

Why Do They Cheat? A Meta-Synthesis of Academic Dishonesty in ESL University Students

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**Abstract:**

Non-native speakers of English who study in Western academic environments are perceived as being more likely to cheat than native English speakers. There may be higher stakes related to their academic success, differing definitions or expectations of academic behaviour, or cultural contrasts between their native country and their country of study. Additionally, students may not be prepared with sufficient language skills to complete university-level courses taught in academic English. Universities in particular are concerned about academic dishonesty and wish to eliminate misconduct to the greatest extent possible. This paper examines literature from a variety of sources and uses common themes to create suggested procedures that will limit the opportunity, motivation, and reward of committing academic misconduct. These suggested changes include increasing support of English-language education, examining differences in academic culture, and including anti-cheating and intercultural topics in established courses.

Keywords: ESL, plagiarism, cheating, intercultural education, university, international study

**Abbreviations and Nomenclature:**

Cheating refers to plagiarism, patchwriting, unauthorized collaboration, and other forms of academic misconduct

ESL stands for English as a Second Language, which will also include EAL, which stands for English as an Additional Language, and EFL, which stands for English as a Foreign Language

IELTS stands for International English Language Testing system; a popular test used to assess language skills of non-native speakers of English for academic purposes

NNSE stands for Non-Native Speaker(s) of English

Student refers to undergraduate university student, unless otherwise specified

Teacher refers to any person who teaches, including professors, sessional instructors, and teacher-assistants, at the post-secondary level

TOEFL stands for Test of English as a Foreign Language; a popular test used to assess language skills of non-native speakers of English for academic purposes

University refers to any post-secondary learning institution, including universities, colleges, vocational schools, and technical schools

## **Chapter One: Introduction:**

In North American educational institutions, cheating and plagiarism have become synonymous with laziness, dishonesty and incompetence. By examining the methods and motivations of cheaters for whom English is a second language, this research will be able to propose specific countermeasures to prevent attacks on academic integrity. Current research gives several possible reasons for international students to cheat that are different from reasons that may affect local students: they may come from academic cultures with different values (Beasley 2014; Chapman and Lupton 2004; Grimes 2004; Lund 2004; Rubenstein 2006; and Williams and Hosek 2003), have difficulty with their English language skills (Duff, Rogers and Harris 2006; Ercegovic and Richardson 2004; Mitchell and Carroll 2008; Pecorari 2005; and Yamada 2003), or may simply be able to outwit assessors (Abasi, 2008; Currie 1998; Gu and Brooks, 2008; Ha, 2006; Martin, 2011). Schools and academics often study cheating, but very few offer ways of understanding language difficulties encountered by students who cheat, the motivations of cheaters, the techniques they use, or the cultural experiences that lead to cheating (Bouville 2009; Pecorari 2003; Rubenstein 2006; Tinkelman 2011). Those who do study academic dishonesty find that it is increasing in frequency, which indicates an area ripe for more intense investigation (Beasley 2014; Bouville 2009; Divan, Bowman, and Seabourne 2015; Williams and Hosek 2003).

There exists a variety of material on English as a Second Language (ESL) students and cheating. Some studies focus on methods of cheaters (Lyon 2009; Tinkelman 2011). These methods may make use of modern technology, impersonation, cheat sheets, or other techniques intended to go around the prohibition on using outside assistance (Pecorari 2005; Tinkelman 2011). Others may plagiarize, specifically with take-home assignments or in large classes where the chance of discovery is slight (Abasi and Graves 2008; Martin 2011; Sutherland-Smith 2005).

Lastly, students may memorize answer keys, or fail to cite quoted sources (Divan, Bowman, and Seabourne 2015; Lyon, 2009).

The objectives of my research are twofold. The first is to explore differing cultural or linguistic contexts as motivations or excuses for cheating by adult ESL students in a North American English-language university context. My second objective is to determine techniques that can prevent this cheating. My purpose is to create a collection of anti-cheating tactics for those who teach ESL students in post-secondary contexts, those who administer tests in the same settings, and those who design curricula or materials for post-secondary courses. It is my hope that my research will be used to improve test and assignment security and accuracy in both private and public educational institutions. I intend to reach these goals through a meta-synthesis study of existing literature on cheating in post-secondary contexts by students who have English as a second language.

My research draws upon and contributes to existing knowledge of ESL students and their language skills (Currie 1998; Duff, Rogers and Harris 2006; Ercegovic and Richardson 2004; Gu and Brooks 2008; Mitchell and Carroll 2008; Martin, 2011; Pecorari 2005; Skyrme, 2007; and Williams and Hosek 2003), causes of cheating (Amsberry 2009, Gu and Brooks, 2008; Ha, 2006;), and methods of cheating (Kenny, 2007; Lyon, 2009) by proposing concrete, actionable recommendations that can be used by test designers, administrators, and invigilators to limit the opportunities and temptations for cheaters to gain an improper intellectual advantage. As well, I am interested in definitions and effects of cheating. Bouville (2009) asks if lessening cheating advances learning, and questions whether cheating is, in itself, negative. Kenny (2006) examines the effect of cheating on the professional reputation of nurses. This is a field which combines many international students with difficult real-world consequences of cheating. Current research

emphasizes analyzing cheating events and techniques (Beaseley 2014; Mitchell and Carroll 2008; Tinkelman 2011), but does not provide as much in terms of prevention or avoidance.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review:**

Currently, there exists a variety of peer-reviewed literature on the subject of cheating in universities by non-native speakers of English (NNSE) students. From analytical and philosophical studies (Bouville 2009; Tinkelman 2011), language assessments (Pecorari 2003; Divan, Bowman, and Seabourne 2015), cultural investigations (Gu and Brooks 2008; Lund 2004), to discussions of stereotypes (Evans and Youmans 2000; Ha 2006), current literature covers a wide range of topics. Being employed as a language teacher of foreign students, I see that the popularity of overseas study is steadily increasing and that a degree from an international university is often seen as essential for students to reach professional goals in their home countries. Many NNSE students face pressures from home, from immigration and visa restrictions, or from the cost of their scholarship, and these pressures can provide justifications or rationales for cheating (Currie 1998; Lyon 2009; Rubenstein 2006; Simkin and McLeod 2009).

At the same time, post-secondary institutions seem fragmented with regards to their policies concerning academic misconduct (Williams and Hosek 2003). There exist internationally-recognized English language tests, such as IELTS and TOEFL, but the anti-cheating rigour involved in how these tests are administered and graded is often not matched by many schools. Indeed, it seems as if schools, faculties and departments within them embrace a diversity of policies and procedures intended to promote or maintain their individual academic standards. Students from other academic cultures can find this confusing (Skyrme 2007),



especially if the differences between their culture and their new school are great (Duff, Rogers, and Harris 2006).

With the rise of the Internet, and the attendant ease in obtaining a wide range of opinions, topics, and works, both students and academics are discovering differences in the concept of authorship (Amsberry 2009; Ercegovac and Richardson 2004; Sutherland-Smith 2005). Scholars are investigating if these differences, as well as ethical concerns, will affect graduates once they reach the workforce (Grimes 2004; Kenny 2006). Concerns are raised about how important ethical education is and if it relates to ethical business decisions after graduation (Chapman and Lupton 2004).

As people are increasingly able to travel to many places, societies are increasingly embracing diversity, and catering to international students is a key part of university business plans, intercultural awareness is becoming a more pressing issue to educators and administrators. Knowledge of one's own cultural expectations as well as those of others is increasingly seen to give an advantage in business, education, and travel, and yet, we don't see much in the literature about differences in awareness of or familiarity with educational cultures (Gu and Brooks 2008, Martin 2011). Examining how these differences are covered, either as part of university orientation or as in-class regulations, and how they may affect choices of courses or professors could yield actionable information for course designers (Levy and Rakovski 2006; Rubenstein 2006).

Each of these separate topics is interesting and influential, but they are just that, separate. There has not been a study of the type carried out in this project, where all of these separate topics are analyzed in concert with others to determine patterns, themes, and commonalities. Therefore, my study will firstly add to the body of knowledge that already exists and extend it

into new areas. Secondly, making recommendations to instructors and administrators is intended to promote a more consistent understanding of methods to counteract academic misconduct.

While cheating cannot be eliminated, it is my intention to assist in limiting the number of successful cheating attempts. Lastly, I feel it is important to mention that my recommendations will counteract both cheating attempts by those who wish to deceive as well as those who are simply unaware of academic misconduct standards. It may be better, from the perspectives of public relations and academic rigour, for an institution to put my suggestions into practice with the announced goals of improving integration of international students, encouraging students to become familiar with a variety of academic cultures, or assisting in language-learning initiatives. As the opportunities for cheating were not discussed in the articles included in my meta-synthesis, it shall remain a topic that is outside the scope of these recommendations.

### **Chapter Three: Method and Analytical Framework:**

The data I will study will come from peer-reviewed sources. Additionally, it will refer to academic dishonesty by students for whom English is a second language and who are studying in a North American university. I expect that my searches will yield studies of academic dishonesty that focus on other locations, student populations, and languages, because academic dishonesty encompasses a wide variety of practitioners. For reasons of scope, and to ensure that the findings and recommendations are in line with the research objectives, I will not be looking at studies that do not meet all of my criteria.

My rationale for choosing these sources is made up of three parts. First, data from resources that have no peer-review process may vary in quality. I believe that the peer-review

process ensures a minimum standard of integrity in data collection, analysis, and reliability. Secondly, using sources from within the academic community will introduce a level of distance or separation from the students and cases under examination. Thus, data written by those accused of academic misconduct, their parents and friends; examination and assignment assessors; or administrative, advisory, or support personnel are excluded, as they may only reflect the experiences of one person, while this project's meta-synthesis research strategy benefits from a larger sample size. Thirdly, by avoiding reports written by or for specific educational institutions, I will be able to limit some areas of bias. These biases could come from different sources. It is not hard to imagine that a university might want to minimize reporting academic dishonesty in order to emphasize its academic rigour or the moral qualities of their student body, for example. Alternatively, an institution may believe that their reporting on academic dishonesty may discourage NNSE students from applying. Or, finally, universities may not want to cast their staff or institution in general in a poor light, especially when compared to competitors. Any or all of these pressures could result in a staff member minimizing, changing, or disguising their institution's data regarding academic dishonesty, either by accident or intentionally.

A meta-synthesis analysis involves examining the results of existing published articles that deal with my topic in an attempt to discover commonalities (Aguirre and Bolton 2014; Annells, 2005; Branley, 2012; Derakhshan and Singh, 2011; Hoon, 2013; Jensen and Allen, 1996; Kent and Fineout-Overholt, 2008; Long, 2005; Paterson, Thorne, Canam, and Jillings, 2001; Rosenthal and DiMatteo, 2001). Instead of gathering new data, meta-synthesis allows researchers to analyze many pieces of previously-published material related to a topic in order to reveal overarching trends or themes that are not evident in individual articles (Aguirre and Bolton 2014; Hoon 2013). This strategy was developed by and first was implemented by health

care scholars in the 1970s and 1980s as a way of obtaining larger sample sizes or assessing larger issues than were feasible in one study (Jensen and Allen 1996; Kent and Fineout-Overholt 2008). Since that time, the meta-synthesis technique has maintained popularity in healthcare (Rosenthal and DiMatteo 2001) while finding utility in a range of other fields, such as government policy analysis (Long 2005), social work (Aguirre and Bolton 2014) and information literacy (Derakhshan and Singh 2010). Once I gather my data, I will seek out recurring themes, ideas, or concepts (Derakhshan and Singh 2011) in order to compare related points of view (Jensen and Allen 1996).

I chose the meta-synthesis framework because it allows me to approach my question from more than a local or national point of view. As NNSE students are studying internationally, it seems logical to examine peer-reviewed papers from sources working within a variety of scholarly traditions and use these works as a “single, or collective, data source” (Derakhshan and Singh 2011). Using disparate subjects, studies, and analysis techniques as sources also aids in the applicability of this research method in my specific case; students represent a variety of cultural, academic, and moral positions about which commonalities may not be evident when examined individually (Annells 2005). Therefore, for international students, simply focusing on one source nation or one destination institution may not give reliable results that can be used with students from other nations or at other institutions.

This project deals with topics that are currently being studied in a variety of locations and in a variety of academic disciplines which provides access to a wide variety of published material. In order to obtain up-to-date results, I chose to search online, as most peer-reviewed journals are published simultaneously online and in print. I believe that these results will yield the greatest relevance in formulating suggestions for test administrators. I will use peer-reviewed

journal articles that discuss academic dishonesty by ESL students in an English-primary context at post-secondary institutions.

To prepare, I created search terms that reflect the types of academic dishonesty, the settings for its occurrence, and the student populations that I have chosen to focus on. In order to do so, I employed commonly-used expressions and their synonyms in several combinations. I selected a variety of sources for this project; all of them have been published in peer-reviewed academic journals. These articles have been published in journals that deal with a variety of disciplines, including education, communications, intercultural studies, healthcare, and criminology, and I did not eliminate a potential source merely because of the discipline or emphasis of the journal in which I found it. The sources selected include cheating in different contexts, such as groups and individuals, and differing cultural backgrounds. They also include research into general trends and specific details. Based on my experience with ESL education, I believe that these areas will yield insights that will be the most applicable to test administrators and instructors.

I included the search terms “ESL” or “English as a Second Language” in my queries in order to eliminate articles on native speakers. This will also serve to eliminate grade-school students, as well as cheating in other academic environments. The students of interest to my research are also studying outside of their own countries, so I included “international student” as a way of including their out-of-country experiences. There are many different situations or contexts where cheating can take place, as well as different names for dishonest practices, and so I included “cheat,” “plagiarism,” “academic misconduct” and “academic dishonesty” in my searches. I began with searches using these phrases, after discarding synonymous, nonsensical or unrelated combinations of terms from the possible permutations. Based on my experience as an

ESL educator, these words and phrases are the most common ones used in the field to describe what I'm looking for. Though I was open to creating other search terms to help me locate material relevant to my inquiries, these terms yielded a sufficient number of usable results. A full listing of the search terms is included in Appendix I.

I began collecting data by searching all the online journal and thesis collections available through the Royal Roads Library for the terms described above. These searches yielded many possible sources, and so I downloaded the first 30 results for each search. Skimming summaries and abstracts, I removed articles that use my search terms but did not meet the criteria discussed above; these included papers that discussed English literature classes, analyzed the culture of the United Kingdom, and reported on investigations of cheating in non-English-speaking contexts, to name a few examples. As outlined above, my research interest is only in cheating situations involving students with English as an additional language at North American universities.

Next, I sorted articles into groups: those that dealt with cultural differences, those that dealt with language difficulties, and those that dealt with cheating methods. I chose these groups based on current research (Abasi, 2008; Gu and Brooks, 2008; Ha, 2006; Martin, 2011) and my experiences in discussions with students in Vancouver and China about reasons for cheating. The articles in each of my classifications should provide collections of complementary and contrasting viewpoints on each topic.

These 12 search terms yielded just over 100 downloaded files. From these, I removed duplicates; articles that didn't involve students for whom English is an additional language; that were concerned with purely theoretical situations; or didn't involve academic dishonesty. After these removals, I was left with 30 sources to include in the meta-analysis.

As this project does not involve research with human subjects, no ethics review was required. All information was obtained from publicly-available, previously-published sources on the Internet.

#### **Chapter Four: Results**

Six overarching themes or common areas of investigation quickly became evident during my analysis, including cultural definitions of cheating, defining plagiarism, English-language abilities, educational cultures, programs to lessen cheating, and cheaters' motivations.

The widest variety of opinion was found regarding *cultural differences related to definitions of cheating*. Many articles discuss how defining cheating is different in various academic cultures around the world. I was surprised by the depth of material I found that focused on *differing definitions of plagiarism*. More than half the articles discussed plagiarism, as opposed to other forms of academic misconduct. Before starting this research, I expected that studying *language difficulties* would form a large part of the published material. However, a variety of articles investigate the effects of language skill on the frequency of academic misconduct.

With a wider focus than the investigation of cultural differences mentioned above, exploring *cultures of education* proved to be fruitful. Examining contexts and expectations of various educational traditions was the basis for several studies. More than a few articles concentrated on evaluations of *educational programs* that were put in place to combat cheating. Discussions of the creation, implementation, and effectiveness of these programs can be found in great detail. Discussions of different *motivations to cheat* were found in 20 percent of my

articles. Exploring motivations and causes of cheating from a philosophical, preventative, or analytical point of view was the focus of the rest of the articles I studied.

### **Cultural Differences Related to Definitions of Cheating:**

Beasely (2014), Divan, Bowman, and Seabourne (2015) and Williams and Hosek (2003) discuss how cheating is very common, but those most commonly punished have below-average achievement, are non-white, or are international students. Duff, Rogers and Harris (2006) explain how differing academic cultures may cause visiting students to be disproportionately accused of plagiarism. In Baetz et al. (2011), Grimes (2004) and Williams and Hosek (2003), Western ideas of academic dishonesty are noted as being different from other nations' ideas. Additionally, they say that different faculties may have different perceptions of cheating, with medicine, economics and business being singled out as being more likely to permit or tolerate cheating. However, Simkin and McLeod (2010) indicate that cheating was found to be less prevalent in business students in some studies. Currie (1998), Rubenstein (2006) and Skyrme (2007) conclude that low scores by ESL students may be related to poor academic skills, rather than not understanding the course content. Currie continues, saying that financial, immigration, or other pressures may require ESL students to take courses that are above their skill level, and that an ESL student may not have strong academic skills in their native language. Tinkelman (2011) and Williams and Hosek (2003) agree, emphasizing that American universities often cost much more than universities in a student's home country, and that this may not allow for a student to repeat a failed course.

Chapman and Lupton (2004) compared students in Hong Kong and the USA, finding that the materialist and achievement-oriented culture in Hong Kong could lead to a greater number of



cheating incidents. Grimes (2004), Martin (2011), and Rubenstein (2006) mention socialism and collectivism in former Soviet republics, Asian countries, and China specifically, as being likely to create a perception of cooperation with fellow students, rather than breaking the rules of the institution, in scholastic pursuits. Gu and Brooks (2008) agree, citing cases in which students abroad are not familiar with the “traditions, values, and beliefs embedded in [their new educational culture.]” Lund (2004) gives an example of a Korean student copying a passage verbatim from a scholar whom he admires, intending it to be both a sign of respect for the scholar and evidence that the student was well-read in the subject matter, not aware that in the North American context, this constitutes plagiarism.

Gu and Brooks (2008), Skyrme (2007) and Williams and Hosek (2003) describe how surprising some differences in educational cultures can be, saying how students abroad need to supplant their familiar educational culture with that of their host country. As an example, a student profiled by Gu and Brooks (2008) says that Chinese essays require original ideas, but English essays require ideas from powerful people. Students interviewed by Skyrme (2007) compare their expectations of how they would learn English while in New Zealand, with one student saying that simply being in the country should be enough exposure for them to learn academic English. Duff, Rogers and Harris (2006) and Lund (2004) agree with Skyrme, discussing how ESL students in particular struggle with differing cultural expectations. Lund (2004) describes how traditions of ancestor worship can be carried over to showing respect to a master in an academic field; not including the words of a master in an assignment could be seen a sign of disrespect or minimization of the master’s contribution to the field. Similarly, Divan, Bowman, and Seabourne (2015) mention that to cite a well-known scholar is an insult to the reader, as to provide a citation implies that the reader is not already familiar with the master.

Chapman and Lupton (2004) note that cultural differences between educators and students increase the difficulty of controlling academic dishonesty, and that expectations and definitions of dishonesty need to be clearly communicated to the students. They continue, stressing that honesty and ethics need to be taught in schools, regardless of level or location, in order to avoid the perception that dishonesty is a shortcut to educational or professional success. Bouville (2009), Grimes (2004) and Williams and Hosek (2003) agree, stating that professional ethics and academic ethics are related. Duff, Rogers and Harris (2006), Lund (2004) and Williams and Hosek (2003) note that differing ideas of intellectual property between schools at home and abroad lead to inadvertent academic dishonesty.

Chapman and Lupton (2004) believe that more research into cultural differences and academic dishonesty is required. Lund (2004) agrees, suggesting that writing courses should include exercises that highlight these differences as a method of preparing students for success while studying abroad. Williams and Hosek (2003) give examples of honour codes that students must sign and submit as part of their assignments, certifying that they completed them correctly. Baetz et al. (2011) and Levy and Rakovski (2006) state that such honour codes have been effective in some cases, though Baetz et al. emphasize that honour codes must be part of an overall strategy to be effective. Additionally, Currie (1998), Rubenstein (2006) and Williams and Hosek (2003), all make the point that students will tend to gravitate to whichever learning strategies will give them the greatest chances of success, whether that is considered ethical by their host or not.

Pecorari (2003) and Ha (2006) disagree with the above, however, stating that culturally-differing definitions of plagiarism are seen as too important a cause of academic misconduct. Ha (2006) specifically mentions similarities between the negative connotations of the Vietnamese

and English words for plagiarism. She continues to give numerous examples of shared beliefs between Vietnamese and North American scholastic culture that discourage textual borrowing. Pecorari, on the other hand, examines how students may not be expected to avoid plagiarism, especially when they are in the beginning stages of their studies: “The novice academic writer must learn to crawl before being able to walk.” According to her findings, students may be expected to borrow from more accomplished authors as a necessary part of their education. Abasi and Graves (2008) agree with Pecorari, discussing students who believe they must copy before they can create with their own voice. Currie (1998), Divan, Bowman, and Seabourne (2015) and Duff, Rogers and Harris (2006) also agree, mentioning how a desire to cheat may not be present, but academic misconduct may result from intercultural confusion about acceptable learning methods and their application. Abasi and Graves (2008) caution that many administrators assume that cheating is always caused by a student’s motivation to act in a dishonest fashion.

### **Definitions of Plagiarism:**

Amsberry (2009), Baetz et al. (2011), Duff, Rogers and Harris (2006), Ercegovic and Richardson (2004), Ha (2006), Lund (2004), and Pecorari (2003) mention multiple types of plagiarism, including patchwriting, unauthorized collaboration, copying without citations, leaving out references or citation information, referring to past work without permission, purchasing completed assignments, and inventing lab results. Ercegovic and Richardson’s (2004) analysis adds various linguistic changes to unsourced reference material to this list, and , includes replacing source material with synonyms, omitting words from a source, or changing grammatical structures. Gu and Brooks (2008) discuss a student who sees patchwriting as a necessary learning tool, rather than evidence of dishonesty. Amsberry (2009) shows how students

may view copying as evidence of learning, i.e., knowing whom to copy from, or evidence of successful understanding, i.e., remembering which material to copy.

Amsberry (2009) reveals that even though students from different academic cultures may disagree on what plagiarism is, they may have a similar idea of when it may be tolerated. Evans and Youmans (2000), however, found the opposite: students tended to agree on what plagiarism is, and gave a Western-style definition, even though they were not brought up in a Western academic culture. Students discussed by Sutherland-Smith (2005) state that information found on the Internet is considered 'common knowledge' because of its wide availability, and that internet sources as a result did not require citation or attribution. Amsberry (2009) states that the acceptability and definition of plagiarism may depend on the context: standards for casual writing are less strict than those for academic writing.

Grimes (2004) conducted a survey of students in which no definition of "academic cheating" was given, finding that students from different countries disagreed on whether it was socially acceptable. However, both student groups said that cheating in business situations was more serious than cheating in schools. Rubenstein (2006) notes that group-oriented and self-oriented cultures may define academic dishonesty differently, and Gu and Brooks (2008) show a student who says their writing process has changed since leaving China as a result of the student's adaptation to new academic expectations. Pecorari (2003) states that plagiarism must include a *mens rea*, an "intention to deceive," and discusses how some professors disregard the first example of plagiarism from each student as a way of accounting for an innocent mistake or misunderstanding. Williams and Hosek (2003) partially agree, noting that academic dishonesty can come from two causes: ignorance of expectations or a desire to deceive. Amsberry (2009) discusses cases where students from China, Japan, and Korea believe that information is

considered to be common property, and where their languages did not have a word with the same meaning as “plagiarism.” They continue, stating that their languages have words that may be similar, but that these words do not have the same negative connotations as the English word. This left the students with cultural difficulties in understanding the idea of plagiarism.

Ercegovac and Richardson (2004), Evans and Youmans (2000), and Sutherland-Smith (2005) connect plagiarism with copyright infringement, honesty, morality, and ethics.

Sutherland-Smith (2005) continues, stating that “the pariah of originality is plagiarism.”

However, she does not define plagiarism, instead focusing on differing responses to plagiarism from legal, historical, and authorship points of view. Mitchell and Carroll (2008) mention an example where plagiarism is seen as a problem with the instruction the students receive.

### **Language Difficulties:**

Currie (1998) and Duff, Rogers and Harris (2006) reveal that vocabulary difficulties form a large part of ESL students’ language problems. Abasi and Graves (2008), Ercegovac and Richardson (2004), Gu and Brooks (2008), Mitchell and Carroll (2008), and Skyrme (2007) agree, but add that language abilities and knowledge of educational expectations are related. Pecorari (2005) cautions that if feedback is not forthcoming from a professor, students may assume that all that isn’t explicitly marked as incorrect is correct. Williams and Hosek (2003) add that a student’s confidence in their English skills can be an important factor in whether they cheat or not. Abasi and Graves (2008) and Gu and Brooks (2008) mention that some students choose references based entirely on how their professor will perceive the student and their academic abilities, rather than their relevance to the point being made.

Mitchell and Carroll (2008) mention how a student with poor writing or research skills may not be able to complete the assignment independently. Currie (1998) discusses how a student cheats to save time, as her language difficulties increased the difficulty of her assignments. Abasi and Graves (2008) report something similar, adding that taking longer than expected to complete an assignment was viewed negatively by a professor. Gu and Brooks (2008) describe students who feel that they must patchwrite, as their English skills are not strong enough to complete their assignments on their own.

Yamada (2003) discusses the difficulty in teaching paraphrasing skills to students, saying that paraphrasing is "... not cognitively easy." She continues, warning that concentrating on paraphrasing can lead to a false understanding of what quality academic writing is and how it is done. Gu and Brooks (2008) also mention that differing ideas of "originality" and "creativity" may also cause inadvertent plagiarism. Mitchell and Carroll (2008) show that what is "quality" or "correct" writing can vary depending on the context of the writer; what is acceptable in one situation may not be so in another.

Duff, Rogers and Harris (2006) note that not all students have the same abilities, and that courses should include activities that focus on learning educational skills, such as citation, and should not just concentrate on mastering the subject material. Ercegovic and Richardson (2004) agree, emphasizing that ESL students may not have sufficient writing skills to produce university-quality work, regardless of their facility with the subject matter. Yamada (2003) states that ESL students may not be aware of inferential thought processes that are required to successfully complete assignments without cheating. Currie (1998) describes how a student's reasoning, reading and writing skills hamper her ability to complete assignments, with the expectation that the student would cheat in order to complete the work on time. Ercegovic and

Richardson (2004) and Gu and Brooks (2008) agree, stating that developing writers may be unsure about how to complete assignments that involve citations without plagiarizing. Mitchell and Carroll (2008) extend this train of thought, describing how a student felt their English skills could not describe a “beautifully written” source accurately, respectfully, or successfully.

### **Cultures of Education:**

Levy and Rakovski (2006) show that educational techniques relate strongly to rates of academic misconduct; consistency of enforcement and punishment tend to deter cheaters. Abasi and Graves (2008) describe how some students may over-cite as a method of avoiding being accused of cheating, rather than focusing on educational achievement or creating a strong argument. Evans and Youmans (2000) relate how a student who has said that their educational goals are unattainable without cheating and how students should bribe teachers as a way of avoiding failure.

Abasi, Akbari and Graves (2006) state that a student’s identity cannot be separated from the text they write. They continue, stating that student writing should be analyzed as discourse, including aspects of the writer’s culture, academic ability, and knowledge of the subject. Evans and Youmans (2000) show that some students create their “... ideas on plagiarism through talk [with other students.]” They conclude that students must define cheating together with their instructors in order to create an environment where cheating is less likely to occur.

Evans and Youmans (2000) mention that their study found few differences between Western and non-Western definitions of plagiarism. However, they did report that some respondents believed plagiarism was thought of as a legal, not educational, problem. Gu and Brooks (2008) discuss how some students from China view copying material as ways of learning

good writing skills, creating literary themes, and building on classic ideas. Pecorari (2003) reveals how a Chinese student thought that plagiarism might be considered imitation, which was viewed as a positive step in a beginning writer's development. Along similar lines, Sutherland-Smith (2005) says that ESL students are generally not familiar with Western educational expectations regarding author's rights.

Abasi and Graves (2008) and Yamada (2003) discuss how an extensive study of students' needs and home cultures is essential to understanding why academic misconduct occurs. Abasi and Graves (2008) continue, saying that students' differing levels of familiarity with their own advantages and skills will influence their awareness of plagiarism and their willingness to plagiarize. Levy and Rakovski (2006) show how students may choose their professors, based, in part, on their attitudes towards cheating.

Abasi and Graves (2008) and Skyrme (2007) mention that a student's culture and education affect their expectations regarding academic achievement. Abasi, Akbari and Graves (2006) agree, saying that a student may not be aware of their own educational cultural expectations and norms, regardless of their knowledge of other educational cultural norms. Evans and Youmans (2000) discuss how some students feel that plagiarism is unavoidable because of the structure of their educational system. These Ukrainian students describe an intense focus on memorization and course grades that come from a single test, and they say that success without cheating is not possible.

Levy and Rakovski (2006) studied professors who have a zero-tolerance attitude towards cheating, and found that it may deter cheaters either from cheating or from enrolling in such a professor's course offerings. They then cautioned that a professor with this reputation may



also deter honest students. Yamada (2003) adds that insufficient teaching of anti-plagiarism skills could be due to academics wanting to avoid the issue of cheating in schools. Pecorari (2005) warns that rules regarding academic conduct that apply to the entire student body may not reflect the philosophies, practices, or preferences of individual departments or instructors, but Tinkelman (2011) believes the opposite, stating that definitions of plagiarism need to be college-wide in order to be effective.

Abasi and Graves (2008) explain how students from countries with similar intellectual property laws to Western laws, such as Chile, Japan and Spain, have less difficulty in adapting to studying in Western countries, while students from countries with very different intellectual property laws, like China, experience more difficulty. Gu and Brooks (2008) offer an interesting counterpoint, giving examples of Chinese students who notice such intellectual property differences yet choose to ignore them. Pecorari (2003) agrees, stating that some students use cultural differences as an excuse to plagiarise repeatedly. Rubenstein (2006) discusses how the Internet's origins, language, and dominant culture are Western, and that students from non-Western cultures may find it difficult to become comfortable using it in Western educational contexts. Sutherland-Smith (2005) agrees, stating that the rights of the author are different in many cultures, that these differences can lead to inadvertent plagiarism, and that confusion about "correct" actions is exacerbated by the popularity of the Internet in educational situations. Abasi and Graves (2008) and Skyrme (2007) reveal that students' skills in academic writing in their own language do not indicate their skills in English-speaking academic pursuits, and that this difference can lead to stress about acceptable writing, correct citation, and creation of academic arguments. Gu and Brooks (2008) discuss a student who submitted a draft assignment without references, believing them unnecessary until the final version.

### **Educational Programs to Combat Cheating:**

Levy and Rakovski (2006) show that habits of academic misconduct may be started before post-secondary education. Baetz et al. (2011) have similar findings, also stressing that cheaters tend to obtain higher rewards from cheating than non-cheaters do without cheating. Yamada (2003) expands on this, while saying that some educators do not want to raise the issue of plagiarism in their classes. Baetz et al. (2011) identify an important gap in knowledge where institutions are not familiar with issues of relevance to would-be cheaters.

Levy and Rakovski (2006) and Yamada (2003) mention how changing technology and cultural expectations may be responsible for some academic misconduct. Rubenstein (2006) agrees, stating that students raised in one academic tradition may have difficulties with technology or learning tools developed by other academic traditions, and that not all academic cultures see technology in the same way.

Divan, Bowman, and Seabourne (2015) emphasize how early intervention has a stronger effect of reducing predicted cases of academic dishonesty. Integrated courses of writing and subject material, they continue, were received positively by international students. Currie (1998) and Yamada (2003) suggest including material on inferential thinking in college writing courses to better prepare students for the demands of their studies. Abasi and Graves (2008) caution that courses which include material on avoiding plagiarism must do so within educational contexts, as simply describing cheating diminished the effectiveness of the lessons. Not all changes need to be complex, however; Rubenstein (2006) discusses how a teacher changed their questioning technique to one that was more culturally familiar to their students and how it resulted in them giving better answers.

Gu and Brooks (2008) mention that such educational programs need to be “holistic and developmental” in order to help students understand and comply with the concepts and requirements of their new academic culture. Duff, Rogers and Harris (2006) state that successful programs must start from very basic levels, as students may assume that scholarship traditions are all the same. Divan, Bowman, and Seabourne (2015) note that most academic programs focus only on the subject material, without discussing research or writing skills. Mitchell and Carroll (2008) discuss how students must be made aware of how administrative procedures work in order for them to understand their limits in coursework. Teachers mentioned by Abasi and Graves (2008) were unhappy with requirements to add lessons on avoiding plagiarism to their coursework, saying that they had to pursue both educational and legal goals by doing so.

Abasi and Graves (2008), Duff, Rogers and Harris (2006), Rubenstein (2006), and Yamada (2003) mention that any educational program implemented to discourage cheating must recognize that educational cultures differ around the world, and that lessons must simply highlight differences, not denigrate or replace them. They continue, stating that it is key to explain and explicitly show the requirements of acceptable Western scholarship, while acknowledging that students may not be aware of their local educational culture. Currie (19998) and Yamada (2003) also explore differences in thought processes between academic cultures, showing that these differences are not easy to see, understand, or teach, and noting that such explorations may take more time than initially imagined. Mitchell and Carroll (2008) mention that administration and faculty must be familiar with rules, regulations, and expectations themselves before attempting to make students aware of them. Beaseley (2014) warns that some instructors find counteracting cheating to be an unpleasant part of their professional

responsibilities, which can lead to their ignoring academic misconduct in the name of convenience, avoidance, or a desire not to “rock the boat.”

Currie (1998) recommends that each institution teach both general Western academic expectations as well as their own specific expectations and the consequences of not meeting them. Currie continues, suggesting that cheaters and ESL students alike hold the key to developing effective anti-cheating curricula, as they can speak about their reasons and motivations for cheating with the most authority. Abasi and Graves (2008) caution that dividing students into groups of plagiarists and non-plagiarists also divides them into groups of ethical and non-ethical students.

#### **Motivations to Cheat:**

Bouville (2009) mentions that a clear understanding of why academic misconduct is wrong is necessary in order to combat it effectively. Tinkelman (2011) discusses how “error” and “fraud” are different: fraud is committed with an intent to deceive, while errors are mistakes.

Williams and Hosek (2003) conclude that a rational student will weigh the potential benefits of cheating against the potential harm of getting caught. They continue, saying that education should include aspects of ethical behaviour. Bouville (2009) agrees, noting that cheating students who get high grades could be considered good students on the basis of their scores alone. On the other hand, Levy and Rakovski (2006) wonder if ethics training can be effective in removing motivations to cheat. Currie (1998) states that plagiarism by ESL students has “traditionally been viewed as ... intentional... .” Baetz et al. (2011) note that irregular understanding of what actions are permitted, inconsistent penalties, and unclear social

expectations may lead to inadvertent cheating. Bouville (2009) agrees to a point, saying that students will only follow rules they feel are legitimate.

Rubenstein (2006) states that the goal of education is to maximize the success of the students by preparing them for success in their society. To do this, she continues, countries have created educational systems that reflect the dominant philosophies in their societies, which in turn affect how classes are taught and academic dishonesty is defined. As well as Rubenstein, both Currie (1998) and Williams and Hosek (2003) note that social pressures may dissuade students from asking for help, leaving cheating as an attractive path to scholastic achievement.

Abasi and Graves (2008) note that plagiarism is increasing, which they and Tinkelman (2011) attribute to increased information-sharing via the Internet. Tinkelman (2011) continues, describing a concept from auditing called the “fraud triangle,” which states that fraud will only occur if there is an incentive, an opportunity, and a rationalization. By removing one of these aspects, he states, a student will not cheat.

Bouville (2009) gives an example of a student who cannot afford a private tutor cheating because they don’t want to be left behind by a fellow student who is able to afford a private tutor. Tinkelman (2011) expands on this, listing several motivations for cheating: a perception that it is common; to lessen a perceived disadvantage or gain a perceived advantage over classmates; or seeing cheating go unpunished. Currie (1998), however, describes how a student just wants to stay out of trouble, because “... making mistakes [makes my professor] angry.” Bouville (2009) cites another example in which students cheat simply because it is easier than completing what they perceive as useless work. He cautions that a student who cheats for this reason is unlikely to start studying hard because their cheating was discovered. This may also apply to instructors: Beaseley (2014) states that many instructors choose to follow informal reporting procedures

instead of the formal procedures that their institution requires, citing convenience, job safety, or reputation as drivers for their actions.

## **Chapter Five: Discussion**

### **Indications from the Data:**

My meta-synthesis research, based on 30 peer-reviewed articles from a variety of fields, indicates that cultural education about academic dishonesty is becoming increasingly specialized, as shown in Divan, Bowman and Seabourne (2015), Duff, Rogers, and Harris (2006), and Martin (2011). More recent articles indicate that there is a movement to include lessons on plagiarism, differences in academic cultures, and educational expectations as part of curricula in a variety of fields. Universities and instructors alike are becoming more aware of academic cultural expectations and norms that differ between countries, languages, and disciplines.

Several articles indicated that cheating is becoming more common amongst all students, though international students seem to be more likely to be accused of misconduct. This may be due to a perception, real or assumed, that an international student has language difficulties or an ambivalence toward Western expectations of academic conduct. International students may face pressures that local students do not, including immigration and visa restrictions, higher tuition costs, difficulty in adjusting to the new academic or social culture, language difficulties, and differences in instructors' expectations compared to their home culture. In response to these pressures, cheating could be seen as a coping technique.

With the rise in popularity of the Internet and online learning, differences in author-attribution tradition are rising in frequency and importance. More than one author mentioned that the availability of vast quantities of information at no cost has led to an assumption that such information is common knowledge or otherwise free to use without attribution. Examining this intersection of information availability and author attribution is likely, in my opinion, to be a future source of conflict and a fruitful source of study.

English skills continue to be a pervasive theme from the analysis. It is clear from the articles that language difficulties create barriers to success for NNSE students, and that these barriers can be overcome in some cases by academic misconduct. Improving English language skills to remove this temptation is the easy solution, but may cost time or money that a student doesn't have. Students may not want to "waste time" learning English, which they could do in their home country. It is easy to imagine that they would prefer to earn an academic credential, which is their main purpose for studying in a foreign country.

## **Chapter Six: Recommendations and Conclusions**

### **Recommendations for Curriculum Designers:**

My recommendations for designers of curricula are threefold. Tinkelman's (2011) concept of the "fraud triangle" gives three necessary pre-conditions for cheating to occur: a student needs opportunity, an incentive, and a rationalization. From the meta-synthesis, it can be seen how we can counteract these pre-conditions with a variety of methods. As many of the problems described in the data reach beyond just test-related academic misconduct, I believe that

the greater effect will result from changes to curricula. Of course, my examples will not stop the most determined cheaters, but they should serve to limit the number of cases of cheating.

Recommendation 1.1: Including material in courses that recognizes and explains differences in educational culture between countries would help students understand that such differences exist. Students, both local and foreign, may not be aware of their own assumptions regarding academic cultures. By acknowledging these differences, instructors will pave the way for students to examine their own assumptions and compare them to the assumptions of their English-speaking academic culture. Focusing on these differences will counteract the rationalization of cheating, as students will be made aware of what is acceptable and what is not.

Recommendation 1.2: Discussing the expectations and definitions of acceptable academic conduct present at their North American institution will assist students in their understanding the legal, ethical, and moral responsibilities expected of them at their new institution. Several authors discussed the possibilities of adding morality and/or ethics training in courses. This will be more appropriate and effective in some subject areas than in others, and I believe it could prove fruitful in counteracting a potential cheater's rationalization as well.

Recommendation 1.3: Creating course materials that assist in learning English as well as academic conduct will aid students in understanding both their new language of instruction and their new academic culture. Integrating such lessons into existing subject-matter curriculum will allow standardization across courses, departments, or faculties. These will limit a potential cheater's incentive - if their skills and stresses are reduced, they will not have an incentive to cheat.



Recommendation 1.4: Instructors should be trained as well. Both teachers and students may be unaware of their assumptions regarding academic cultural expectations, and thus both could benefit from additional training. NNSE students may require additional support as they attempt to navigate financial pressures, cultural differences, and language difficulties, so adding services related to English-language improvement, academic skills, counseling and peer tutoring could help students to adapt to or eliminate these new stresses more quickly. Introducing these services will have the effect of limiting incentives for cheaters to cheat.

**Recommendations for Test Administrators:**

For test administrators, I have four suggestions.

Recommendation 2.1: Clearly and explicitly permitting or prohibiting collaboration, study aids, or uncited quotations will allow the candidates to understand the requirements of the test procedure and remove ambiguity, misinterpretation or loop-holes. While this may be current practice, adequate in-depth information, like including specific examples of prohibited behaviour, will reduce differences of interpretation of technical terms. Covering this material in class, as opposed to on the cover of the test document or just in the course outline, will help to keep the ideas in the minds of the students as they take the exam.

Recommendation 2.2: Adding questions about educational expectations to the test itself could help candidates to clarify their understanding of how the test will be marked or graded. The students may take these expectations more seriously if they know their comprehension of this topic will be worth marks. Additionally, should a student cheat after correctly answering questions about cheating, it will simplify the investigative and disciplinary process, as the student will be unable to claim they knew nothing of the correct and accepted procedures.

Recommendation 2.3: Rewarding a test-taker who follows desired procedures as well as arriving at correct final answers will simultaneously discourage memorizing an answer key and aid in forensic analysis of a suspected cheater's papers. If a candidate only includes an answer, but no steps showing how that answer was obtained, for example, that candidate may have cheated.

Recommendation 2.4: Lastly, I suggest designing examinations in such a way as to account for possible differences in the candidate's and the test-designer's academic cultural expectations. This step will require analysis of past cheating events in order to determine what differences cause the most frequent or serious misinterpretations or opportunities for academic misconduct. For maximum impact, this step should include cultural liaisons with marketing staff, foreign-educated staff members, or focus groups with past students. As an example, administrators may discover that students from Country X have a different concept of collaboration, and so the test could be written in a way that ensures that collaboration provides no advantage; giving different questions is one possible method of counteracting this problem.

**Limitations:**

While this research project used 30 peer-reviewed articles, selected from over 100 that met the search-terms, it, did not use an exhaustive selection of published sources. As such, it may be missing information. Additionally, the study only used articles written in English; it may be that additional articles exist in other languages.

### **Suggestions for Future Research:**

Investigating cheating situations in different countries may yield fruitful results that cross language boundaries. It would be interesting to compare cheating events where the students receive instruction in a second language that is not English, for example.

Further study is warranted into the effectiveness of intercultural programs that educate about academic dishonesty, as only five articles discussed this area. Based on my experiences as an educator, I believe this area to be particularly relevant in order to further combat academic dishonesty.

### **Conclusions:**

There are a wide variety of aspects and viewpoints regarding academic dishonesty, and researchers who wish to specialize in one aspect can easily do so. However, I believe that the data I subjected to a meta-analysis show that multi-disciplinary analyses are likely to yield results that can be used in many situations. Integrating lessons about academic authorship, ethics, and testing procedures into subject-matter curricula are, in my view, an effective way of simultaneously preparing students for successful international education or business while also improving their knowledge of different cultures.

With the rise of the internet and its effect on global education, the topic of students' opinions and their effect on academic expectations is an area ripe for further investigation. In this vein, creating courses and support strategies that encourage or ease intercultural adaptation by international students also deserves further study. Determining the success of these programs is

an additional area for research, which would result in increased general understanding as well as providing opportunities for fine-tuning specific techniques.

Discovering and counteracting situations that, for lack of a better word, encourage cheating, is key to reducing academic misconduct. The data and analysis show that such situations can arise from differences in academic expectations between a home and international school; external pressures arising from financial, social, or immigration situations; and academic skills, including English-language abilities, critical thinking, or reasoning. By applying the eight recommendations outlined in this paper, administrators and instructors will be able to take steps to remove common causes of academic misconduct.

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## Appendix I

### List of Search Terms:

All searches were made through the Royal Roads University Library search portal (at <http://library.royalroads.ca>) in January 2016. The first 30 results from journals, theses, or dissertations were downloaded in each case, and duplicates were deleted.

academic dishonesty + English as a Second Language - Completed January 6, 2016

academic dishonesty + ESL - Completed January 6, 2016

academic dishonesty + international student - Completed January 7, 2016

plagiarism + English as a Second Language - Completed January 8, 2016

plagiarism + ESL - Completed January 10, 2016

plagiarism + international student - Completed January 10, 2016

academic misconduct + English as a Second Language - Completed January 10, 2016

academic misconduct + ESL - Completed January 10, 2016

academic misconduct + international student - Completed January 10, 2016

cheat + English as a Second Language - Completed January 10, 2016

cheat + ESL - Completed January 10, 2016

cheat + international student - Completed January 10, 2016

Distribution of the included articles by publishing year:

<b>Year</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>#</b>
1996	1	2004	4	2009	3	2014	2
1998	1	2005	4	2010	1	2015	1
2000	1	2006	6	2011	4		
2001	2	2007	2	2012	1		
2003	3	2008	4	2013	1		