

## Academic Cheating: The Origins of a Threat to Educational Integrity

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### Abstract

School cheating, a global issue, jeopardizes academic integrity and educational values. It stems from various factors such as fear of failure, social and academic pressure, peer influence, low awareness of consequences, and inequalities within the educational system. The rise of technology, particularly smartphones and the Internet, exacerbates the problem by making it harder to detect.

In Morocco, this phenomenon reflects social and economic pressures while undermining the quality of education. Inequitable access to resources and perceived injustice within the system further fuel this practice. Addressing it requires implementing educational reforms, strengthening prevention efforts, and establishing effective monitoring mechanisms.

By analyzing a set of previous studies and research, the importance of this research lies in identifying the most important causes of cheating in exams in order to contribute to finding appropriate solutions to them.

### Keywords

Academic Cheating, Psychological Factors, Academic pressure, Social and environmental factors, Awareness of consequences, Inequalities and educational systems, Impact of technology.

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## Introduction

Academic dishonesty, a pervasive dilemma impacting numerous educational frameworks globally, fundamentally erodes the core tenets of education and scholarly integrity. Frequently regarded as an expedient solution to surmount academic challenges, it nevertheless bears considerable ramifications on both individual and societal dimensions.

Morocco is not immune to this predicament. The practice of evading academic assessment protocols to secure fraudulent outcomes manifests in diverse manifestations and substantially impacts the integrity of the educational framework as well as the caliber of learning. Within the Moroccan milieu, academic dishonesty epitomizes not merely a significant obstacle for educational authorities but also serves as a reflection of the socio-economic and pedagogical pressures confronting students. In this discourse, we shall examine the underlying causes of academic dishonesty, which may be ascribed to a confluence of individual, societal, cultural, institutional, and contextual determinants. Scholars have delineated various factors elucidating why students opt to engage in dishonest practices. These factors can be categorized into several domains: psychological influences, academic exigencies, social and environmental factors, and perceptions regarding repercussions.

### 1. Psychological factors

Psychological motivations encompass elements such as a profound aspiration for achievement, apprehension regarding failure, or diminished self-esteem. These variables may compel certain students to engage in dishonest practices to evade adverse outcomes, including academic underperformance or unfavorable societal evaluations. The psychological factors that precipitate academic dishonesty include variables such as a profound aspiration for achievement, apprehension regarding failure, or diminished self-esteem. These components may drive certain students to partake in unethical actions to circumvent adverse outcomes, such as academic underachievement or societal criticism. Specifically, students who regard themselves as academically deficient may resort to dishonest practices to obscure their lack of preparedness or limited competencies (McCabe, 1996). Apprehension concerning failure also exerts a considerable influence, functioning as a catalyst for some students who perceive cheating as a protective mechanism against the repercussions of academic inadequacy (Murdock, 2007).

### 2. Academic and social pressure

In numerous educational cultures, the attainment of academic excellence is regarded as a pivotal determinant in the establishment of a favorable personal and professional trajectory. This considerable pressure may compel certain students to engage in dishonest practices as a means to circumvent failure. A research investigation conducted by McCabe and Trevino (1996) delineates this pressure as one of the primary catalysts of unethical conduct among students. Individuals originating from environments where scholarly accomplishment is profoundly esteemed may perceive cheating as a viable strategy to guarantee their success. Confronted with escalating academic expectations, the impetus to excel transforms into a substantial element that contributes to dishonest behavior. This pressure may emanate from parents,

educators, or the broader educational milieu in general (Chapman, 2004). Furthermore, an additional factor that seemingly promotes academic dishonesty among students is the substantial workload coupled with the challenging nature of examinations. These circumstances may drive students to seek expedient measures, such as cheating, to manage the mounting demands of their academic responsibilities (Graham, 2006).

### **3. Social and environmental factors**

Social influences, including peer interactions and the academic culture within the institution, play a crucial role in students' decisions to cheat. The school environment can either promote or discourage such behavior. According to Murdock, students are often influenced by peers who cheat or view cheating as acceptable. This group influence can lower individual inhibitions and normalize academic dishonesty (Murdock, T. B. & Stephens, J. M. , 2007) . Furthermore, certain cultural and institutional norms that downplay the seriousness of cheating or consider it an acceptable strategy for success can also encourage these practices (McCabe, D. L & Trevino, L. K., 1997).

### **4. Awareness of consequences**

Students who assess the risks and repercussions associated with academic dishonesty as minimal are more inclined to participate in such conduct. This assessment may arise from inadequate oversight, lenient disciplinary measures, or the assumption that acts of cheating will remain undetected. Indeed, when educational institutions neglect to enact robust regulatory frameworks or impose only trivial penalties, the deterrent effect against academic dishonesty is weakened (Lammers & Stoop, (2010). Furthermore, in certain educational settings, cheating is perceived as a prevalent norm and does not provoke ethical condemnation, thereby motivating students to partake in it without experiencing remorse (Bowers, A. J., 2010).

### **5. Inequalities and educational systems**

Inequities and educational frameworks serve a pivotal function in academic dishonesty by shaping both the availability of learning opportunities and students' interpretations of unethical academic conduct. These disparities may manifest as differences in access to educational materials, such as textbooks, learning supplies, tutoring services, or high-caliber instruction, which considerably influence students' attitudes toward cheating. Individuals hailing from underprivileged backgrounds, who do not possess the same resources or educational chances as their counterparts, may perceive cheating as a means to offset their inadequacies (Stearns, L. A. & Spector, T., 2012). Furthermore, disparities in educational quality represent a significant determinant. In academic institutions where instructors are deprived of necessary educational materials and adequate professional development, or where the student-to-instructor ratio is excessively high, the educational milieu may foster an environment conducive to cheating behaviors. Students may regard the evaluation of their knowledge as unjust or misaligned with their authentic competencies, thereby viewing cheating as a permissible course of action to rectify the inadequacies of the education received (Bowers, A. J., 2010).

In intensely competitive educational contexts, wherein academic achievement is perceived as vital for future professional prospects, students may experience coercion to engage in dishonest practices to sustain their competitive edge. This phenomenon is particularly pronounced in institutions where academic performance is critical for securing future opportunities, such as admission into elite programs or obtaining scholarships (Graham, 2006). An additional aspect associated with inequities and educational systems pertains to the influence of such disparities on self-esteem and ethical conduct. Indeed, students from less advantaged backgrounds may suffer from diminished self-worth due to perceived inequities between themselves and their more affluent peers. This erosion of confidence can propel them toward cheating behaviors to obscure their lack of preparedness or to counteract feelings of inferiority relative to better-equipped students or those benefitting from greater support (McCabe, D. L & Trevino, L. K., 1997).

In certain educational systems, particularly within developing nations, students may perceive the educational framework as inequitable owing to the ineffectiveness of the assessment procedures, favoritism, or inconsistencies between urban and rural educational institutions. This sense of injustice may prompt some students to resort to dishonest practices in an attempt to restore a sense of perceived equity in their academic outcomes (El Ouadi, M, 2015). Another element that fosters academic dishonesty is the institutional climate and the absence of stringent regulatory measures. Indeed, in educational systems where oversight mechanisms are feeble or repercussions for cheating are insufficiently severe, an environment in which cheating becomes a normalized behavior may arise. Students, particularly those confronting inequities in educational access, may regard cheating as a viable strategy to mitigate their disadvantages and achieve success without the apprehension of facing stringent penalties (Lammers & Stoop, (2010).

## **6. Influence of technologies**

The impact of technology on academic dishonesty is becoming an increasingly important concern in educational systems worldwide. The rise of the Internet, smartphones, and increasingly advanced digital tools has transformed the methods students use to cheat, while also altering the strategies implemented to address it. This evolution affects not only the nature of cheating itself but also the measures taken to prevent it. Technologies, particularly the Internet and search engines, have significantly facilitated quick and easy access to information (Bennett, R. E. & O'Neill, H., 2012). This has allowed students to search for answers during exams or use unauthorized resources, such as online forums or cheating apps. For instance, websites specializing in providing exam or homework answers have become common (Lange, M. & Ward, R., 2019). Smartphones and mobile apps, now ubiquitous in students' lives, have become popular tools for cheating (McCabe, Treviño, & Butterfield, 2012). Apps that allow students to scan exam questions and find answers instantly, as well as messaging apps where students exchange answers in real time, facilitate this practice (Lund, J. P. & Walton, K. A., 2020). The use of word processing software and the Internet has also simplified the practice of plagiarism (Sutherland-Smith, W. , 2018). Tools like Google Scholar, online databases, and automatic writing

software like GPT (used inappropriately) sometimes encourage students to copy excerpts from existing works without proper citation (Newton, (2018).

In response to the rise of cheating facilitated by technology, many institutions have invested in plagiarism detection systems like Turnitin or Urkund, which help verify the originality of submitted work (Hughes, G. E. & Bingham, E. A., 2021). These tools use algorithms to detect similarities in texts and compare them to a database of articles, publications, and previously submitted papers (Zhu, J. J. H. & He, F., 2016). Technologies have also transformed the way exams are monitored. The use of online proctoring (remote monitoring via webcams) has become common, particularly after the COVID-19 pandemic, to ensure that students do not cheat during remote assessments. However, this method raises concerns about privacy and excessive surveillance (Brink, C. & Laing, S., 2020).

## **Conclusion**

Academic dishonesty represents a complex phenomenon, shaped by variables such as academic stressors and insufficient pedagogical methodologies. Its ramifications are significant, impacting not merely the individual participant but the entirety of the educational framework. To effectively tackle this challenge, it is imperative to engage in interventions at various strata: enhancing awareness, diversifying evaluative methodologies, instituting suitable repercussions, and offering robust student support. By cultivating an ethos of integrity and establishing a more equitable educational milieu, it becomes feasible to diminish incidences of cheating and promote a more just and principled educational experience.

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