

Cheating in exams: Investigating its prevalence, nature and cheating related factors among Moroccan high school students

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ABSTRACT: The previous research studies have examined the prevalence of exam cheating and its related factors among students. In spite of this bulk of studies, only few have been able to look into the issue using the students' voices to understand the issue. The purpose of this study was to fill in this void by investigating the frequency, nature and the most important factors conducive to cheating in exams among Moroccan high school students. This study uses the qualitative approach, a purposive sample of (n = 7) Moroccan high school students were interviewed to understand deeply how these students frame cheating in exams as a part of their lived experiences. The interview result in rich data about the frequency of cheating, types of students who cheat, major techniques being used to commit cheating, and why these students resort to cheating. In fact, it was revealed that both good achievers and low ones engage in cheating actions. In so doing, they use many cheating techniques ranging from traditional to technologically advanced ones. They demonstrate such an advanced level of creativity, coordination and skill in their cheating actions. Additionally, students attribute their cheating practices to a range of factors; which cause three themes to emerge: The greed for grades, inferiority complex and pervasive dishonesty. The findings indicate that high school students worry too much about grades in order to have access to the best schools to secure a better future. The deep feeling of frustration and inferiority lead students to react dishonestly. Finally, the chaotic nature of the school and its outside milieu makes it possible for exam cheating to flourish. Pedagogical implications and lines for further research were discussed.

Keywords: Exam cheating, inferiority complex, pervasive disorder, the greed for grades.

INTRODUCTION

Cheating in tests is one of the serious issues that every educational system is enduring. It is a dangerous problem tarnishing all education levels, from primary school to graduate school. Research studies conducted all over the world demonstrate that the problem is widespread (Bowers, 1964; Cizek, 1999; McCabe, 2005; Butterfield and Trevino, 2006; Mardsen, 2008; Carter, 2008; Bret, 2008; Roberts and Hai-Jew, 2009; Ikweke, 2011; McCabe et al., 2001). Cheating is harmful as it does not only spoil the reputation of the educational system, but it also hits against the wall every reform in the educational field.

Students' dishonesty is also transferred to their working places after graduation (Stephen, 1995; Donald and Klebe, 1997; McCabe et al., 2001; Whitley Jr, 2001). This constant increase in exam cheating prevalence has been gradually prompted by the technological and creative inventions of many cheating techniques, which makes it quite hard to control its spreading (McCabe and Trevino, 1993; McCabe, 2005).

Additionally, a significant part of research literature has attributed cheating in tests to a multiple of variables, some of which deal with individual and demographic factors such

as age, gender, course enrollment, family (Bowers, 1964; David and Wendy, 1990; Ferrell, 1991; McCabe and Trevino, 1997; Alderman et al., 1998; Hensley et al., 2013); whilst others have centered on the relationship between student cheating in exams and a number of contextual variables such as peer influence, honor code, school recklessness (McCabe and Trevino, 1997; McCabe et al., 2001; Trevino and Butterfield, 2002; Shatz, 2011; McCabe et al., 2012). All of these studies have approached exam cheating from different perspectives, but they have not yet been able to curtail the problem efficiently. In addition, most of these reviewed studies are quantitative in nature, so they merely confine their analysis to how students perceive the issue of exam cheating in various academic settings. Only few studies offer to students the opportunity to reveal their profound understanding of the issue such as Anne (2009) and Hammerschmidt (2013). At the national level, news stories keep reporting to us about the prevalence of cheating in exams in the system in all its segments, mainly among high school students (Hammou, 2012, Loubna, 2012, Kawtari, 2013).

In spite of these media stories, a very small number of research studies have examined exam cheating among students in Morocco (Benmansour, 2000, p.1; Boulai, 2013). These studies have roughly focused on the rate and prevalence of the cheating behavior among students, but little has been done on the nature of the behavior, why there is such a prevalence, who is behind the student this exam cheating and the most important factors conducive to this immoral behavior. Therefore, the purpose of this research paper is to fill in this gap in the Moroccan literature on cheating by examining the nature of this dishonest behavior; the main factors that might help explain this phenomenon, and the preventive measures that should be taken to put an end to it. In fact, "If educators are to develop effective strategies to address academic dishonesty, they must be equipped with knowledge about the types of behaviors in which students actually engage and the motivations for them to do so" (Mardsen, 2008, p.4). This will be unfeasible without focusing on individual actors and seeking their perceptions of the issue by means of interviews because they provide access to what is in students' heads, what they know about cheating, and what they think about it (Tuckman, 1972; Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995).

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

There is a growing evidence that cheating has become a real problem among students in all academic settings (Bowers, 1964; Whitley Jr, 2001; Dick et al., 2003; McCabe et al., 2006). This evidence hails from many countries including the United States (McCabe, 2005; Hensley et al., 2013), UK, South Korea (Ledesma, 2011), Ukraine (Grimes and Rezek, 2005). In order to discern the gravity of the phenomenon, it is quite interesting to cover the

research written on the topic. Therefore, this section focuses on defining academic cheating, the frequency of exam cheating, the techniques being used to commit this dishonest behavior, and the most important factors influencing the phenomenon.

Exam cheating defined

A Review of the literature on exam cheating reveals that exam cheating has not been extensively addressed in the research literature. Most of the research (Austin et al., 2006; Bret, 2008; Roberts and Hai-Jew, 2009) being conducted has roughly focused on academic dishonesty of which cheating is a component. However, Cizek (2003, p. 122) as cited in Ikweke (2011, p.24) who has done extensive research on cheating defines it as: "Any action that violates the established rules governing the administration of a test or completion of an assignment; a behaviour that gives one student an unfair advantage over other students on a test or assignment; or an action that decreases the accuracy of the intended inferences arising from a student's performance on a test or assignment".

Dick et al. (2003, p.172) tries to define cheating if the following questions can be answered in the positive:

1. Does the behaviour violate the rules that have been set for the assessment task?
2. Does the behaviour violate the accepted standard of student behaviour at the institution?

Bowers (1964) as cited in Mardsen (2008, P.12) defines cheating according to certain items which illustrate the cheating experience:

1. Copied information from another test or exam.
2. Helped a student to cheat on a test.
3. Used crib notes to cheat on a test or exam.
4. Copied on a test without knowledge of other.

Subsequently, (McCabe and Trevino, 1993 cited in Mardsen, 2008, P.12; McCabe, 2005; McCabe et al., 2006) also measured exam cheating according to the following behaviours:

1. explicit copying of another student's paper during a test with their permission;
2. explicit copying of another student's paper during a test without their permission;
3. the use of unauthorized crib notes;
4. helping someone else to cheat on a test;
5. learning in advance what was on a test from someone who previously took the test.

Frequency of exam cheating

The idea that academic dishonesty has become so prevalent among high school students is largely documented

in a growing body of research studies. The last, show that between 80 and 95% of high-school students admit to engaging in some kind of cheating (Bruggeman and Hart, 1996; Anderman et al., 1998; McCabe et al., 2001; Jensen et al., 2002).

Perhaps one of the greatest researchers whose work has had a insightful impact on investigating the prevalence of cheating behaviour in academic intuitions is McCabe et al. (2001), who reports that high rates of students admitted cheating. 86% of surveyed students copied from another on test/exam, 90% let another copy homework, 77% got questions/answers from someone who had taken test, 76% worked in an assignment with others when asked not to. Other studies reporting that 60% of high school students cheated during a test at school within the past 12 months (35% did so two or more times), 33% copied an internet document within the past 12 months (18% did so two or more times) (Josephson Institute of Ethics, 2006). After four years, the figure of exam cheaters has dramatically increased. The Josephson Institute of Ethics (2010) cited in Challenge Success (2014) surveys 43,000 students from both public and private high schools and asked them about their cheating behaviours. The results indicate that 59% of students surveyed admitted to having cheated on a test in the past year, and more than 80% of students admitted to having copied another student's homework. Grimes and Rezek (2005) investigate cheating among a sample of 1097 secondary school students in six transitional economies, Belarus, Croatia, Kyrgyzstan, Lithuania, Russia and Ukraine, along with students in the USA. In spite of the geographical location, a considerable majority of all students report that they had cheated on an exam or course assignment. However, the rates of students who reported that they had cheated and that they would help other students to cheat were higher in the transitional economies than in the USA. (Farkas and orosz, 2012). Benmansour (2000) surveys cheating among Moroccan students, the results show that engagement and belief in cheating received high ratings.

Some exam cheating techniques

High school students have come up with different exam cheating techniques: (Bushweller, 1999; Cizerk, 1999; Bramucci, 2003; Rowe, 2004):

1. Obtaining assignments from other students who had the course before or have it a different hour of the day and then copy the answers.
2. Breaking into their teacher' classrooms, filing cupboard, and computers.
3. Using their own bodies or clothing as a source for cheating. They can write notes on top of their hands or on their palms; writing on legs is also so common.
4. They can program anything into their cell phones, mp3 players, and calculators, then hide them in their pockets and take them out and cheat.

5. They can gain access to websites where they can buy essays or other papers for an English assignment or assignments for other subjects. Talking to peers, listening to someone, or using a tape recorder.
6. Using someone to take parts or whole examination instead of the authentic person.
7. Using parts of someone's work without giving adequate credit.

Major factors influencing exam cheating

The wealth of published and extensively disseminated literature of academic cheating among high school and college students in the US have analyzed variables and factors correlated with exam cheating, which generally fall into two major categories. The first group is related to demographic and individual factors such as gender, age, grades and many others (David and William, 1983; McCabe and Trevino, 1997; Trevino and Butterfield, 2001; Whitley Jr, 2001; Hensley et al., 2013). On the other hand, the second type is related to situational and contextual factors. These include variables such as peer influence, school policy, honour code; family.

Demographic and individual factors

Demographic factors generally refer to those which concern the characteristics of a chosen population. They comprise variables such as race, age, income, educational achievement, home ownership, religion. The role of gender was comprehensively examined as a demographic factor in exam cheating. One of the seminal studies was conducted by Bowers (1964) as cited in Farkas and Orosz (2012) who finds in his classical study that men cheat more than women. The results are shared by McCabe and Trevino (1997) as cited in McCabe et al. (2001) who conclude that men admitted to have cheating on examination more than women. However, higher frequency of cheating was found among female students majoring in engineering courses compared with other majors. Recently, Hensley et al. (2013) examines the rates of academic dishonesty and the characteristics (eg gender, course enrollment, and grades) of students who engage in various forms of cheating behavior by surveying undergraduates at a large public university in the USA. Of 292 students, 57.19% admitted some form of academic dishonesty in the previous six months, with cheating in tests being the most common type (51.71%). The results also indicate that men were more likely to cheat or make false excuses than women. On the other hand, David and Wendy (1990) examine the relationship between excuse-making and actual cheating among 165 American college students. The results show that women were more likely to make excuses before engaging in cheating behavior than were men. The same findings were shared by Whitley Jr (2001) who examines the prevalence of cheating among

male and female college students. He finds that a sample of 92 and 78 female college students have engaged in exam cheating. He also finds that even though female students have negative attitudes towards cheating than do men, they are more likely to cheat on examinations. With respect to age, results have been varied when reporting about the relationship between age and exam cheating. Some studies have indicated that the age factor has no effect upon exam cheating (David and William, 1983; Franklyn-Stokes and Newstead, 1995; Danie et al., 1991). On the other hand, Donald and Klebe (1997) as cited in Ledesma (2011) finds that older students have a lower tendency to cheat than younger students. Eastman and Iyer (2008) show a contrasting finding for age and level in school. He finds that students who are more likely to cheat are the ones who enroll a higher class. Using grade as an exam cheating predictor, students with a high cheating score tend to have a low goal grade-point average (Genereux and McLeod, 1995). The results are supported by Ledesma (2011) who studies the predictors of academic misconduct among undergraduate students in a Korean university; he concludes that Korean students are more likely to cheat as they are worrying about getting higher grades. Apart from grades, learning strategies were also related positively to cheating beliefs and behaviors (Alderman et al., 1998).

Contextual influences

Contextual factors can be defined as "pressures which come to bear on the individual to encourage or discourage ethical decision making" (Ford and Richardson, 1994 as cited in Mardsen, 2008, P.40). A strong correlation has been shown between a number of contextual variables and student cheating in exams. McCabe and Trevino (1997) investigate the influences of individual and contextual factors on self-reported academic dishonesty among college and university students in the United States. The findings indicate that cheating was influenced by a number of individual traits such as age, gender, and grade-point average, as well as a number of contextual factors including the level of cheating among peers, peer disapproval of cheating. The study also reveals that peer disapproval was the most significant factor. In addition, peer behavior has been considered as an important factor in influencing students' exam cheating behavior. They report that the strong influence of peers' behavior may suggest that academic dishonesty not only is learned from observing the behavior of peers, but that peers' behavior provides a kind of normative support for cheating. The fact that others are cheating may also suggest that, in such a climate, the non-cheater feels left at a disadvantage. Thus, cheating may come to be viewed as an acceptable way of getting and staying ahead (McCabe and Trevino, 1997 cited in McCabe et al., 2001. p.533).

Schools sometimes are directly responsible for facilitat-

ing exam cheating behavior among students. For example, students are more likely to cheat if they know that other students cheated in exams and got away with it. Cheating behavior can also be attributed to the recklessness of the major stakeholders including: teachers, counselors, headmasters and administrators. This would give students the opportunity to commit cheating in tests (Kleiner and Lord, 1999; Jensen et al., 2002; McCabe et al., 2002).

Honor code is another factor that can be associated with academic dishonesty. McCabe and Triveno (1996) compare academic dishonesty in colleges that have honor codes and those that do not. A t-test was used to compare the means of code and non-code respondent on the academic dishonesty variable. The self-reported cheating is significantly higher among students in the non-code sample than among those in the honor code sample ($t = 26.073$, $p < 0.0001$). The academic dishonesty means are 2.62 in the honor code sample and 2.77 at the non-code schools. The findings are supported by Loschiavo and Shatz (2011) who investigate the effect of an honor code on self-reported cheating during online quizzes in an introductory psychology course. The results show that students who signed an honor code were about 30% less likely to report cheating (57.6%) than those who did not sign (81.8%).

A review of the literature asserts that cheating in tests is prevalent in academic settings, counting high schools. However, the issue is having known about the rates of cheating on examination among students, how they cheat, but why these students commit such dishonest behavior. In fact, the literature is mixed when reporting on the most related factors. The reviewed ones are grouped into three categories: individual, demographic and contextual factors.

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this research study is to explore the prevalence of exam cheating among Moroccan high school students, its nature and the most important factors conducive to this immoral act. This section describes the methods used to conduct this research. It starts with a presentation of the research design being adopted. It continues with a detailed listing of research procedures, including selecting the participants, conducting the interviews, a detailed description of the instrument that was used in the study, and a description of the process of data analysis and mode of presentation.

In order to reach a deeper insight into the seriousness of the exam cheating among high school students and the most influencing factors underpinning the phenomenon, a case study was adopted. Cohen et al. (2007, P. 254) believe that case studies strive to portray 'what it is like' to be in a particular situation, to catch the close-up reality and 'thick description' of participants' lived experiences of,

thoughts about and feelings for a situation.

In this respect, this methodology was chosen because it provides a deep description of exam cheating as experienced by high school students. Not only did outward understanding of cheating as a lived experience sought, but also investigated participating high school students' perceptions of the event. This view is shared by Hitchcock and Hughes (1995, P. 317) as cited in Cohen et al. (2007, P. 253) who argue that a case study "focuses on individual actors or groups of actors, and seeks to understand their perceptions of events.

Another seminal feature of a case study is that it "can penetrate situations in ways that are not always susceptible to numerical analysis" (Nesbit and Watt 1984, p. 72–73 as cited in Cohen et al., 2007, p. 253). The quantitative tradition of research, conversely, starts the guiding questions of a research study with words such as, what, who, how much, and how many. The data analysis comes with identified and controlled instruments and statistical recipes. In point of fact, qualitative approach was adopted because the investigation started by asking questions like "how" and "why". This was considered as an opportunity because it would provide a profound insight on how students frame the issue of exam cheating. In this respect, McCabe (1999, p. 681) as cited in Anne (2009) states that:

"Most of the research (into student cheating), however, has utilized survey techniques, which define the topics that respondents are to address. As a result, it is not clear that the most relevant questions have been asked, and that we truly understand how students themselves frame the issue of cheating".

In addition, case studies are 'a step towards action'. "They begin in a world of action and contribute to it. Their insights may be directly interpreted and put to use; for staff or individual self-development, for within-institutional feedback; for formative evaluation; and in educational policy-making". Each of these features has a special importance to this research study since: "If educators are to develop effective strategies to address academic dishonesty, they must be equipped with knowledge about the types of behaviors in which students actually engage and the motivations for them to do so" (Mardsen, 2008, p.4).

Research procedures

The educational setting in which this study took place is Rahali Farouki High School in El kelaa district, Morocco. This study targeted this institution for the following reasons:

1. It is my working place where I have direct contact with students.

2. It is a huge school which consists of at least 3000 students coming from the surrounding villages and countryside.
3. It has the highest students' passing rate and exam cheating frequency.

Once the research site was identified, informal request was made to the principal to implement the findings in this research in the school. A brief discussion was held with the principal and every area of concern were clarified. It was pressed on the principal to act as a research link to help contact the interviewees and to coordinate with the administration. Once he approved to serve so, he contacted a purposive sample of ($n = 30$) students via letters to volunteer in the study. A purposive sampling strategy was chosen because of my professional experience as a teacher that has allowed me to be in direct contact with students especially those who commit cheating in tests. Also, a purposive sample is vital in this research since all the participants admitted cheating in tests. So, they are aware of the issue being investigated. It may not be representative, but the interest is to acquire deeper information from those students who are in a position to give it. However, only ($n = 7$) students consented to volunteer for the study. This lower rate of participation, perhaps, can be attributed to the sensitivity of the phenomenon. Seven were enrolled in second year Baccalaureate. The participants ranged in age from 18 to 21. Four students were males and three females. Participants were asked via letters (Appendix A). The letter explained the study and the role of the volunteer.

This study used semi-structured interviews as an instrument to gather data. In fact, there are many advantages to using this tool. Most importantly, Kvale (1996, p. 11) as cited in Cohen et al. (2007, p. 253) argues that the use of the interview in research marks a move away from seeing human subjects as simply manipulable and data as somehow external to individuals, and towards regarding knowledge as generated between humans, often through conversations.

Listening to interviewees allowed me to find out perceptions and personal accounts from the participants to get an authentic portrayal of the cheating experience. The interview is also a powerful tool for the researcher in the sense that "it is a flexible tool for data collection, enabling multi-sensory channels to be used: verbal, non-verbal, spoken and heard" (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 253). In this respect, the interview left me a room for spontaneity since I could push not only for full answers, but also for complex replies about the issue of exam cheating expressed by multi-sensory channels.

Despite all of these advantages, the researcher using the interview as an instrument may fall in the trap of bias and subjectivity (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 252). Being the sole instrument in data generation, I have to report some characteristics of the researcher that might influence the data procedure and interpretation. As a teacher, I am really

curious about students' feelings and thoughts about what they do, how they do it and why they do it. This demands pertinent questions to be asked in order to uncover deeper understanding of the issue being investigated. In the course of the interview, I allowed sufficient timing for students to generate answers to interview questions, and to trigger a sense of spontaneity among them. The data interpretation might also be influenced by the fact that I am a teacher and I have been involved in many campaigns that promote academic integrity within the school. I also have written many complaints to the administration about students who commit cheating in national exams. However, I tried to put aside these experiences and looked at students' perceptions of the phenomenon from an unbiased perspective. I also identified a critical friend, who is a PhD holder from Mohammed IV university, to take part in analyzing the data.

The interview questions are divided into four sections, a) students' demographic and individual characteristics, b) the prevalence of cheating among high school students, c) the major techniques being used to commit the cheating behaviour, d) the most important factors influencing exam cheating among these students. Interviews were constructed based on the study of Stephens and Nicholas (2008) as they use qualitative approach to investigate academic dishonesty (Appendix B).

A pre-interview questions was conducted to make sure that the interview questions provoke the answers that would present adequate data for the research and to verify if the research site and time given to each interview was suitable. Interviews were conducted in Moroccan dialect, tape-recorded, and later translated in English with the help of a translator. The transcript was sent to be validated by each participant. Samples of both versions are provided in (Appendix C). The interviews took place in the classroom and ran for 30 to 35 minutes for each volunteer. They were conducted on a regular basis for 10 days.

Data analysis

The analysis of the transcribed interview will follow Hycner's guidelines (Hycner, 1985 as cited in Cohen et al., 2007, p. 351):

- Transcription.
- Bracketing and phenomenological reduction.
- Listening to the interview for a sense of the whole.
- Delineating units of general meaning.
- Delineating units of meaning relevant to the research question.
- Training independent judges to verify the units of relevant meaning.
- Eliminating redundancies.
- Clustering units of relevant meaning.
- Determining themes from clusters of meaning.
- Writing a summary of each individual interview.
- Return to the participant with the summary and themes, conducting a second interview.
- Modifying themes and summary.
- Identifying general and unique themes for all the interviews.
- Contextualization of themes.
- Composite summary.

The presentation of data analysis was presented by each participant interview to preserve the coherence and integrity of each individual's response. It also helps the researcher to get a whole picture of the person (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 467).

Ethical considerations

According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) as cited in Hammerschmidt (2013, p. 58), ethical issues permeate interview-based research. They argue that the knowledge produced by such research depends on the social relationship of the interviewer and interviewee, which rests on the interviewer's ability to create a stage where the subject is free and safe to talk of private events recorded for later public use. This again requires a delicate balance between the interviewer's concern for pursuing interesting knowledge and ethical respect for the integrity of the interview subject.

In order to protect the volunteers as well the research results, the following ethical issues were adopted (BERA, 2011):

1. The students had the right to refuse to take part or to withdraw from the interview at anytime.
2. There was voluntary informed consent, thus ensuring that students freely choose to participate or not in the research.
3. All interviewees were informed that the interviews would take approximately 30 minutes to be conducted.
4. All interviews were tape-recorded with the permission of the participants.
5. The interviews were transcribed and copies of transcription were sent to each participant.
6. An official letter was sent to the school headmaster to ask for consent.
7. Students were not punished for their responses.
8. Pseudonyms were adopted to protect students' names and identities. (BERA, 2013)

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The main objectives of the present study were to unravel the prevalence of exam cheating among Moroccan high school students, its nature, and the major factors conducive to this immoral behavior. In order to get closer to the reality and a deep description of participants' lived experiences of cheating in exam, a qualitative approach

was adopted. Interviews were conducted with a purposive sample of ($n = 7$) students who admitted cheating in tests. In fact, the findings of the present investigation will be presented into two forms. At the outset, a brief narrative of each participant to describe his/her surroundings in which he is entrenched. The participants' background, social environments help to get a sense of the person and the main motives behind his/her actions. First, an account of each participant regarding cheating is presented to elicit the innermost ideas and concepts, quotes that help us to understand how these students think about cheating and the factors that drive them to commit this behavior. Second, an analysis of students' interviews and a discussion of the major themes emerged are subsequently followed.

Students interviews

Madi

Madi is a student at second year Baccalaureate Math. Science stream at Rahali Farouk high school. It is a low achieving, and crowded school which lacks organization and peace. Nevertheless, Madi likes the school so much. He said that "the school represents 75% of my life". He plans to study medicine after Baccalaureate. He also pointed out that he comes to school in order to:

"get smarter and more intelligent in order to get more prestige and esteem from my surrounding world and to avoid being tricked by anyone, because nowadays the secret of knowledge is power".

His parents always press him to achieve higher grades to get into the faculty of medicine or other engineering schools. Though Madi considers cheating as ethically wrong; he cheats often in exams especially in History, Geography and Islamic Education exams, since as he pointed out "the teacher keeps filling the student's head without improving any of our important skills, these subjects encourage me to cheat". Also, the interviewee said that cheating in tests did not begin at high school, but in primary school. He tried to cheat in tests when the teacher left the classroom. Sometimes the teacher helps him to get things done especially in the final exam of the primary school so that the school could have a higher rate of passing students.

The question of "How do you cheat?" incited Madi to boast about his numerous cheating strategies he frequently uses. Madi said:

"I write notes on my clothing, and a small written paper to be hidden in my pocket. Once I catch the opportunity, I take it out and I cheat, and swap it with my friends".

He also recalled an organized cheating action, he said:

"last year I had the 1st year Bac exam, I still remember that a student expert in cheating coordinated a cheating operation in which all students cheated in Islamic education using mobile phones. We were so happy because it went unnoticed".

In response to the question about the main reasons behind this cheating in exams, Madi plainly stated that "I cheat because I used to do it all the time without being punished". Actually, this answer fits with the research analyzed in the review of the literature section. Students cheat and get away with it without any punishment. This also can be attributed to the fact that honor codes, if there are any, are not enforced by either the administration or by the students. Another factor that drives Madi to cheat in exams is that his parents put pressure on him to get good grades "my parents do not have enough money to get me into private universities, so they always warn me to get the best grades at any cost".

Madi is one of the special cases of a good student and a good cheater all together. He believes that knowledge and prestige attained from school can also be attained through effortless cheating actions. In point of fact, the long for getting good grades go beyond his honest part of achieving things honestly. This stance, actually, was derived from the daily pressure of his parents, and a performance-based system that lays emphasis on grades rather than students' competence.

Sufi

Sufi is studying at second year Baccalaureate, Physics stream at Rahali Farouki High school. She describes her school as a "salad" which consists of teachers and students from different backgrounds. She said that most of her teachers are good, but there are some "racist" teachers who show no respect towards their students as well as the nobility of the job. She is from a poor background. Her favorite subjects are physics, history and English, while she dislikes geography because it's "so boring". She wants to be a doctor. She also mentioned that grades are important in her school. She admitted cheating in exams. In this respect, "I have become addictive too, I have a second chance to do better in the exam". Sufi uses modern cheating techniques. She does not use secret notes as proof if caught. Rather, she uses highly sophisticated means of cheating. In this sense, Sufi said:

"before the regional exam, I watched some tutorials in English about the best way to cheat successfully in the exam and I found an interesting technique. I used wireless headphones. It is so small and has the color of the ear so it cannot be detected. I received the answers from my friend" cheating operation manager. The exam paper was already sneaked".

Actually, cheating is no longer an individual and traditional

action, but a gang-like operation that uses modern technology. Sufi justified her cheating behavior by saying:

"personally, I have to get good grades in order to get into the best school. Also, my friends' parents pay for them to study in the private school in order to have good education and good marks. I really have to be like them with any means".

Also, according to Sufi, "students in the private schools have good teachers, but we have careless ones". I think these justifications spring from negative attitudes towards the school system at large, and unjust practices of some teachers. Cheating here is one way of protesting against these practices. This also reflects an awareness of the need to look for the status and prestige gained from good performance which is highly supported and appreciated by parents.

Fati

Fati is 19 years old. She has just got her Baccalaureate in science stream. She studied as the rest of the students at Rahalli Farouk High school. She likes school very much to the point that she considers school as her "second home". She seems to be a hard working student. She plans to do journalism. She lives in the school campus with her two sisters. She said that she had good teachers as well as bad ones. Some teachers are like "my family" while others are always nervous and have bad attitudes towards the job. Her favorite subjects are English and Philosophy. She likes philosophy since it's like her "doctor". She dislikes Geography because it requires learning the material by heart. Her parents always insist on achieving better results:

"We are three girls in the family. I have to get good grades so as to achieve my dream. I want to tell the people that we do not need a boy in the family". She admitted cheating in exams many times. She also helped other students to cheat. In this respect, she said "friends become real if they help each other in difficult situations".

When she was asked about her cheating techniques, she narrates to me her cheating adventures with enthusiasm and joy:

"Facebook helped us well to cheat. There is a Facebook page called "tasribat", in which we find all the leaked exams; lens fixed on the candidate's glasses send the exam questions quickly to the receiver to be posted on Facebook". She also added "the teachers sometimes help us to cheat".

In finding about the reasons why she commits this cheating, Fati told me that success among students who

cheat is higher than among honest ones. "I have seen examples of students who cheated in the Baccalaureate exam and they succeeded". Also, the issue of private versus public school comes again to the surface. "students of private schools have better marks than public school ones". The next reason why Fati committed cheating was: "some teachers give better marks to the students whom they teach in the evening classes. There is also a class in the school reserved only to teachers and administrators' children called "classe pilote"; they give them the best teachers".

Overall, Fati's attitude towards cheating is a product of some psychological as well as social drives. As a girl in a patriarchal society, she feels the need to fit into her community through academic success in order to bring honor to the family. Helping others even in such dishonest situations as cheating is a true sign of friendship in order to redress the unfairness and favoritism that the Moroccan educational system is promoting among students.

Ella

Ella is a student at Rahali Farouk high school. She is currently studying at second year Baccalaureate, science stream. She lives with her parents in Attaouia, El kelaa district. She does not like her school so much because it is messy. She said that there are some teachers who work hard with students while others do not. The latter ones work according to their moods. Also, most of the students are not interested in studying hard. The school is just a place to have fun and spend a good time with friends. Furthermore, there is a kind of conflict between Art stream students and Science ones. Her favorite subjects are English, Science and French, yet she dislikes Math and Arabic. According to her, Arabic has become a "useless language". She wants to continue her studies as far as she can in order to achieve what her parents were not able to realize, "to be an educated person". She admitted cheating in tests as well as helping others to cheat". I cheat frequently in tests because I do not have time to learn by heart all the materials". Ella uses many techniques to cheat. For example, "I sometimes write on my leg and trouser". "I also use small papers hidden somewhere". Ella Justified her cheating deeds by saying that "for me, cheating is the easiest way to succeed". She also said that "I cheat because I do not understand the material as the teacher did not do his job in the right way".

Ella is an example of students who take advantage of the disordered life of the school. She could do everything she wants as long as the school lacks an effective leadership that could nurture a culture of responsibility and honesty among students, administration staff as well as teachers. Again, her background as coming from an uneducated family coerces her to achieve the dream of her parents. To her mind, being an uneducated person in a society like Morocco has become a marker of shame. Also,

her laziness drives her to justify her cheating acts by claiming not to have time or being unable to understand the material.

Riana

Riana is also a student at Rahali Farouk high school. She is a student at Art Stream Baccalearete. She is living in the school campus with her brother. She seems to come from such a poor background. She describes most of the students as badly behaved, so the teachers do not have a good relationship with them. She also stated that the administration and the teachers show some favoritism towards some students, typically hard-working ones while they ignore the weak students. Her favorite subject is philosophy because she feels that philosophy "makes you think about the reality". She likes school so much. Riana cheats very often in tests. She acknowledges that "I developed the cheating habit from my Junior school because I did not understand what I was learning" When asked about her own test cheating techniques, she seems tactical in how she cheats.

"Last year I used an earpiece. It was such a success especially in Geography and history subjects. cheating has become such an easy stuff for me. Sometimes I use "Clinics" (handkerchief) to copy notes, this has never been detected by any teacher".

Actually, combining between the old and modern cheating techniques makes of her a professional cheater. In addition, Raihana justified her cheating practice by acknowledging the fact that:

"Being an Art Stream student, our teachers bombard us with a lot of lessons to learn by heart. So, there is no harm if I cheat as long as it is no use to memorize all the information, and if memorize I would forget everything once I am done with the exam"

Besides the heavy loaded program, Riana added:

"what I am learning is not practical in our daily lives. I wish I had been a science student, at least I would not spend too much time learning the materials by heart and "vomiting" it on the paper's test".

Riana represents a weak kind of students. This weakness comes from a longstanding doubt about her potentials to learn the material very well. Therefore, all she could afford is to look for a second chance to do well at school.

Ayoub

Ayoub is a second year Bacculaureate student at Rahali

Farouk High School, Science stream. He is 19 years old. He is from a remote village in El kelaa des Sraghna. He is living in the school campus. He describes his school as an inappropriate place to study in. The school lacks a library and a multimedia room. He also added that the classes are not equipped enough to motivate students to learn. Teachers are also in daily conflicts with students. Besides, some teachers work hard and give good grades to students whom they teach in the extra hours. In addition, the administration favors students whose parents are working in the school or other good jobs. He admitted cheating in exams so many times. He says:

"I cheat whenever I stand the opportunity. I do not care if it is wrong. I have to do it to succeed. This year is my last chance to get my Bac, otherwise I will quit the school definitely".

Ayoub uses many techniques to cheat. For instance:

"I used the traditional techniques, like crib notes, writing on the clothes and other, but this year I do not have a choice but to use a wireless earpiece that transmits answers from the person who sends answers. This has become so common and rarely detected".

Ayoub justified his cheating actions by saying:

"I actually have something to say. I really get so angry when I work so hard and stay up all the night to prepare for a test, and some kids who do not know even the title of the lessons we study, and take a sheet full of answers, and they just copy them to their papers and succeed. I feel like I am doing nothing, and I am useless. I just cannot stand it".

Ayoub is not concerned whether cheating is immoral as long as it would take him to the next level. The peer culture provides a normative back up to his cheating actions.

Yassin

Yassin is also a student at Rahali Farouk High School. He is a Bacculaureate student, Science stream. He describes his school as a place to have fun with friends. He also added that students are bored of having a lot of lessons. As for teachers, he told me that teachers work at school and go home. Students are considered as numbers in the school. His favorite subjects are physics because he likes to learn something real. He wants to be an Engineer. He actually admitted cheating in tests so many times, not only in high school but also in middle school. He recalled so many instances in which he cheats in tests, for example "I really hate Geography and History subjects, I learn the materials by heart but I always keep some crib notes in my pocket in case I forget". He also adds that "I do not have

self-confidence when I learn the material. I always have in mind that I would forget everything on the day of the exam."Yassin resorts to cheating as a savior from a schooling system in which only those who learn by heart can do well.

DISCUSSION

Participants attributed their cheating actions to a multiple of motives, which are personal, psychological, social as well as political. This has pushed them to invent many techniques, ranging from traditional to technologically advanced ones. Analyzing the students' accounts, one can derive that cheating is widespread in high school not only among lazy students, but also among good ones. It is also important to note that most of the reviewed studies that surveyed students' cheating actions were not able to distinguish between the types of students who cheat (Franklyn-Stokes and Newstead, 1995; Donald and Klebe, 1997; Roberts and Hai-Jew, 2009; Galloway and Pope, 2009). However, this purposive sample comprises a range of students who are doing well at school as well as students who are not, but they all show talent in exam cheating. The high level of coordination, skill, creativity that those students display in their cheating actions is so impressive. If these aptitudes had been displayed in their learning, they could have achieved great things in their studies. Cheating in this sense serves better than studying at school because it promotes critical thinking, creativity, coordination, collaboration, and the advanced use of technology. In point of fact, these are the mostly required skills in order to survive the twenty first century challenges. It seems these students are tired of fattening their heads with useless information, which therefore pushes them to mobilize these skills in dishonest acts like academic cheating. These students are endowed with exceptional abilities and talents that should be exploited in learning opportunities and good achievement.

Students' lived experiences of cheating in exams also do reflect an intricate pattern of some social, personal, economic, and psychological factors that might explain the phenomenon. In fact, these factors stimulated major themes to emerge to justify student's exam cheating. The most important ones, which will serve as headings, are outlined subsequently: The greed for scores, inferiority complex and pervasive dishonesty.

The greed for scores

The findings of the current study are consistent with other empirical studies investigating grades as exam cheating predictor (Genereux and McLeod, 1995; Grimes and Rezek, 2005; McCabe et al., 2006; Ledesma, 2011). These studies show that high school students worry too much about grades in order to have access to the best

schools to secure a better future. This pursuit for grades itself is exceedingly influenced by many factors, for instance parents, the educational system, and social prestige. Most of the interviewees acknowledged that their parents put higher pressure on them to get good grades because of the good status that this would bring to the family to boast about. Instead of encouraging their children to enjoy the learning experience at school, they put them under strain to fulfil the family's priorities. In most family gatherings, people start talking about grades that students get, or the schools to which they were admitted, but they rarely talk about the kind of learning that they have received. Some of them never ask their children what they do at school till the end of the semester when they receive the results. This indicates that parents sometimes are accomplices in this illegal practice. They force their children to look for scores rather than encourage them to get immersed in the learning experience. The finger of blame should also be pointed to the educational system which favours performance rather than competence and makes grades decide students' futures. Kohn (2007) as cited in Anne (2009) puts forward that widespread cheating might indicate a flawed educational system than a student's character. Therefore, students become obsessed with attaining higher grades through resorting to illegal practices as cheating.

Inferiority complex

It can be inferred from the students' views about exam cheating that the deep feeling of inferiority and frustration that these students have, leads them to react dishonestly. Many research studies show that inferiority complex is correlated with many anti-social behaviors. For instance, Kenchappanavar (2012) reveals that inferiority complex is correlated significantly with aggression, academic failure, passive dependency and dishonest behavior. The results are in agreement with the findings of Coppersmith (1967), Byrnes (1984) and Kohlberg et al. (1984). As said by students in their accounts, most of them developed a kind of a low self-esteem from the early years of their schooling that they cannot do well at school. The heavy loaded program they have been exposed to from primary school up to now has made them think that depending on themselves is impractical without resorting to other ways to survive the school's memorizing tradition. There is a well-known saying shared among Moroccan students that if you cheat you will move to the next class, if not you will stay stuck in the same level. Another striking thing is the unjust practices that some students endure in the school. Fati expresses a deep sorrow over the favoritism that some teachers and administration officials show towards some students whom they teach in the evening classes or whose parents are working in the school. Another feature of unfairness is manifested in the kind of education that students of private schools received as opposed to the

public school ones. The first ones stand good opportunities to do well at school, have good grades that can enable them to have access to the best schools. All of these make these students feel as if they are worthless. This feeling fuels them with the need to counter this worthlessness; cheating here is one way to do it.

Pervasive disorder

Students seize the opportunity to cheat if the school turns a blind eye on the cheating practices in the school, which thus becomes habitual among students. Most of the interviewed students state that they cheat and get away with it without any kind of punishment. The results are in line with the reviewed studies (Kleiner and Lord, 1999; Trevino and Butterfield, 2002; Loschiavo and Shatz, 2011; McCabe and Triveno, 2012). Sometimes, the teachers or the administration staff, somehow or other, can help students commit this illegal practice with the intention of increasing the rate of passing students. It is this mess that makes the school a fertile land for all illegal and dishonest practices to flourish.

What is happening within the school is just a mere reflection of what is taking place outside its walls. The current peer culture is a normative support to this dishonest practice (McCabe et al., 2001). Today's young people want to achieve everything without doing any kind of effort. They are influenced by other young people who have achieved great things without doing well at school. It is this culture of laziness that is molding our students day after day. They are also influenced by all kinds of corruption that the country is undergoing. High profile professionals, athletes, celebrities are being caught in corruption issues. The social learning theory puts forward that an immoral behavior is acquired through the influence of an example; to their disappointment it is a bad one.

Conclusion, recommendation and limitation

Exam cheating in high school is such a mounting and complex issue which incorporates many facets. There are many quantitative studies being conducted on high school students as regards the issue of cheating in exams, but only few were able to use the students' voices to understand the issue. The goal of this study was to uncover the specificity of exam cheating from the voices of a purposive sample of Moroccan students. This in fact required an approach of a qualitative nature to be adopted. Due to its thick portrayal of the issue, some concealed exam cheating motives were revealed; which shows that those students are exam cheating talents and real dissidents of academic integrity. Themes were accordingly drawn from students' lived experiences of cheating, which in turn contribute to the scholarship in this area of inquiry. The chosen approach also helps to understand how

students frame the issue of cheating as well as seek their perceptions of the issue being investigated.

The study was guided by three major questions: What is the extent of exam cheating among Moroccan high school students? What types of cheating behaviour students use? And what are the main factors that might account for students' cheating behavior? It revealed that cheating is highly prevalent among students. Yet, what is unique about it is that all types of students can cheat no matter whether they are doing good at school or not. In doing so, they have demonstrated such an extraordinary expertise and talent in cheating by using various techniques. Cheating teaches them critical thinking, advanced use of technology, sharing, coordination and problem solving, but for the wrong reasons. A malicious use rather than an intelligent productive one. In fact, students attributed their cheating practices to a range of factors; which cause four themes to emerge.

Cheating in exams among high school students poses a real threat to the educational system as it tarnishes its reputation and diminishes its quality. The present study offers several implications for educators and other major stakeholders. To begin with, teachers and administration staff should treat their students equally, because most of the cheating occurs as a result of reacting against the learning culture inside the school. Secondly, honor codes must be enforced within the school in order to nurture and maintain a culture of responsibility and integrity within the institution. Next, a professional learning community should be established to help students who suffer from low esteem and frustration. They should also sensitize the students to use technology for the sake of learning and not academic dishonesty. Moreover, parents should teach their children to love the pursuit of learning rather than grades. This also must be emphasized by teachers to guide their students towards competence goals rather than performance ones. Last but not least, the examination system should be more reflective, critical and project-based rather than memorizing facts.

There were many limitations to this research. First of all, there was a small purposive sample ($n = 7$) of students, which would limit the sources of data. The qualitative approach alone is insufficient to capture the full image of students' cheating behavior. Using quantitative data sources would boost the reliability, generalisability and validity of the study. As for the interviewees, students might not be honest when answering the interview questions. Also, some interview questions were taken from other studies, so they may not stir up suitable and specific answers. Finally, this study opens interesting lines of research which would compare the prevalence of cheating among private and public high school students. Another significant point for further research would be to explore whether exam cheating is empirically correlated with students' low self-esteem and frustration.

Exam cheating is such a complex issue. Many research studies have tackled it from different standpoints. The

study in turn has tried to contribute to this scientific discussion in order to assist researchers to understand the problem. It was revealed then that cheating can also be influenced by how students perceive themselves and the outside world. In fact, we are in front of a generation whose intellectual and moral makeup is being challenged every day by different influences, which makes them opt for effortless and dishonest tactics to continue their hunt for such unwritten future.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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Appendix A

Letter Request for Students Participation

Dear Student,

I am asking your help for my Master dissertation, which deals with the prevalence of cheating, its nature, and the most cheating -related factors among Moroccan high school students. Your contribution will help me to understand why students resort to cheating and the major techniques being used to cheat. Please be assured that your identity and responses will be anonymous and confidential. The interview should take you between 30-35 minutes. They will take place in room 32 in your free time. The interview will be tape-recorded and sent to you to be validated. I'm really seeking your voluntary participation and responses. Please if you have questions regarding the research, timing feel free to ask. I will be so happy to answer you back.

Thank you
Zouar Abdellatif
EFL teacher, Rahali Farouk High school
abdelzouar@gmail.com

Appendix B

- Introducing myself and the objective of the research.
- How old are you?
- Where are you from?
- What year are you in high school?
- Can you describe your school?
- What are students and teachers like?
- What is the relation between teachers, students and administration staff in your school?
- What's your favorite subject? What's your least favorite subject? why?
- Have you ever cheated in tests?
- have you ever helped somebody to cheat?
- In which subjects do you cheat most? Why?
- Tell me about your cheating experience?
- What are the main techniques that you use to cheat in tests?
- Why do you cheat?
- I there anything you would like to add about cheating in exams?

Appendix C

Madi

"Tanktab thriza f hwaiji.wri9a srira tankhabbiha fjib diali.Melli tanl9a forsa tanjbadha n9ol mnha o ndawaz lshabi"

"I write notes on my clothing, and a small written paper to be hidden in my pocket. Once I catch the opportunity, I take it out and I cheat, and swap it with my friends".

"Dak L3am fjihawi, Ba9i tan39al 3la wahd khabir fn9il nadam wahd 3amalia. Ga3 tlamad na9lo ftarbia Islamia btilifone. kolshi kan farhan hit hta wahd ma3a9 biha"

"last year I had the 1st year Bac exam, I still remember that a student expert in cheating coordinated a cheating operation in which all students cheated in Islamic education using mobile phones. We were so happy because it went unnoticed.

Ayoub

"Sraha brit ngoul shi haja fhad moodo3.saraha taitla3 lia dam melli tankhdam mzian o tanshar lil kamlo bash nprepari l test.Walakin shi wahdine matai3arfo hta 3anawiine dial doross li tan9raw.Taiyakhdo war9a dial ajwiba taina9lohom f war9a dial imtihan o tainajho.Tanhass bhala matandir walon hadshi mashi m39ol."

"I actually Have something to say. I really get so angry when I work so hard and stay up all the night to prepare for a test , and some kids who don't know even the title of the lessons we study, and take a sheet full of answers , and they just copy them to their papers and succeed. I feel like I'm doing nothing, and I'm useless. I just can't stand"