaeli University voluntarily participated in the research. As a data collection tool, "Attractiveness Attitude Related to Exam Cheating" developed by Semerci (2003) was used. The attitudes of students of Kocaeli University on exam cheating were found to be moderate in the research ($205,44 \pm 42,51$). Although there was no statistically significant difference between the exam cheating attitude scores of university students according to gender, age group & department variables ($p > 0,05$), there was a significant difference according to grade variables ($p < 0,05$). This meaningful difference occurred from preparatory grades - 2nd grades, 2nd grades - 3rd grades and, 2nd grades - 4th grades. Precautions for exam cheating can be increased so that more conscious and well-educated students can be graduated. The courses that will be successful by exam cheating behavior should be emphasized by the relevant faculty members to the student who may need them in professional business life. Disciplinary policies should be implemented to prevent students from exam cheating behavior.

Keywords: University; student; cheating; attitude; exam.

Introduction

Exam cheating is defined as an attempt to respond to exam questions secretly by using the materials previously prepared by entrants (O'Rourke et al., 2010). It is stated that this process is one of the most important problems of inefficiency and unproductiveness that continuing from primary education to the latest stages of higher education (Semerci & Sađlam, 2005).

It has been determined that pupils are not able to acquire sufficient cognitive behavior with the exam cheating and that less-informed pupils are exposed to "snowballing" as they move to higher classes. In other words, the missing information grows like an avalanche. It is said that it is difficult to produce information at the level of analysis, synthesis, and to produce solutions to country problems for people who are incompletely educated (Semerci, 2004).

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Attitude is defined as the pre-tendency of a mental, emotional, and behavioral response that an individual organizes based on experience, knowledge, emotion, and motivation of any object, social subject, or event in or about himself or herself (İnceoğlu, 2010).

It is stated that with the increase of technological developments, students cheat in the exams via mobile phones (Nyamawe & Mtonyole, 2014). Despite the fact that it is easier to reach knowledge through developing science and technology, the fact that learning is still based on memorization can encourage students to make copies by looking at the result from the learning process. It is expressed that examinations form various types of copying, such as looking at a friend, looking at a source in a secret way, not remarking the sources of information from the internet and other sources in project and performance assignments (Köse & Öztumur, 2013).

It has been determined within the framework of teacher views that exam cheating is among the most common unwanted student behaviors (Çankaya, 2011). Although students generally state that the act of copying is morally wrong, they have seen a variety of ways to legitimize the situation and to rationalization, even though they are confronted with an exam cheating-related situation (Ünlü & Eroğlu, 2012). Justification of the act of exam cheating seems to be influenced by such concepts as "earning without working", "making money on the short way" and "egoistic thinking" in the society we live in. It is suggested that people who grow up in environments where this philosophy is valid are also expected to cheat in the exam (Semerci, 2004). Furthermore, the understanding of "being free to make copies on condition that it is not caught" drove us to an understanding that can disrupt the social order like "something can be stolen, missed, etc. if no one sees it". All this shows that the act of exam cheating is closely related to the moral values of the individual and to the moral development. It is stated that the exam scores are more valuable than learning and honesty for the students who cheat in the exam (Ünlü & Eroğlu, 2012). It has been stated that researches that investigate exam cheating behaviors were generally focused on motivation and moral dimension, and individuals with high success motivation tend to be more prone to cheating than individuals with lower achievement motivation (Hardigan, 2004). On the one hand, exam cheating behavior prevents the student's learning and success but also causes the student to clash with his own inner world, along with guilt. In addition, the copy makes it difficult to determine the true success of the class or the student and creates ambiguity in this respect (Ünlü & Eroğlu, 2013). Although some researchers now refer to the high level of college students' copying, the period of decline in general morality, exam cheating is not a new problem (Dam, 2013). Copying is often seen as a common behavior among college students (Simkin, 2010; McCabe, 2001).

For these reasons, the aim of this research was to determine the attitudes of the students of Kocaeli University on the copying according to age, gender, department and year variables.

Method

Research group

163 male (64.2%) and 91 female (35.8%) 254 total students who attend Kocaeli University voluntarily participated in this study. Students participating in the study were from 7 different faculties (engineering, science & literature, economics, and administration, dentistry, education, communication, political sciences) and 2 different colleges (physical education & sports, health).

Data Collection Tools

In this research, attitude scale related to copying developed by Semerci (2003) was used. The KMO (Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin) value of the attitude scale was 0.87, the Bartlett test was 16059.3 and the Cronbach alpha was 0.96 (Semerci, 2003). On the scale, there were 67 items, 37 of which are positive and 30 of which are negative. In the survey, the scale is as follows: "I never agree: 1", "I mostly disagree: 2", "Partially agree: 3", "I agree mostly": 4 "and" I fully agree: 5 ". The answers of the negative sentences in the scale were recoded into the reverse direction as; "I totally agree: 1" to

"I totally disagree: 5". There are additionally 4 demographic questions (gender, age group, department and grade).

The higher scores on the scale represent higher interests in exam cheating. Thus, the scores of the answers of questions as follows were coded in the opposite direction; 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 11, 12, 14, 15, 17, 18, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 32, 33, 35, 37, 38, 41, 44, 47, 48, 50, 53, 56, 58, 61, 63, 64, 66, 67. The lowest score that can be taken from this scale was 67, the highest score being 335. The lowest negative attitude about exam cheating between 67 and 120 points, the low negative attitude about exam cheating between 121 and 174 points, the unstable attitude about exam cheating between 175 and 228 points, the high negative attitude about exam cheating between 229 and 282 points, 283 and above point indicates the highest negative attitude regarding exam cheating.

Collection of the Data

The survey was conducted individually by the researcher. The subjects who participated in the study were informed about the study and were asked to complete the questionnaires within 15-20 minutes in the classroom environment.

Analysis of the Data

Descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation) tests, Independent Samples T-Test was applied to analyze gender variable and Oneway ANOVA was applied to analyze age group, department and grade variables. The data were evaluated using the SPSS 24.0 package program. Significance levels of 0.01 and 0.05 were used.

Results

Table 1. Distribution of total points of the university students' exam cheating attitude scores according to number of people variable

	n	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
67 – 120 points	7	2,8	2,8	2,8
121 – 174 points	39	15,4	15,4	18,1
175 – 228 points	149	58,7	58,7	76,8
229 – 282 points	49	19,3	19,3	96,1
283 points and above	10	3,9	3,9	100
Total	254	100	100	

Exam cheating attitude scores of most of the students (58,7 %) were at unstable level (n=149). 19,3 % of the student were at high negative attitude level (n=49), 15,4 % of the students were at low negative attitude level (n=39), and 3,9 % of the students were at the highest negative attitude towards exam cheating (n=10). The minimum number of students (2,8 %) were in the lowest negative attitude levels (n=7).

Table 2. Distribution of university students' attitude scores regarding exam cheating according to some variables

		n	%	\bar{x}	\pm ss
Gender	Female	91	35,8	205,34	45,67
	Male	163	64,2	205,5	40,79
Age Group	18 – 20 age group	82	32,3	203,55	38,92
	21 – 23 age group	144	56,7	205,24	43,92
	24 age group and above	28	11	212,04	46,06
Department	Faculty of engineering	50	19,7	200,54	34,76
	Faculty of science & literature	41	16,1	201,93	46,04
	Faculty of economics and administration sciences	61	24	201,72	38,63
	Faculty of dentistry	12	4,7	210,92	49,7
	Faculty of education	6	2,4	202,67	71,1
	Faculty of communication	21	8,3	195,1	40,91
	College of physical education & sports	47	18,5	224,15	43,21
	College of health	9	3,5	185,78	30,19
	Faculty of political sciences	7	2,8	217,14	55,65
Grade	Preparatory grade	35	13,8	194	32,88
	1 st grade	2	0,8	219	19,79
	2 nd grade	61	24	222,97	43,52
	3 rd grade	76	29,9	199,41	44,01
	4 th grade	80	31,5	202,48	41,2

Table 3. Independent Samples T-Test Results of Exam Cheating Attitude Scores of University Students According to Gender Variable

		n	\bar{x}	\pm ss	t	p
Total points	Female	91	205,34	45,67	,028	,978
	Male	163	205,5	40,79		

There was no statistically significant difference between exam cheating attitude scores of students in terms of gender variable ($p=0,978$).

Table 4. ANOVA Results of Exam Cheating Attitude Scores of University Students According to Age Group Variable

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Between Groups	1517,373	2	758,686	,418	,659
Within Groups	455883,241	251	1816,268		
Total	457400,614	253			

When exam cheating attitude scores of university students were examined according to the age group variable, no statistically significant difference was found ($p=0,659$).

Table 5. ANOVA Results of Exam Cheating Attitude Scores of University Students According to Department Variable

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Between Groups	26092,722	8	3261,590	1,853	,068
Within Groups	431307,892	245	1760,440		
Total	457400,614	253			

When exam cheating attitude scores of the university students were examined according to department variable, there is no statistically significant difference was found ($p=0,068$). Exam cheating attitude scores according to department variables were the highest in the college of physical education & sports ($\bar{x}=224,15\pm 43,21$) and were lowest in the college of health ($\bar{x}=185,78\pm 30,19$).

Table 6. ANOVA Test Results of Exam Cheating Attitude Scores of University Students According to Grade Variable

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Between Groups	27156,374	4	6789,094	3,929	,004*
Within Groups	430244,240	249	1727,889		
Total	457400,614	253			

* $p<0,05$.

A statistically significant difference was found when exam cheating attitude scores of university students were examined according to grade variable ($p=0,004$).

Table 7. Tukey LSD Test Results of Exam Cheating Attitude Scores of University Students According to Grade Variable

(I) Grade	(J) Grade	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	p	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
2 nd grade	Preparatory grade	28,967*	8,814	,001	11,61	46,33
	1 st grade	3,967	29,871	,894	-54,86	62,80
	3 rd grade	23,559*	7,146	,001	9,49	37,63
	4 th grade	20,492*	7,066	,004	6,58	34,41

* $p<0,05$.

It was found that meaningful difference in exam cheating attitude scores of university students according to gender variable occurred from 2nd grades.

Conclusions and recommendations

As a result of this research, it was determined that Kocaeli University students' attitudes towards exam cheating were moderate. In this case, the students of Kocaeli University generally show an unstable attitude towards exam cheating ($\bar{x}=205,44\pm 42,51$). According to this situation, it can be said that students of Kocaeli University cheat in some courses and do not make copies in some courses. In a different study, it was stated that the act of cheating was widespread among the university students (Hosny & Fatima, 2014).

Although the cheating is a harmful and non-ethical behavior, statistics show that nearly 90% of university students have cheated at least one time during their university years (Küçüktepe, 2012). There are studies that indicate that gender (Yangın & Kahyaoğlu, 2009) and grade variable (Hardigan, 2004) have an effect on exam cheating behavior in university. Additionally, there was a relationship between exam cheating behavior and achievement situations, the pressure of success, worries about failure and aim to get high scores (Ünlü & Eroğlu, 2013).

In terms of gender variable, there was no statistically significant difference between the exam cheating attitudes of college students. In addition, the average attitude scale scores of male ($\bar{x}=205,5\pm 40,79$) and female ($\bar{x}=205,34\pm 45,67$) students are very close to each other by gender variable. This result was similar to the study results of Ünlü and Eroğlu (2013), whereas Yang and Kahyaoğlu (2009) reported that there was a significant difference in the gender variable. According

to a different research, the percentage of exam cheating in female students is less than that of males. A contrary result comes from Japanese university students because Japanese female students are more likely to cheat in the exam than males (Lüle, 2012). In different studies, it was mentioned that male students are more inclined towards exam cheating than female students (Keçeci, 2011; Gallant, 2015).

There was no statistically significant difference when the exam cheating attitude scores of the students were examined according to the age group variable. The most tendency to cheat in the exam was in the age group of 24 and above ($\bar{x}=212,04\pm46,06$). This is followed by the 21-23 age group ($\bar{x}=205,24\pm43,92$) and the 18-20 age group ($\bar{x}=203,55\pm38,92$). Accordingly, it has been observed that the negative attitudes towards exam cheating are decreasing with the increase of the age variable. As age increases, there is more tendency to cheat in the exams. It was found that 26 years old students were more prone to cheating in the exam when the ages were analyzed. This result was followed by 25, 24, 21, 19, 23, 20, 22 and 18 years old students. In addition, it is thought that low score of the students who are 18 to 20 years old may have developed due to the adaptation to university life, try to make friends, less intensive courses in the first years, the awareness that they have taken a step to a very different educational institution from high school.

According to department variable, there was no statistically significant difference in exam cheating attitude scores. Exam cheating attitude scores according to department variables were the highest in the college of physical education & sports ($\bar{x}=224,15\pm43,21$). This result was followed by the faculty of political sciences ($\bar{x}=217,14\pm55,65$), faculty of dentistry ($\bar{x}=210,92\pm49,7$), faculty of education ($\bar{x}=202,67\pm71,1$), faculty of science & literature ($\bar{x}=201,93\pm46,04$), faculty of economics & administration sciences ($\bar{x}=201,72\pm38,63$), faculty of engineering ($\bar{x}=200,54\pm34,76$), faculty of communication ($\bar{x}=195,1\pm40,91$), and college of health ($\bar{x}=185,78\pm30,19$). It is stated that the department variable has an effect on the exam cheating (Yangın & Kahyaoğlu, 2009). In a different study, 81% of physical education and sport college students were cheating in exams (Alemdağ & Alemdağ, 2015). According to this, among the reasons of the high average attitude in exam cheating points of the students of Physical Education and Sports College; exam cheating is perceived as a necessity, everybody cheat in the exams sometimes, the system pushes the students to cheat in the exams, attitudes of lecturers during the semester encourages students to cheat in the exams, priority is given to practical lectures than theoretical lectures, and students want to show themselves as physical success rather than academic success.

When grade variable analyzed, there was a significant difference between exam cheating attitude score and grades ($p=0,004$). This meaningful difference arose from preparatory grades - 2nd grades, 2nd grades and, 3rd grades, 2nd grades - 4th grades. It was determined that 2nd grade students ($\bar{x}=222,97\pm43,52$) were more prone to exam cheating than other students and the lowest exam cheating tendency was in the preparatory grade students ($\bar{x}=194\pm32,88$) in the evaluation based on the grade variable. This was followed by the 1st grade ($\bar{x}=219\pm19,79$), 4th grade ($\bar{x}=202,48\pm41,2$) and 3rd grade ($\bar{x}=199,41\pm44,01$) students respectively. According to these results, it is considered that there are factors such as the failures of the classes, the differences in the teaching hours, course content, etc., due to the fact that the exam cheating attitude scores related to the year variable are not regularly increased or decreased and new questions can be added to the questionnaire to identify these reasons. It is thought that as the grade increases, the students become more aware of the sanctions for cheating behavior, problems of adaptation to the school and its environment highly solved, they become more sensitive about the ethical rules of their potential professions and, the risk is more difficult to take (Akdağ & Güneş, 2002). In a different study, it was implied that there was no significant difference between the attitudes of cheating in the exam according to gender and grade variables (Wei et al., 2014). In another study, it was stated that there was a meaningful relationship between grade and exam cheating behaviors. (Ünlü & Eroğlu, 2013; Semerci, 2004).

It can be said that the researches about exam cheating in Turkey are limited and followed research were obtained; Kaymakcan (2002), Semerci (2004), Semerci & Sağlam (2005), Tayfun & Yazıcıoğlu (2008), Yangın & Kahyaoglu (2009), Durmuşçelebi (2011), Er & Gürkan (2011), Topçu & Uzundumlu (2011), Küçüktepe & Küçüktepe (2012), Mert (2012), Ünlü & Eroğlu (2012), Köse & Öztemur (2013). In these research exam cheating reasons were education based on memorization and abstract mentality, negative teacher attitudes, lack of studying habits, personality disorders, exam cheating habit, crowded classrooms, inadequate applications, worries about getting low scores, reduction of points from minor mistakes.

There are also many studies in foreign countries about exam cheating. Following research have been found in the literature; Hardigan (2004), Etter et al. (2006), Stephens & Nicholson (2008,) Simkin & McLeod (2009), Anderman et al. (2010), O'Rourke et al. (2010), Jones (2011), Ledesma (2011), McCabe (2011), Miranda & Fireire (2011), Sportsman (2012), Witherspoon et al. (2012). In these research, it is stated that it is also widespread cheating in the exams in developed countries, especially more cheating in homework and projects and among the reasons of exam cheating were negative attitudes of teachers, examinations based on memorization, not to understand the lesson, psychological pressure of the family, inadequate studying etc.

As a result of the research, most of the students answered: "I do not agree" to the question "Those who make copies are unbelievers" (n = 140). Nevertheless, the number of students who were answered "I fully agree" with the same substance is the least (n = 14). Accordingly, there was a consistency between students' thinking that there was no connection between exam cheating and personal belief. 2nd most frequent totally agreed sentence was "The fact that a student succeeds and even a degree via exam cheating is unfair to others" and most frequent totally disagreed sentence was "Exam cheating is a glory" (n=120). "Even if my friend, I interfere with my friend while cheating in the exam" and "I do not trust my friends who cheat in the exam" were the most frequently answered by students "I never agree" (n=111).

Precautions for exam cheating can be increased so that more conscious and well-educated students can be graduated. The courses that will be successful by exam cheating behavior should be emphasized by the relevant faculty members to the student who may need them in professional business life. Disciplinary policies should be implemented to prevent students from exam cheating behavior.

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