

Introduction

Contract cheating refers to a variety of behaviors in which a student outsources their work or involves a third party in attempting their assignments. Over the last few years, the number of contract cheating cases at the university, nationally, and globally has increased dramatically. To help fight this malpractice, the UK government has now passed a bill making it an offence to provide or advertise cheating services to students enrolled at higher education providers in England. However, this may not be enough as most of these services are run overseas.

This project's goals were to investigate

- various causes that lead students to access contract cheating services
- measures that can help the university to reduce and prevent contract cheating.

Methodology

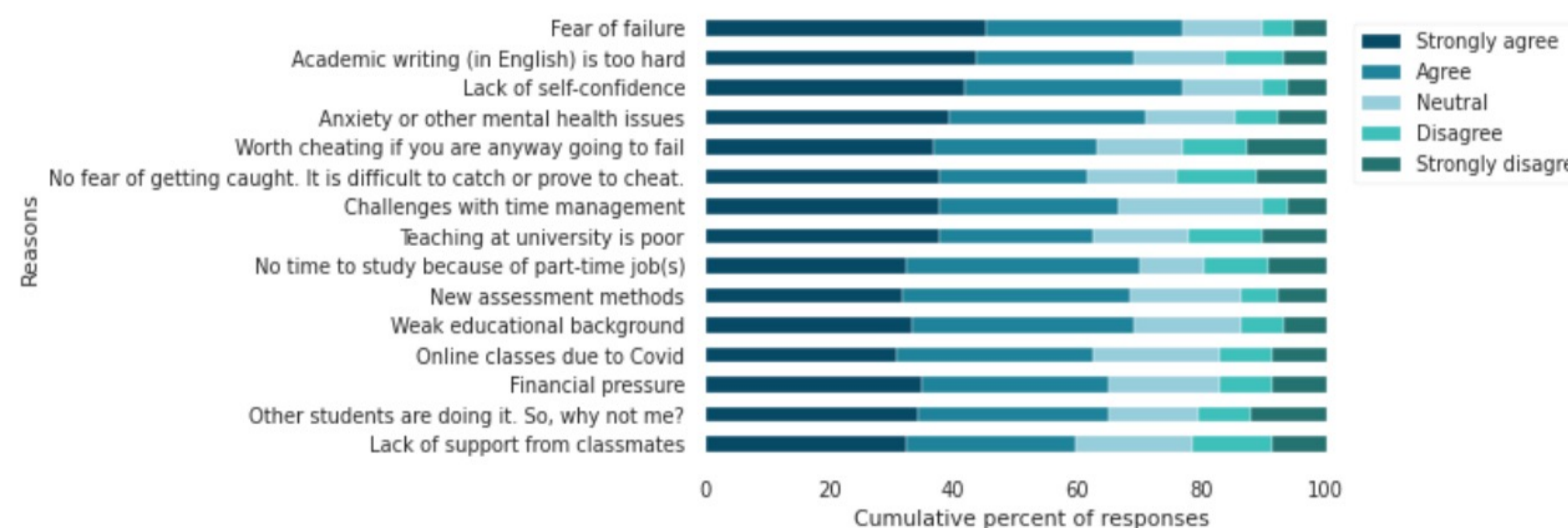
- An anonymous survey was conducted among University of Northampton students to examine the factors that influence students and their peers to resort to contract cheating.
- The poll was customised for the University of Northampton in order to match the criteria found in research publications as influencing misconduct among students.
- The survey was distributed to students through different social media student groups.

- To discover more about how students become involved in cheating, a semi structured interview was conducted with students. A few students who were found guilty of academic misconduct were also included in the sample.
- It was also investigated in depth how the students feel about the malpractice and what kind of support they require to prevent it.

Key findings

- A total of **117 responses** were received for the survey and 6 interviews were conducted.
- **82%** of the students who attended the survey belong to MSc. and MBA courses at the university.
- **88%** of the respondents were international students
- Even though most students claimed to be familiar with the term academic integrity, their responses to selecting scenarios that could be considered academic misconduct revealed a lack of awareness.
- **70% of respondents** believed academic misconduct is common or very common at their university.
- According to the survey, the following are the factors that influence students to engage in contract cheating.

- **79% of the participants** were approached by third parties offering to do assignment on their behalf. Third parties contacted most of them via social media.
- Instructors and assignment guidelines briefly mention the dangers of contract cheating, but it is hardly taken seriously.
- The process of investigating academic misconduct is slow, complicated and stressful for students. It has a ripple effect in terms of students resorting to cheating practices as they lose focus in their studies.
- Having an academic background that is closely related to the course, support from the university to improve learning and writing skills, continuous evaluation instead of having one big assignment at the end of module, approachable lecturers who are empathetic to students' hardships, warnings on the extent of penalties for contract cheating, and face-to-face classes where they can interact with students etc. would have helped students who were found guilty to refrain from cheating.



Conclusion

- Based on the findings of the survey and interviews, the difficulties of adjusting to a new environment have a negative impact on international students' perceptions of contract cheating, which has affected their academic programs.
- It is also evident that tougher measures to monitor contract cheating practices, as well as increased support to develop students' knowledge, confidence, and learning skills are needed to combat the widespread academic malpractice of contract cheating.
- In cases of academic misconduct, a quicker decision-making procedure is needed to aid students in avoiding dropping out of courses.

Recommendations

- Campaigns to raise student awareness on contract cheating and, as a result, boosting their morale.
- Publicising university support systems that can assist students in improving their learning skills, allowing them to avoid contract cheating.
- Implementation of software to reduce the time required to prove contract cheating.
- Reviewing whether admission criteria for specific courses should be modified in order to meet prerequisites for learning modules.