

IT HAPPENS TO EVERYONE: WHY DO HIGH-PERFORMING STUDENTS ALSO PLAGIARIZE?

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As one of the major global challenges of contemporary higher education landscape, plagiarism has entered mainstream scholarly debates years ago. For the last several decades, scholars have been seeking to provide a comprehensive analysis of the main motivating factors which drive students to plagiarize. Amongst the most frequently quoted reasons, one may find the lack of understanding of what constitutes plagiarism (Belter and du Pré, 2009); students' laziness (Batane, 2010); lack of skills and time restrictions (Rets and Ilya, 2018); ease of copying using ICT (Sprajc et al., 2017); desire to get a good grade (Goh, 2015; Jones, 2011); different types of pressure and pride reasons (Jereb et al., 2018); convenience and academic ambition (McCabe, 2005); fear of failure (Goh, 2015; Underwood and Szabo, 2004); lack of deterrence (Davis and Ludvigson, 1995); efficiency gain (Park, 2003), etc. In addition, cognitive ability is also considered to be as an important factor that is associated to plagiarism (Honing and Bedi, 2012). However, previous literature exploring the relationship between students' cognitive ability in terms of grade point average (GPA) and their intention to plagiarize is rather scarce and provides the opposing findings. Noteworthy, in order to build our theoretical framework, we will not only review the analyses on plagiarism, but also on wider notion of cheating, which is a complementary form of academic misconduct. We assume that in our study of plagiarism similar challenges, conceptualizations and empirical results may arise as in the existing analyses of correlation between GPA and cheating.

One group of scholars confirm that students with lower grade point average (GPA) scores are more likely to engage in plagiarism than those with higher GPAs (e.g. McCabe and Treviño, 1997; Straw, 2002; Teixeira and Rocha, 2010; Elias, 2017; Ramberg and Modin, 2019) as they have less to lose

(Nowell and Laufer, 1997). For instance, Teixeira and Rocha (2010) empirically confirmed that the students' academic performance influences negatively the students' propensity of cheating. Similarly, Elias (2017) concluded that students with higher GPA were more likely to perceive cheating as more unethical. The same is obtained by Ramberg and Modin (2019) who suggest that students' tendency to cheat increases when their grades are low.

Contrary, Moeck (2002) suggests that high-performing students may feel pressure to maintain high GPA which can drive them to engage in unethical behavior. In the same vein, Strangfeld (2019) provides an example where student did not want to sacrifice his GPA due to the time constraint. Based on experimental data, Yaniv et al. (2017) conclude that high-performing students have stronger motivation to sustain their achievement which directly influences their probability of cheating if there is an opportunity to do so. Anderman and Midgley (1997) observed that a relatively higher performance-oriented classroom climate increases cheating behavior; while a higher mastery-oriented classroom climate decreases cheating behavior. In other words, the effort of achieving high GPA may explain high-performing students' attitude and behavior towards cheating (Geddes, 2011). Thus, plagiarism, as a type of academic misconduct, is in no way a behavior characteristic for low-performing students and there is no clear evidence that high-performing students plagiarize less than their peers with lower grades. Therefore, academic ambition, pressure to score high grades, high expectations of parents, peer influence, etc. may even be stronger incentives for high achievers compared to the lower-performing students.

Motivated by the fact that research related to academic dishonesty among low/high-performing

students provides contradicting findings, in this paper, we aim to address this particular phenomenon by analyzing perception and drivers of plagiarism amongst students with both high and low average grade. Using a sample of over 500 students of University of Montenegro, we analyze whether there is a significant difference in perception and frequency of plagiarism between high and low-performing students. Furthermore, we also interrogate if there is a difference in main motives for plagiarizing reported by the students with high and those with low

GPA. The analysis sheds light on this underexplored paradox and should enhance our understanding of the logic of plagiarism amongst excellent students and suggest the mechanisms for preventing this group of students from practicing dishonest behaviors. It may contribute to both the scholarly field of academic integrity and the policy-making by explaining whether different set of policies and preventive mechanisms should be used to address the issue of plagiarism amongst high-performing students.

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