

Analysis on Contemporary College Students' Credit Awareness -A Qualitative Research on Undergraduates Who Cheated in Examinations

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Abstract: In this paper, 79 college students who were punished for cheating in exams are studied. Through reading their self-criticism texts and conducting in-depth interviews as well as surveys, researchers find out their motives in cheating, their attitudes toward cheating and their predictions of possible outcomes; the theory of Symbolic Interactionism is used to analyze the results. The research illustrates that students' motives in cheating mainly include fear of failing the exam, desire of getting better grades, and requirements of keeping friendship or saving face. As for students' attitudes toward cheating, some of them believe that the behavior must be wrong; others are in the state of psychological imbalance. Students' predictions of possible consequences are divided into three categories: some choose to cheat regardless of the consequences; some know the serious consequences but have the fluke mind; some want to give up at first but cannot resist the temptation.

1. The Research Question

In colleges and universities, a small group of students cheat in exams. Although with the improvement in academic atmosphere and the supervision system, the phenomenon has been curbed, it is difficult to completely eliminate practices of cheating in short time. At present, college students cheat in examinations through smuggling notes into the exam, peeping other students' papers, using communication equipment to access or disseminate answers, looking for information in the toilet, talking test contents, plagiarizing or even forcibly grabbing other students' test papers or drafts, and hiring someone else to take the place of the test [1]. These phenomena have brought many negative impacts on education in colleges and universities.

2. Theoretical Framework and Research Methods

2.1 Theoretical framework.

In order to further understand the thoughts of students who cheated in exams, the theory of Symbolic Interactionism is used as the conceptual framework of this study. Symbolic interaction theory focuses on studying the process of individuals' construction of their own behaviors. There are three main premises. First, human beings act on things on the basis of their meaning. Secondly, the meaning of things derives from the social interaction between people. Thirdly, when dealing with things, actors can communicate with each other so as to interpret and revise the meaning of things. [2] Students' views on cheating are constructed in their social interactions. This study aims to analyze students' attitudes toward cheating and credit when they were cheating in exams; their attitudes are reflected in their interactions with others and themselves. When studying students' credit awareness, the drama theory put forward by Goffman is employed. Researchers analyze human behaviors in the performance scene. Goffman observes how individuals present themselves and their behaviors to others in their daily lives. [3] This study adopts Goffman's theory to explain the interaction between college students that cheated in exams with others and themselves. It does not only pay attention to the expression of respondents, but also attaches importance to the actual experience of these students.

On this basis, undergraduates' attitudes toward cheating and credit are analyzed.

2.2 Research Methods.

S. Merriam points out that qualitative research is the best way to further understand the meaning of people's behavior construction, that is, to understand how people treat their own behaviors; it focuses on understanding the meaning of phenomenon from the perspective of the interviewee, rather than from the researcher's point of view. [4] This study uses the qualitative research method to make intensive descriptions in the process of collecting data. It can help researchers to understand the real experiences and attitudes of these students. The investigation is carried out through semi-structured interviews, which allow respondents to freely express their opinions and resent life experiences.

Research subjects are 79 students who were punished for cheating in exams in a university of Sichuan Province. These students are from 2013 to 2017 grades; the time span is from 2014 to 2018. Some students are interviewed on the basis of reading their self-criticism texts. Since different college students have different explanations for the same phenomenon, respondents' descriptions are crucial to the interpretation of this study. Cheating is not accepted by the school; students who cheat in exams will be punished. It is an issue involves privacy. Before the formal interview, researchers contacted interviewees and obtained their trust. The main content of interview is to explain their motivations and attitudes towards cheating, as well as their predictions about possible outcomes.

The interviews are recorded on the premise of interviewees' permission. Interview materials are sorted out afterwards; students' feelings and recollections during the interview are also recorded. When classify and in-depth analyze data, two methods are adopted: category analysis and situational analysis. Category analysis means to search recurring phenomena in data and important concepts which can explain these phenomena; situational analysis refers to analyze the descriptions of relevant events and characters in natural situations and in the order of story development. [5]

3. Research Results

The credit awareness of college students mainly refers to the attitude of college students towards credit. This paper studies the credit awareness of college students through analyzing their motives in cheating, their attitudes toward cheating and their predictions of possible outcomes.

3.1 Motivation of cheating in exams.

College students' motives of cheating in exams can be roughly divided into the following types.

They are afraid of failing the exam since they do not make enough preparation. Some students spend much more time on leisure and entertainment than study. In this survey, 46 students cheated for this reason, accounting for 58.23% of all respondents. This motive has the largest proportion. Some other students do not have interests in their majors and courses, and are lack of motivation and initiative in learning. 13 undergraduates cheated for this reason, accounting for 16.46%. These two groups of students do not have enough confidence when the examination is approaching, and hope to pass the exam through cheating. Further research finds out that students who are afraid of failing an exam are actually afraid of losing face or being blamed by their parents.

"I put too much time on gaming and surfing the network. I do not spend enough time on learning; I do not know how to review the course. I am afraid of failing in the exam and let my parents down."

"I was transferred to this major. At first I forced myself to adapt it, but my interests in learning were declining. There's no hope, so I began to skip classes. But I am afraid of failing in the exam and have to re-study this course. "

"I did not like chemistry in high school. I am absent-minded in class since I can't understand the content. My performances on other courses are good. If I cannot pass this exam, it will be embarrassing."

Some students want to get better scores, which is also one of the most important motivations for college students to cheat. These students usually have relatively good academic performance; they cheat in exams to get better grades, since high marks can help them to get scholarships, or have better development in the future. Eight respondents in this survey select this reason, account for 10.13% of

total students. They usually use cheat sheets or mobile phones to search for answers.

"My performances on other courses are good. I can definitely pass this course, but I hope to get 85 points or more, so that I can have the chance of getting award."

"I am determined to work in state-owned enterprises or foreign enterprises; they have higher requirements on employees' academic performance. My future career cannot be ruined by this course."

The requirements of keeping friendship or saving face. In this group, some students hire surrogate exam-takers; some ask friends to send answers through communication tools. Most cases are cooperative cheating between friends. Students sending answers or substituting others in exams suffer from psychological pressure; the direct consequence of not helping is the influence of friendship. When a friend has asked for multiple times, the psychological pressure of refusal is much higher than the risk of being caught for cheating. [6] Five pairs of 10 students cheated out of this reason in this survey, accounting for 12.66%. After being punished for cheating, the relationship between friends is deeply affected.

"My friend has financial difficulties. If he fails to pass CET-4, it will be more difficult for him to find a job after graduation. I just want to help him. "

"Hiring a surrogate exam-taker is not a new thing; it has nothing to do with morality. The actual pressure of lost friends' trusts is far greater than the potential pressure of being caught. "

"I am very regret in helping my good friend and being caught. Although he apologized to me for many times, there is still an untied knot in my heart. "

The attraction of trying something new. After entering the university, students get rid of constraining of teachers and parents. College students are curious about many things. They know that cheating in exams is not right, but some of them choose to cheat out of their rebellious psychology and excitement of challenging rules. 2 students choose this reason, accounting for 2.52%. Both of them are first-year students. "Never cheated before, I just want to try it." "I always want to try something I want to do."

3.2 Students' attitudes toward cheating in exam.

College students are adults; most of them can tell right and wrong behaviors. Their attitudes toward cheating in exam are summarized as follows.

Some of them believe that cheating must be wrong. All students in this survey were punished for cheating in exams; they all feel "confessed" and "regretted" for their behaviors in self-criticism texts. But in the interview, many students do not regard cheating as an immoral behavior, which is consistent with the result of Feng-lin Liao and his colleagues' research. Moral self-deception can be found in students' cheating behaviors. At the moment, their consciousness and subconscious are contradictory, they do not realize that cheating is immoral in consciousness, but subconsciously they know it is immoral. [7]

Others are in the state of psychological imbalance. College life is a kind of collective life. The behaviors of college students are greatly influenced by the surrounding environment. Some students have cheated successfully, passed the exams easily and even gained recognition. This caused other students' psychological imbalance. Some students who have not cheated before choose to cheat in the exam. Among them, a part of students have excellent grades.

"Some people around me can easily pass the exam through cheating. I cannot catch up with them no matter how hard I study. It is really unfair."

"Some students usually skip classes, and do not take study seriously. But they could pass exams through cheating; some of them even won scholarships. I feel imbalanced."

3.3 Anticipation of possible consequences.

Some students choose to cheat regardless of consequences; most of them are students who are afraid of failing the exam. The unbearable psychological consequences such as parents' blame, teachers' criticism and influence on future development encourage them to take risks. These students often have poor academic foundation and have planned to cheat for a long time. There are four students in this group, accounting for 5.06%.

"No matter how I prepare, I am sure I can't pass the exam."

"Failing the exam will affect job hunting; all other things are not important by comparison."

Some undergraduates know the serious consequences but have the fluke mind. Almost all students know that cheating will be punished, but most of them believe that after careful preparation, the teacher may not find them. Even if teachers notice their behaviors, they may not catch them, since some students have successfully cheated before. The trusting to luck makes students take the wrong step. In the survey 66 students hold this view. The proportion is as high as 83.54%. "If I have prepared very carefully in advance, it is impossible for teachers to find." "Some students have cheated successfully, indicating that supervisors cannot catch everyone."

Some students wanted to give up at first but could not resist the temptation. In this survey, 9 students account for 11.39% belong to this group. Most of them are able to pass the exam, but they want to achieve better results. Usually they copy other students' answers or taking cheat sheets. After being caught, they have the highest degree of regret. "At first I had the idea of cheating, but when I saw the strict supervisor I gave up. Then I found some difficult questions, the idea of cheating came out again... It was really suffering". "Actually I knew that cheating could not help me to answer correctly, but I cannot calm down and take the exam. Now I am extremely regretted."

4. Countermeasure Analyses and Suggestions

Strengthening credit education. The most effective way to reduce and eliminate cheating behaviors is to improve students' moral levels. Strengthening the credit education can help students to be honest and behave properly when they are improving their cultural accomplishments and innovative abilities. College students should be strict with them and refuse to cheat; only with these small honest behaviors can we build a harmonious campus. Special measures include signing letter of commitment before exams, holding class meetings with the theme of credit and taking the exam honesty, and studying relevant school rules and regulations. Let students be law-abiding and honest and cultivate students' sense of responsibility and honesty. At the same time, the serious consequences of cheating in examinations and the harm to individuals and families should be clearly told to every student, so that every student can understand the significant impact and serious consequences of cheating in examinations.

Optimizing examination management. On the basis of doing their own jobs well, all school departments should actively cooperate with each other to organize, publicize and educate effectively. Faculty dealing with students' affairs should carry out integrity education through various channels, deal with students who cheated in exams more seriously and launch warning education. Professional teachers should instruct students to behave properly in daily life, and be strict in students. As the department in charge of teaching management and assessment, when evaluate teachers' performance, the educational administration department should also consider class attendance, students' homework and the phenomenon of cheating in exams. They should focus on publicity and education before examinations, establish strict supervision system, pay attention to law enforcement and perform their duties seriously, so that no students who have made mistakes can escape from punishment. The authority should also promote the diversification of students' assessment; their class attendance, qualities of their homework and their practical abilities should also be included in the evaluation system. Through these ways, students can realize that the only way of being excellent is hard working.

Stressing both punishment and punishment, and building up the credit system. First of all, it is necessary to establish the campus culture of seeking truth and pragmatism, as well as the academic atmosphere of being honest in life and examinations, and being diligent in study. Secondly, the school discipline should be taken seriously. The authority needs to further improve the reward and punishment mechanism, and pay equal attention to education, reward and punishment. The punishment of cheating students should be more serious and publicize to the whole school, in order to warn and deter other students. Thirdly, through the cooperation and joint efforts of the educational administration, the propaganda office, the students as well as teachers, a multi-level integrity system should be established.

5. Research Limitations

Some students may not tell the truth since they want to protect personal privacy. In the processes of designing questions, establishing theoretical hypotheses and analyzing data, researchers cannot eliminate the influences of their personal opinions and value orientations, which may have certain impacts on the study.

Respondents may guess what kind of answering the researcher wants to get and provide information according to their expectations; ideas expressed may not be true.

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