

## Pilot study to pave way for exploring contract cheating among higher education students in UAE

*Zeenath Reza Khan, Sabiha Mumtaz, Priyanka Hemnani & Sanjana Raheja*  
*University of Wollongong in Dubai, UAE*

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### **Abstract:**

Contract cheating has been the focus of research for the last decade, due to the boom in websites and web-based business models gaining popularity. Although measures exist to deter students from traditional plagiarism behaviour, these text-matching solutions are not able to provide a viable option to detect and deter contract cheating. To the best of researcher's knowledge, no studies so far have looked at the student population and trends in the UAE and Middle East. Why is this relevant to the UAE? UAE has already replaced Malaysia and Singapore to become the fourth most desired destination for higher education after USA, UK and Canada. More than a million students are a part of UAE higher education coming from varying backgrounds. With UAE's young education industry establishing quality of education and producing graduates at a global platform, it is crucial to explore and understand the current status of contact cheating among higher education students. Based on initial literature review, interview questions were prepared. Independent research assistants carried out the focus group interviews of students who represented at least five nationalities, varying age groups and levels in their degree program. Questions included capturing respondents' awareness of term 'contract cheating', 'asking other students to write assessments', 'turning in work done by someone else', 'writing paper for someone else' among others. Results showed 43% of those interviewed never heard of such an act, were not aware that it was considered academic dishonesty. In contrast, 62% had heard of students asking someone else to write a paper. Respondents also quoted lack of enthusiasm, poor time management and procrastination among others as primary reasons to get their assessments completed by someone else. Students pointed to email, ads, social media and even student-events outdoors as ways and places where mills contacted them. These findings have alerted us to the urgent need for conducting comprehensive future study, gather larger dataset of instances, where contacts are made, how often papers are bought, students' level of understanding and awareness, why they engage in such act among others. The paper offers steps to follow for the comprehensive study and its potential to collaborate with Global Essay Mills Survey project.

**Keywords:** Academic integrity, contract cheating, ethics, plagiarism, e-cheating.