

Perspectives of Czech High School Students on Cheating in Remote Education

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Abstract: This study explores the perspectives of Czech high school students on using digital technologies for cheating during remote education, a phenomenon encouraged by the abrupt transition to online learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Through a mixed-methods research design, this study collected data via an online questionnaire with 24 questions completed by 316 students from secondary schools and conducted individual interviews with seven teachers. In their study, the authors focus on three questions: How much do high school students know which digital technology they can use for cheating in remote online education? What are their experiences with cheating in remote online education? What are the preventive solutions recommended by students and teachers to eliminate online cheating? The research findings indicate that students perceive online cheating as justifiable, primarily due to their disengagement with the course material and lack of interest in learning under the pandemic's extraordinary circumstances. Students frequently used technical means for cheating, with mobile phones and screen-sharing during online tests being the most popular methods. Additionally, the use of internet resources to find answers was the most commonly reported form of online cheating. To address this issue, students outlined various anti-cheating strategies, categorised into three perspectives: pessimistic, practical, and critical-realistic. The pessimistic perspective indicates scepticism about the feasibility of effectively combating cheating, whereas the practical perspective offers tangible, immediate solutions. The critical-realistic view provides a thoughtful and pragmatic approach to the problem, suggesting a balance between understanding the complexities of cheating and implementing realistic measures. The study highlights educators' critical role and emphasises the importance of aligning assessment methods with students' learning needs and expectations to reduce cheating tendencies naturally. The rise of AI technologies has introduced new dimensions to the problem of online cheating, as AI tools can facilitate academic dishonesty. However, AI can help detect and prevent cheating. The authors suggest using formative assessments and creating an engaging, supportive online learning environment to deter dishonesty and promote academic integrity.

Keywords: Online cheating, Remote online education, High School, COVID-19 Pandemic, Plagiarism, Anti-cheating strategy

1. Introduction

According to the report of the Czech Government (2021), all secondary schools in the Czech Republic operated due to the pandemic for a total of 155 days in the remote online education regime in two periods: in spring (March-June 2020) and autumn-winter-spring (mid-October 2020 to mid-May 2021) using Zoom (4 % schools), Google Meet (40 %), MS Teams (53 %) or other platforms (e.g., Skype, Jitsi Meet, Adobe Connect). According to a survey of the Czech School Inspectorate (ČŠI, 2020), among 1,767 students, 48 % of them characterised their online education as self-study from textbooks, slightly more students (55 %) as online broadcasts of teachers, 58 % of students stated that online education consisted of working on assigned tasks themselves, and 63 % students as watching videos recommended by the teacher. In another survey, school principals estimated that there were 250,000 students who were not involved in remote online education in the spring semester of 2020. In the 2020/2021 school year, there were approximately 50,000 such students (3.5%) (ČŠI, 2021, p.15).

Students cheating in school education is closely related to evaluating students' activities and their learning outcomes. "Providing feedback and evaluating achieved results proved to be crucial during remote education." (ČŠI, 2021, p.50). Implementing the traditional forms of verification of results into remote online education was the main reason why most Czech teachers were not successful. Therefore, they followed the methodological recommendations of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MoEYS). "Problems with assessment have led teachers to talk about gradual changes in their approach to assessment, but unfortunately only 7% of them report more fundamental changes in their approach to student assessment.

Most often it is a milder classification (in secondary schools the classification is exceptionally stricter), but also continuous verbal assessment is significantly more often used" (ČŠI, 2021, p.50). Engaging students to study was often challenging. The dominant organisational form of work was frontal instruction. In rare cases,

students cooperated, with group work averaging 6% and pair work only 4% (ČŠI, 2021, p.46). Video conferencing tools allowed some class grouping.

Despite improvements in remote teaching between spring 2020 and autumn 2021, the quality did not match face-to-face teaching, according to both students and parents. Students' motivation to learn deteriorated, teaching was less engaging, and students enjoyed online learning less. Additionally, parents noted that teaching improved more in schools where it was already prominent in the spring of 2020 (ČŠI, 2021, p.54).

During remote online education in high schools, teachers used various approaches to assessing students' learning outcomes, including continuous classification (94-97%), selected student portfolios (including digital) documenting the results of student learning outcomes (12-16%), or more detailed verbal information about mastered skills (12-31%) (ČŠI, 2021, p.50).

While this research was conducted in 2021, which might suggest a temporal gap between the study and its publication, it provides valuable longitudinal insights. These insights highlight persistent issues in online education that remain relevant today, offering a reflective look at the evolving educational landscape and the ongoing challenges faced by students and educators. This study mainly aimed to investigate the Czech high school students' approaches to online cheating during remote online education. More specifically, the study attempted to examine students' reasons, used technologies, modes, and frequencies of cheating in remote online education including recommendations offered by students and teachers on preventing online cheating.

2. Literature Review

Digital technology is becoming a valuable and powerful tool for learning and school cheating. According to Arnold (2016), "cheating opportunities in online test environments raise the issue of fairness. In a competitive study environment, students will have low toleration for cheating by fellow students" (p.99). School cheating supports the current school setting, which focuses on student performance, competitiveness, and gaining good grades. Online platforms offer numerous opportunities for dishonesty, where students use forbidden means or have others take tests for them (Arnold, 2016). Some young people, accustomed to the digital world and Copy + Paste, often have different views on what constitutes digital cheating. "19% of high school students do not consider copying from the Internet to be cheating" (Vrbová, as cited in Ambrožová, 2020, p.95).

Cheating is a widespread phenomenon. Not every student cheats. "14% of high school students think they do not cheat when they copy or consult with classmates, 14% of them think they do not cheat when they copy homework, 12% of them do not think they are cheating if they have sight of questions for a written exam before they are due to take it, and 11% of them do not consider that they are cheating when using crib-sheets (or secreted notes)" (Vrbová, as cited in Ambrožová, 2020, p.95). Lovett (as cited in Ambrožová, 2020) considers "students who are more focused on gaining good grades than understanding educational content, and students who feel dissatisfied at school, are the two groups of students who cheat most often" (p.94). Galloway (2012) concludes that one of the three main reasons for cheating is the consequences of cheating are not set to discourage students from further attempts to cheat, i.e., "the temptation to cheat has grown - there is little accountability, consequences are few, and settings lack systems to deter people from cheating" (p.382).

Recent studies have also addressed the impact of remote education on cheating behaviours. Cramarenco et al. (2023) conducted a systematic review on student perceptions of online education and digital technologies during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study highlighted that while online education offered flexibility and self-directed learning opportunities, it also presented significant challenges, including increased opportunities for cheating due to the lack of direct supervision and the ease of accessing unauthorised resources online (Cramarenco et al., 2023). Similarly, Bond (2020) synthesized research on K-12 teaching and learning during the pandemic, emphasising that the rapid shift to remote education often lacked the necessary infrastructure and pedagogical adjustments, leading to increased instances of academic dishonesty. The study recommended better teacher training and the integration of technologies to mitigate cheating in online environments (Bond, 2020). Additionally, DiPietro et al. (2020) examined the varied experiences of students and teachers during remote learning across different grade levels, finding that high school students were particularly prone to cheating due to the increased pressure to perform well and the relative ease of bypassing online supervision tools. The research suggested implementing more robust assessment methods and fostering a culture of academic integrity to address these challenges (Di Pietro et al., 2020).

Noorbehbahani et al. (2022) identified four main themes for students' reasons for cheating in online exams: (1) teacher-related, (2) institutional, (3) internal, and (4) environmental. Teacher-related reasons include unfair

favouritism, low interest in students' learning, poor pedagogical styles, course difficulty, lack of support, reluctance to punish cheaters, and poorly designed exams. Institutional reasons involve lenient cheating policies, ease of cheating, impulsiveness, less respect for online teachers, and poor quality of online learning equipment. Internal reasons include students' academic performance, low intrinsic interest in the course, and personal traits like laziness, lack of confidence, and moral attitudes towards cheating. Environmental reasons include peers' behaviour, parents' attitudes, personal issues, and societal factors such as poor economic conditions and societal attitudes towards cheating.

Research among Czech high school students (n=1542; aged 15-23; 58.0% female) showed that "high school students download work on the internet, which they later publish as their work" (Ambrožová, 2020, p.167). This research confirmed that "cheating affects more male students than female students" (Ambrožová, 2020, p.168), aligning with other international case studies. Ambrožová (2020) also found connections between school cheating and a student's grades in Czech and mathematics. With worsening grades, the incidence of digital cheating increased. "Research also revealed a high degree of correlation between school cheating and the tendency to become addicted to the internet" (Ambrožová, 2020, p.170). Inspired by Johnstone (1996), Ambrožová (2020) presents a typology of students based on their preferred learning strategies to determine how different types of students exploit the Internet. Detailists and perfectionists showed a low tendency to exploit the Internet, unlike data collectors and innovators.

According to Michal Černý, a member of the Association of Principals of Czech basic schools, "it does not have to be just a mobile phone that students cheat or disturb. For example, they use wireless headphones, which girls can easily hide under their hair, while someone tells them, which the teacher does not notice at all. Another illegal test helper is a smartwatch, which can now receive and send messages" (Rizikyová, 2021).

In conclusion, the shift to remote education during COVID-19 has increased high school students' cheating due to less supervision, more pressure, and digital tools. Addressing this requires better teacher training, robust assessments, and fostering academic integrity.

The following two research questions were formulated to conduct the current study.

RQ1: How much do high school students know which digital technology (HW, SW) they can use for cheating in remote online education?

RQ2: What are their experiences with cheating in remote online education?

RQ3: What are the preventive solutions recommended by students and teachers on how to eliminate online cheating?

3. The Study

3.1 Research Design

A mixed methods research approach was used to collect and analyse the data to understand better Czech high school students' approaches to cheating in remote online education during the COVID-19 pandemic (Creswell, 2014). The researchers employed the explanatory sequential design (Creswell, 2014) in which qualitative and quantitative data were collected sequentially in two phases. First, high school students' views (N=316) and experiences with cheating during remote online education amid the Covid-19 pandemic was assessed by a survey. Then interviews were conducted with their teachers (N=7) concerning the same topic under scrutiny.

3.2 Participants and the Settings

The study was conducted at nine high schools in the Czech Republic. Data were collected from 316 high school students through an online questionnaire and from seven teachers through individual interviews. Among the students, 56.0% were boys, 38.9% were girls, and 5.1% did not state their gender. The respondents, aged 15 to 19, were distributed as follows: 29.1% in Year 1, 31.3% in Year 2, 33.2% in Year 3, and 6.3% in Year 4. Most students (34.2%) were from secondary vocational schools with the 'maturita' exam, followed by 23.1% from secondary industrial schools, 19.3% from grammar schools, 13.0% from secondary pedagogical schools, and 8.5% from business academies. The most popular online subjects were foreign language (25.3%), Informatics and IT (24.4%), and Czech language (13.0%).

To provide demographic information about the seven teachers (1 female, 6 males) with teaching experience from 2 to 21 years (12.5 years average) aged from 23 to 41 years. The research involved mainly high schools, where alumni or part-time student teachers of MA study programs in IT of the Faculty of Education at Charles

University work. Those seven teachers showed willingness to get their students to participate in the survey of this study.

3.3 Data Collection Tools

In this study, an online questionnaire and a series of individual interviews were utilised for data collection tools. Data from students were collected from 9.6.2021 to 30.6.2021 when secondary schools in the Czech Republic returned to face-to-face education, and remote education was over. Interviews with teachers were organised online in ZOOM from 9.6. to 29.6.2021.

The online questionnaire consists of 24 questions dedicated to students (14 closed-ended questions, 9 semi-closed questions, and 1 open-ended question). The questions of the questionnaire were designed by one of the authors. The questionnaire questions were carefully designed to elicit specific information related to the research objectives, such as students' knowledge of digital tools for cheating and their justifications for such behaviours. This mixed-methods approach ensures a comprehensive understanding of the issues addressed in the study.

All students who participated in the study were informed about the survey's aim by their teachers before the actual distribution of the questionnaire link. The students were assured it was a completely anonymous questionnaire and were informed about the time required to answer the questions (e.g., not more than 15 minutes to complete the questionnaire). The data collection was conducted anonymously and without specific information about pupils, teachers, and schools. One online individual interview was conducted with all seven teachers, involving 10 questions.

3.4 Data Analysis Procedure

The online questionnaire was made available via a link that directed students to it. The data were analysed using descriptive statistics. Respondents' demographic information is presented using frequencies and percentages. Online individual interviews with the teachers were analysed through inductive content analysis: (1) All seven interviews were transcribed. (2) The transcript of each interview was read multiple times and coded. (3) Coded interviews were compared and contrasted, and themes were identified.

4. Findings

4.1 Students' Reasons of Cheating During Remote Online Education

The main reasons for online cheating during remote education were reported as unwillingness to learn (55.1%), especially if the subject is not interesting/useful (56.6%), inability to understand the curriculum presented in remote education (48.8%), and convenience of online cheating (48.1%) see Fig. 1.

Teachers' accounts from the online interview indicated that students cheating during remote education involve students' pursuit of better grades and teachers' lack of monitoring to detect online cheating.

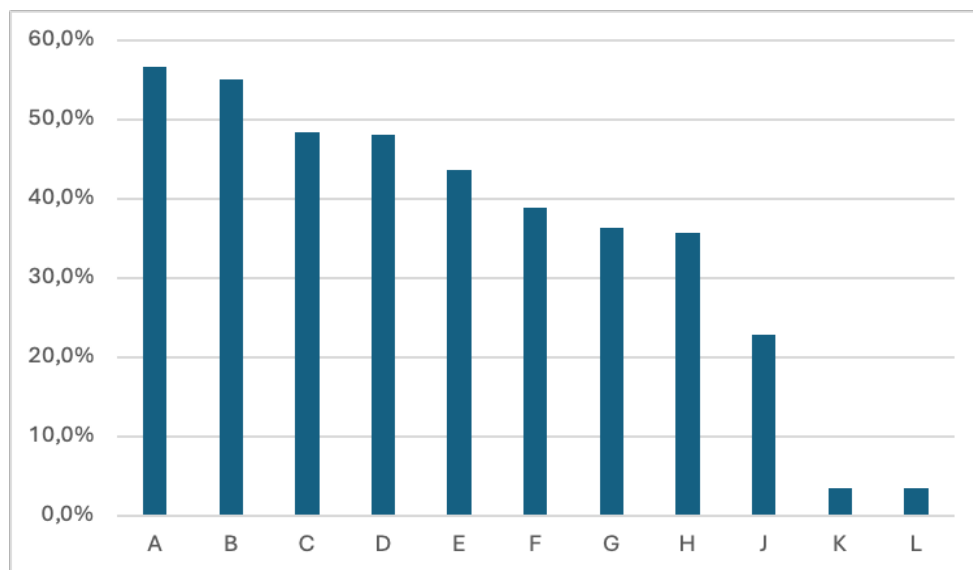


Figure 1: Reasons why high school students cheated in remote online education (N=316) (Podoljak, 2021)

(A- The subject is uninteresting/ useless, B- I didn't want to learn, C- I do not understand the curriculum, because it is online teaching that does not provide me with a sufficient explanation of the curriculum, D- In the case of online education, cheating is easier, E- The subject is very difficult, F- The subject teacher has unreasonably high demands, G- I don't spoil my transcript of records with a bad grade, H- I didn't have time to learn, J- To make my parents happy with a good grade, K- Others, L- I do not cheat)

Most respondents (66.5%) believe that online cheating is excusable during remote education caused by the COVID-19 pandemic since it brought many barriers and limitations for learning. Respondents (79.1%) found that cheating in remote online education is significantly easier than in face-to-face education. As reported by the respondents, their teachers are less likely to detect cheating, and respondents have various ways to cheat. Among the school subjects, maths (39.2%), Czech language (21.2%) and Informatics and IT (10.1%) are found by the students as the most preferred subjects in which they frequently cheated during remote online education.

4.2 Technical Means and Methods of Online Cheating During Remote Education

Regarding technical means, 50.0% of students used additional digital equipment (e.g., mobile phones, tablets, etc.) during online tests, 38.3% of students shared their screen with another person. On the other hand, 25.3% used in online tests software applications (e.g., Wolfram Alpha) - see Table 1.

Table 1: Technology used for online cheating by the high school students (N=316) (Podoljak, 2021)

Used technology	Respondents
Using other equipment (tablet, mobile phone, etc.) during testing	50.0%
Sharing a screen with another person	38.3%
Using a program to help with calculations (e.g., Wolfram Alpha)	25.3%
Using smart calculator	22.8%
Accessing to the source code of the response test page	12.0%
Using a wireless handset for hints	11.1%
Sending an intentionally corrupted file	9.5%
Using a virtual machine to bypass an application that monitors what is happening on your computer	3.5%
Modifying or pasting your own (e.g., Java script) code into a web application with a test	2.8%
Projecting information into smart glasses	0.6%

During online tests in remote education, respondents reported using various cheating techniques at least once: using Internet resources (96.5%), having open notes/textbooks (83.9%), another person/people advising using special software or hardware devices (67.1%), and another person/people in the room advising (49.7%). Students also engaged in plagiarism: 64.2% copied part or all work from the Internet, and 60.8% from their schoolmates. Only 21.2% of respondents actively participated in online lessons. These examples align with teachers' views on student cheating during online education. However, they rarely identified any students cheating.

4.3 Frequency of Online Cheating During Remote Education Across Curriculum

The most frequently self-reported online cheating was using Internet resources (46.8%), which followed using open notes or textbooks in front of the students (26.6%). Surprisingly, students' obtaining help or advice from another person using special software or hardware was 28.2% (see Fig. 2).

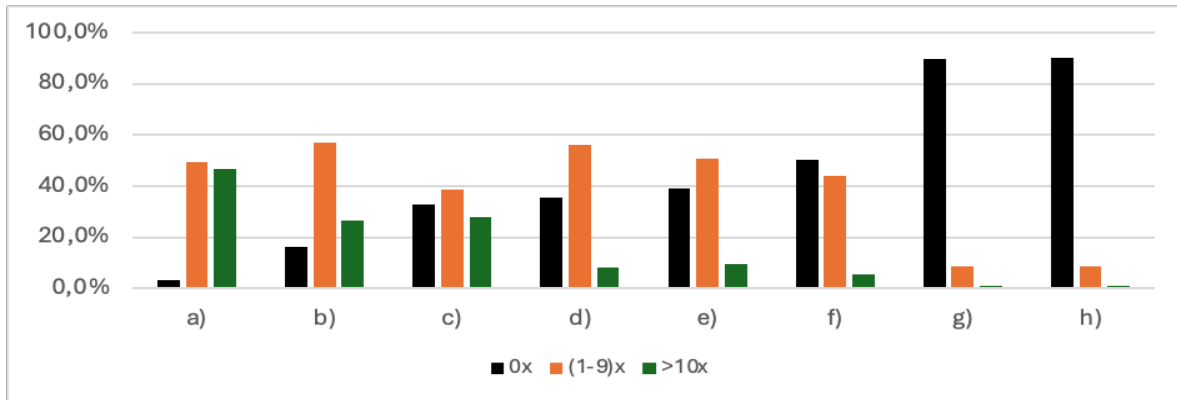


Figure 2: How often high school students used various activities during cheating during online remote education (N=316) (Podoljak, 2021)

(a) I used resources on the internet. b) I had open notes / textbooks in front of me. c) I had another person get advice using a special SW/ HW. d) I copied part/all of the work from the internet. e) I copied part/all of the work from a classmate. f) I got advice from another person in the room. g) I let another person represent me during the test who in fact did my test. h) My parents worked for me.)

4.4 Types of assessment That Lead Students to Cheat

During the remote online education, the teachers reported online tests and individual/ group work activities (both verbal and written form) as the most used types of assessment. Additionally, teachers provided feedback to their students. Usually, there were more individual / group works activities for which students were evaluated. Furthermore, emphasis was often placed on individual verbal assessment of students and one-to-one supervision with their teachers.

The most frequently used assessment types that led students to cheat during remote online education were tests, oral cheating methods, and plagiarism applied in essays and other digital documents.

Based on the self-reports, students in remote online education always cheat when taking tests and occasionally writing essays. Oral cheating methods were applied rarely or never (see Fig. 3).

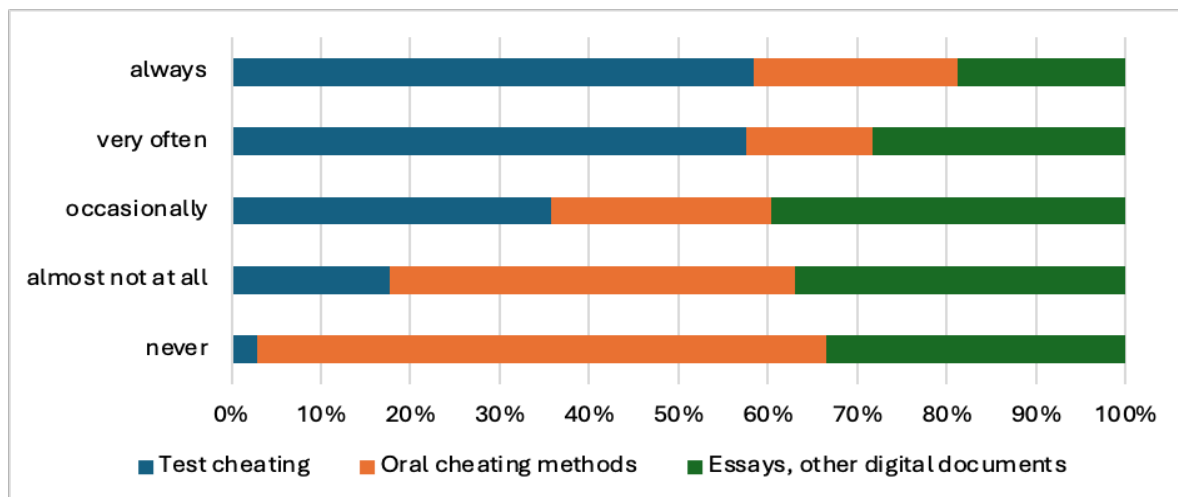


Figure 3: How often high school students cheated during remote online education (N=316) (Podoljak, 2021)

4.5 Solutions Recommended by Students and Teachers for Preventing Online Cheating

Solutions to preventing online cheating were gathered from both students and teachers. First, students' solutions were pooled under three main groups of recommendations, which were (1) *pessimistic* towards preventive solutions of online cheating based on the conviction that "people will always cheat", (2) *practical* based on the technological requirement that all students should use their camera throughout the online exams, and (3) *critical and realistic* towards elimination of cheating in school education based on criticism of

the Czech educational system (including teaching methods and forms and ways how students are assessed in the Czech high schools).

Although teachers realised that students will always try to cheat, they were not pessimistic in the interviews, but suggested a number of practical solutions. For example, to use a hidden unique identifier for each student in the assignment and then checking if each student submitted their file and did not just submit someone else's copied work.

5. Discussion

In response to the first research question, 'how much do high students know which digital technology (HW, SW) they can use for cheating in remote education?', it was found that most high school students are aware of the possibilities of cheating during remote online education. They admit they usually cheated because teachers rarely detected it, and students were rarely punished. This conclusion corresponds with Vrbová regarding "students also cheat due to low penalties for detected fraud" (cited in Ambrožová, 2020, p.94). Some students are familiar with complex cheating techniques that require expertise, such as code modifications in Internet applications, virtual computers to deceive security programs, and image sharing. They needed only basic Internet and smart device skills to cheat.

In response to the second research question, 'what are students' experiences with cheating in remote online education?', it was revealed that almost all students have some experience with the misuse of digital technologies in online learning. Practically every student cheated at least once, and more than half cheated frequently (e.g., 57.3% of students copy from the Internet or their notes), with 18.7% admitting to cheating on tests constantly. 60.8% of students have copied part or all their work from a classmate at least once. Rarely did teachers notice students cheating. Students are aware that it is difficult for a sufficiently digitally literate teacher to detect and prove online cheating. Teachers admit that during remote online education during a pandemic, the number of cheats probably increased, but they had little opportunity to detect it. According to Bilena & Matros (2021), "like doping, cheating cannot be eliminated. There always was, is, and will be cheating in face-to-face and online examinations. However, we can (try to) keep it at an expected equilibrium level" (p.207).

In response to the third research question, 'what the preventive solutions are recommended by students and teachers on how to eliminate online cheating?', it was found that all students' and teachers' recommendations (see 4.5) reflect their understanding of online cheating and their experiences during the pandemic period. Often, the concept of cheating has subjective interpretations, leading to personal solutions. There was no comment from students on whether the school management or teachers issued any measures to prevent cheating during the remote education period (e.g., list of prohibited items, aids used during online exams). Galloway (2012) found similar conclusions: "students described schools as lacking clarity or consequences regarding cheating and expressed feeling forced to cheat in a school culture that promotes getting ahead over learning" (p.378). Online cheating relates to ethical and moral principles. Therefore, it is crucial to clarify this concept for all societal actors: students, teachers, parents, institutions, and policymakers. Bilena and Matros (2021) also point out the need for rules in online examinations at educational institutions as "universities should implement a uniform online exam policy where a camera captures each student's computer screen and room is a requirement. A camera will also help to check a student's ID and eliminate the possibility of another person taking the test" (p.207).

While this study primarily focused on digital technologies for cheating, students also use traditional methods, such as texting answers during online exams. This adaptability highlights their resourcefulness in dishonest practices. Furthermore, the "copy and paste" method remains prevalent, as supported by other research, emphasising the ease of plagiarising content from the internet. This study adds to the existing literature by examining these behaviours in Czech high schools, thus contributing to a broader understanding of academic dishonesty in digital learning environments.

In addition to confirming existing findings, our study offers unique insights into Czech high schools' specific context. These include a detailed analysis of student attitudes towards cheating and the particular methods they employ, providing a deeper understanding of the cultural and educational environment influencing these behaviours. The rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies has introduced new dimensions to online cheating, as AI tools can facilitate academic dishonesty. AI-driven platforms that assist with problem-solving can be misused by students. This study underscores the need for educators to address these impacts on student behaviour. Noorbehbahani et al. (2022) note that cheating in online exams is influenced by advanced

technological tools. Bond (2021) emphasises that the rapid shift to remote education lacked the necessary infrastructure, leading to increased academic dishonesty. Bond suggests that better teacher training and technologies are essential. Cramarenco et al. (2023) found that high school students are prone to cheating due to performance pressure and ease of bypassing supervision tools. While AI and digital technologies pose risks for academic integrity, they also offer potential solutions. Implementing robust assessment methods, fostering a culture of academic integrity, and leveraging AI to detect dishonest behaviours can help. The prominence of AI in online cheating has grown post-COVID-19, which accelerated the adoption of digital technologies in education. Cotton et al. (2024) discuss how AI tools like ChatGPT can be both a challenge and an asset in maintaining academic integrity.

6. Conclusion

Teachers commonly encounter the phenomenon of student cheating at school regardless of the COVID-19 pandemic. The reasons why students cheat remain generally the same: to achieve good grades, a fear of bad grades, a lack of motivation to learn, or laziness. For Czech students, it has probably never been so easy in the past to “copy and paste” materials for school exercises from the internet, or to get advice on exams or work with classmates to develop a test as it was during online education. Teachers increasingly rely on students' trust and belief that they will not cheat. This imaginary gap is widened not only by the number of new opportunities to cheat, but also by the aforementioned difference in computer literacy, specifically in using programs and various forms of online teaching and testing to reduce a student's chances of cheating.

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