

A Study of Candidates' Cheating in National Examinations: a Case Study of the 2017 baccalaureate at the Exam Center of Collège Privé MBF d'Abobo.

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Abstract:

This research aimed to understand the phenomenon of cheating during the baccalaureate examination. Indeed, our results revealed that this degree is for (94.1 %) of those who cheat the symbol of social success, a kind of passport without which there is no way out (no entrance to higher education; no employment tests etc.). Subsequently, they cheat to put all the chances to succeed on their side.

For us, the solution to stop or reduce cheating at this examination does not rest on the multiplication of stricter legal solutions that have proved their inefficiency, but rather on innovating policies that reduce the power of the baccalaureate while giving equal employment opportunities to all the youth of the same nation. Thus, the baccalaureate would be compulsory for those who seek admission to higher education only.

Key words: cheating /baccalaureate / candidates / cell phone / examination

Résumé:

Cette étude a eu pour but de comprendre le phénomène de la tricherie au baccalauréat. En effet, nos résultats ont montré que 94.1% des candidats tricheurs estiment que le baccalauréat symbolise la réussite sociale, une sorte de passeport sans lequel on tourne en rond (pas d'accès à l'enseignement supérieur, ni aux tests de recrutement). Ils trichent donc pour mettre toutes les chances de leur côté.

Pour nous, la solution pour arrêter ou réduire la tricherie ne réside pas dans des mesures de plus en plus sévères qui ont montré leur inefficacité, mais plutôt dans des politiques innovantes visant à réduire le pouvoir du baccalauréat tout en offrant les mêmes opportunités d'emplois à tous les jeunes d'un même pays, laissant ainsi le baccalauréat aux seuls qui aspirent à l'enseignement supérieur.

Mots clés: tricherie /baccalauréat / candidats / téléphone portable / examen

1. INTRODUCTION: THE RESEARCH PROBLEM STATEMENT

The world news is full of cheating stories at different examinations. The following examples serve as an illustration: in the USA “more than 170 teachers and principals were found to have helped cheating in exams in 2009”, or “fake candidates were sent into exams to get hold of the questions, the **South China Morning Post** reports”, or “Several hundred people have been arrested in connection with mass school exam cheating in the Indian state of Bihar”, or “Parents climbing school walls to pass the answers through windows”, or “Up to 64 were suspended for cheating in January, the **Boston Globe**”, or “Thousands of secondary school pupils in Havana were obliged to re-sit their exams, official newspaper Granma said”, or “**China: Using Drones to Catch Cheaters on Exams**”.

Those few “breaking news confirm the works of Marchand (2008), according to which “cheating at the baccalaureate is as old as the exam itself.” Academic dishonesty is real and though nobody has reported cheating cases in COTE D’IVOIRE, the ministry of secondary education seems highly conscious of the instance and severity of this issue. The creation of *la DECO*, a special directorate devoted to organizing national examinations and which stands for “la Direction des Examens et Concours” and yearly frequent innovations prove it.

In spite of the effort of *la DECO* to attain 0% cheating, every year, rumors report cases of “suspicious success” at the baccalaureate. For example, Paul, a 47 year-old carpenter who stopped school in form two, 35 years ago has passed the baccalaureate this year. Alida, 31years old, known level: form two, has also passed the baccalaureate this year. Although it is possible for some highly motivated candidates to succeed after a serious preparation, however some doubts still exist. How can a candidate who could not reach the level to pass the BEPC, lower and easier, suddenly pass the baccalaureate? This key question raises thousand others. For example, do the candidates really cheat despite the proctors’ presence? How to understand cheating at this era of information technology? How do candidates who cheat view the baccalaureate? What is the cheaters’ true message by doing so despite the harsh rules?

The above few questions, samples of many other research questions, constitute the problem that has sharpened our desire to initiate the present research in order to understand this educational problem with the hope to reduce or stop its extension.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to understand why candidates cheat, we decided to investigate on aspirants’ perceptions of cheating. Peter Ashworth & al (2006) who studied that question identified three main excuses from learners or candidates.

The first one is that candidates or students are attached to certain values such as “friendship, interpersonal trust and good learning “ which make them regard a highly punishable behavior like cheating as something justifiable whereas the same learners can view some legally approved behavior as something suspicious.

Besides, the learners' second excuse is about plagiarism. Indeed, the same learners do not have a very clear idea of what plagiarism is exactly. For them, they do not plagiarize intentionally in writing. They just take someone's idea inadvertently for their own ideas.

Similarly, students believe that factors like large classes, lack of contact between students and the staff, and the growing emphasis on group learning are incentives for cheating. Once more, students do not view themselves as truly guilty to cheating. They rather prefer to accuse educational institutions and the way those institutions function.

Another contribution in discovering why students or candidates cheat is that of (Brown, 1995) who observed that academic dishonesty is greater amongst undergraduate students than amid graduate students. Such a discovery implies that the need for a degree or the need to succeed can be an incentive to the temptation to cheat.

As for Graham and all (1994), students' reaction towards cheating can be influenced by the teacher's attitude towards his students. Undeniably, the teachers' fairness determines students' reaction towards cheating. This means that for these researchers, students would be less likely to cheat with a fair teacher than with a teacher that they find unfair.

Besides, Zimmerman (1999) noticed that students cheat more when their instructors are not diligent enough to catch cheaters. For the authors, teachers and educational institutions should develop adequate reactions against learners' cheating in order to prevent them from cheating.

Similarly, for (Stearns, 2001), the type of relationship that exists between students and instructors has an impact on the students' cheating rate, whereas McCabe and Trevino (1997) reported that "contextual factors have more influence on student cheating behaviors than individual or personal characteristics" and they identified the pressure to succeed as one of these contextual factors.

Likewise, Daniel, Adams, and Smith (1994) reported that Students' Cheating is highly related to their expectancies to graduate, stress and course and program requirements. As for (Grignon & Gruel, 1999), they seem to say that when students are confronted with the lack of time to face all the requirements of their learning program, they request to cheating.

To close on this point on why candidates cheat, we have the impression that students live in their own world with their own rules, regulations and laws that have nothing to do with the moral. Thus, severe law violations are justified and since researches are most of the time based on their opinion, cheating seems to be justified. In such a context, what is the frequency of cheating, throughout the literature?

To answer the above question, Wajda-Johnston & al (2001) discovered that 55.1% of graduate students recognized to have cheated at least once during their graduation period. Similarly, for Whitley (1998), an average of 70 % of American students recognized to have cheated or used plagiarism while taking their examinations.

Furthermore, (Brown, 1995) testified that "80% of business students admitted to have violated at least one of the 15 immoral academic practices during the years of their graduation. Additionally, for Mc Cabe, Trevino & Butterfield (2001), the cheating prevalence is so real and its increase so constant that it justified the adoption by many American universities of a good conduct code. They were expecting the signees of that good conduct code to avoid cheating during the course of their studies (Mc Cabe & Trevino, 1993).

Equally, (Whitley, 1998; Crown & Spiller, 1998) who tried to prove a correlation between students' socio demographic situation and cheating reached the conclusion that such a correlation is very weak, if not inexistent. Indeed, for them, learners with a weak GPA tend to cheat more than students

with a high GPA. Subsequently, for them, the higher class attendance and conscious in studying, the less temptation to cheat.

Furthermore, LAMBERT E., HOGAN N. & BARTON S. (2003) who worked on the different items of cheating have identified copying from the neighbor's paper or collecting his draft as the most common forms of cheating.

The existing literature shows that the cheating prevalence is very high on the international plan. As for the reason why candidates or students cheat, they look like a series of justifications of what should normally not be justified. Subsequently, what to say about cheating prevalence during national examinations in COTE D'IVOIRE?

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The present study aims to understand the reasons for cheating at national examinations in COTE D'IVOIRE: a case study of the baccalaureate. For this purpose, we assigned the following objectives to this research.

1.3 General Objective

The general objective of this research is to understand candidates' cheating during the 2017 baccalaureate in COTE D'IVOIRE. Hence, this general objective engenders the following specific objectives.

1.3.1 Specific Objectives

- Identify cheaters' view of the baccalaureate
- Ensure that cheaters are aware it is a high risk to have their cell phone with them during the exam
- Determine the reason to run such a big risk
- Discover how they get into the exam center with their cell phone despite proctors' presence?
- Discern the number of times cheaters have already taken this exam

2 METHODOLOGY

The methodology that we adopted in the present study consists of first our research site, then the population and afterwards the sampling and analysis method.

2.1 Research Site

Our research site was Collège Privé MBF d'Abobo." This school of secondary education was in its first participation as an examination center in July 2017. The management of the school made available 25 classrooms in order to welcome all the candidates of the "baccalaureate 2017".

2.2 Research Population

The research population consists of 35 cheaters of both sexes. They were not actually caught cheating, but they were wedged with their cell phone with them in the examination center. According to the rules and regulations, the fact of entering the center with a phone is fraudulent. What do they represent compared to the total population?

Indeed, we expected a total of 742 candidates at this examination, but we noted a huge number of 140 nonattendance. Consequently 602 candidates actually participated in this examination.

Indeed, our task was to understand how cheaters proceed to cheat. This meant that we had to address our questions to cheaters. Our greatest difficulty was how to identify who would be sufficiently frank to show himself as a cheater. We then decided to read on to the candidates the rules and regulations governing the baccalaureate. Indeed, those regulations stated that whoever was caught with his cell phone inside the exam center would be considered as a cheater and excluded for the exam session.

After this clarification, we asked them to leave their phones, bags and all documents outside, under the supervision of two police agents in order to prevent them from any temptation. Therefore our research population consist of those who, despite our warnings entered the exam center with their cell phone. We devoted two rooms for the searching: one for ladies searches by two ladies. The second room was for gentlemen searched by the overall supervisor and his assistant.

From the first day of the examination to the last day, the search resulted in identifying 35 cheaters. We deprived them of their cellular, but we did not exclude them. They represent 5.8% of the candidates.

2.3 Data Collection Instruments

Our option in this research was that of qualitative data collection method. We used individual interviews. However, we turned the qualitative data into quantitative ones to reinforce our qualitative results.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results were presented first, and, afterwards, the discussion followed.

3.1 Results:

We presented our results according to the order in which our specific hypotheses were described. Those results were reinforced by the result of our field observation.

3.1.1 What is the baccalaureate for you?

Our first concern in the present study was to understand the cheaters' representation of the baccalaureate as the first university degree. To this question, the great majority of the cheaters (94.1%), asserted that for them, the baccalaureate signifies a very important degree. Furthermore, for them, it is even the symbol of social success. However some cheaters believe that the baccalaureate is just a formality and those respondents represent 5.9 % of all our interviewees.

Table1

	Number	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid				
- It is a major degree for me (synonym of social success)	32	91,4	94,1	94,1
It is just a formality	2	5,7	5,9	100,0
Total	34	97,1	100,0	
Missing data	1	2,9		
Total	35	100,0		

Source : *Our investigations*

The above table1 clearly justifies our assertion.

3.1.2 What does the cell phone represent for you?

Our second concern was the cell phone which was at the first place among the forbidden items that should not enter the examination center. To our quest to identify what a cell phone represents to them, all of them (100%) replied that for them it is a medium of exchange between human beings.

Table2

	Number	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid - It is a medium of communication, exchange	31	88,6	100,0	100,0
Missing data	4	11,4		
Total	35	100,0		

Source : *Our investigations*

In short, the cell phone is for them a medium of communication. The above table2 summarizes their view.

3.1.3 Do you Measure the Risk Magnitude of Keeping your Cell Phone on you During the Exam?

Table 3, in presenting our third concern tries to find out if cheaters at this national exam really measure the severity of the sanctions if they were caught cheating with their cellular. Indeed, to this question, 96.2 % of our cheaters acknowledged to be fully aware of the gravity of the action that they were about to take.

Table 3

	Number	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Valid Yes	25	71,4	96,2	96,2
Valid No	1	2,9	3,8	100,0
Valid Total	26	74,3	100,0	
Missin g data	9	25,7		
Total	35	100,0		

Source : *Our investigations*

However, 3.8% of them asserted not to know that cheating with one's cellular is a serious offense.

3.1.4 Do you Have Good Reasons to Run Such a Big Risk

The question on this fourth point is to understand whether the cheaters have some good reasons to run the risk to cheat, since cheating causes a five- year exclusion from any national examination. To our surprise, all of our cheaters (100%) asserted to have good reasons.

Table 4

	Number	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cuumulative percentage
Valid				
- To have all chances to succeed on my side	15	42,9	78,9	78,9
To avoid reprisals following failure	4	11,4	21,1	100,0
Total	19	54,3	100,0	
Missing data	16	45,7		
Total	35	100,0		

Source : *Our investigations*

Indeed, the most popular reasons for which candidates cheat were to put all the chances to succeed on their side. Furthermore, 78.9 % of them aroused this reason. Similarly, the second reason that 21.1 % of them evoked was “to avoid reprisals following failure”.

3.1.5 How do you accede the Exam Center/class Despite Proctors' Presence?

In order to identify the way those shams under study accede to the exam center and to the classroom with their phone in spite of the proctors' presence, our results revealed three means. The first one was for the cheater to hide his phone inside his/her clothes (47.4 %).

As for the second choice, it consists in exposing the phone in his/her handbag (47.4 %).

The last possibility consists in exposing the phone to the sight of every body and maybe with the hope that nobody would see it (5.3 %). Table 7 below summarizes our results.

Table 5

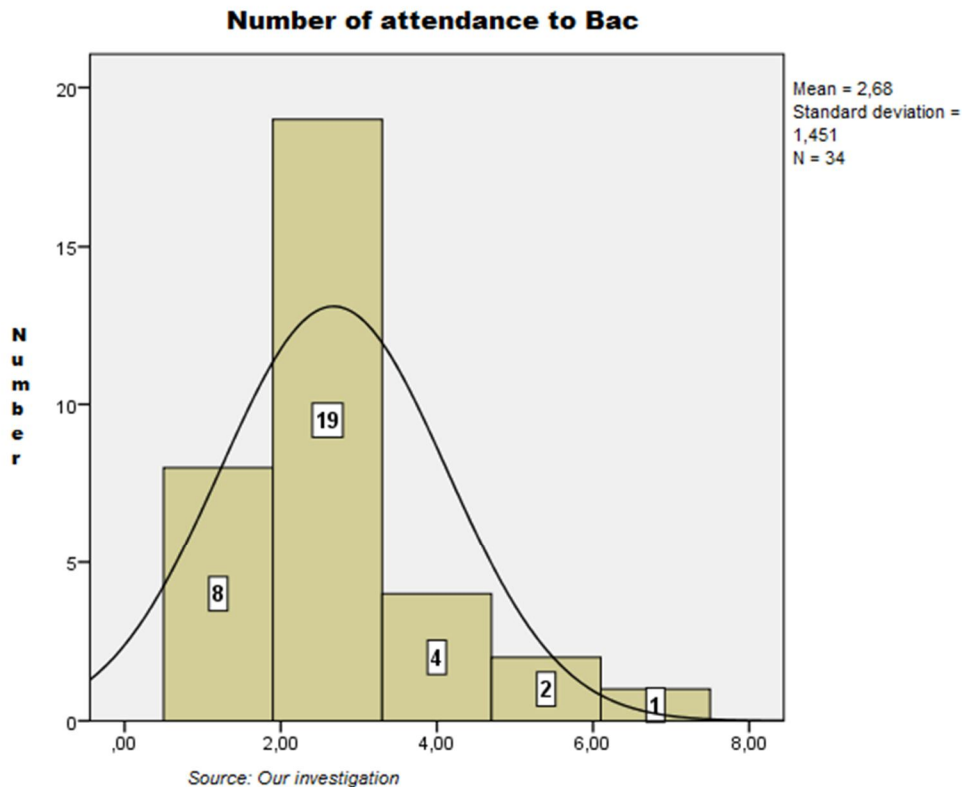
	Number	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid				
I hide it inside my clothes	9	25,7	47,4	47,4
- I expose it (everyone is aware)	1	2,9	5,3	52,6
I put it in my bag	9	25,7	47,4	100,0
Total	19	54,3	100,0	
Missing data	16	45,7		
Total	35	100,0		

Source : *Our investigations*

3.1.6 Relationship between Number of Failures and cheating

The graph below revealed that candidates who have failed at least twice and who are in their third attendance cheat more than all the other candidates. They represent 54.2 %.

Graph 1



Below this majority, are those who are taking part to the baccalaureate for the first time (22.8 %). Those who are in their fourth or fifth attendance represent 11.4 %. It is also good to note that some cheaters are above fifth attendance and those represent 8.5 %. The above graph summarizes these results.

Partial Conclusion:

This research has enabled us to understand why candidates cheat. Undeniably, (94.1 %) of the candidates at the baccalaureate cheat because this degree is a symbol of social success. In clearer terms, it is a must for them to be holders of the baccalaureate without which they have no access to most recruitment tests. Similarly, for (78.9 %) of them, it is as well a must to put all the chances on their sides in order to succeed, thus avoiding the reprisals that follow failures (21.1%), Having this objective in mind, and though 96.2 % of them were fully aware of the gravity of cheating, they willingly chose to cheat in all the subjects and the easiest way, is to find a cheating network aiming at sending them the answer keys through one of the functions that the cellular offers: sms, mms, the internet, what up etc. The cellular, which is a mean of communication is their preferred cheating instrument. Candidates generally hide it in their handbags and their clothes (including their pants). However, some candidates picture the subjects before sending them to those whose role is to treat them before sending answer keys.

3.2 Discussion

Our main concern in this articles was to debate on the reasons for which candidates decide deliberately to become fraudulent and run tremendous risks by cheating during the examination. We questioned the reason for such a choice when we know all the risk that such a choice could imply, because we were convinced that no one would ever try to cheat willingly if he/she knows the regulations.

Contrary to our persuasion, our results showed that 96.2% of the interviewees, all of them cheaters according to the rules and regulations of the examination, reported to be fully aware of the high risk they were running in cheating. This means that candidates were fully aware that seeing them with a cell within the examination center, automatically puts an end to their participation in the exam.

Furthermore, it implies their awareness that the overall supervisor, who is a university teacher has to report the case to the authorities in charge of the examination who, in turn, have to report that case to the court. It also implies that after that, the court will dully judge them, and with the overall supervisor as an eyewitness, the court will condemn them to five years' exclusion to partake in the examination, if they are lucky to avoid going to jail.

Normally, in the view of the severity of the sanction, the common sense should recommend reluctance to every tempted candidate. Despite that, the result is before our eyes: 35 candidates out of 602, that is to say 5.85%) chose cheating as their favorite strategy for success! The proof that this was really their choice and not an accident is that almost all of them (96.2%) openly and responsibly acknowledged that choice.

Such a deliberate choice is a proof that the government's different severe measures taken every year to put an end to cheating at the baccalaureate have failed. In effect, when the threats of a father no longer frighten his son/daughter, it simply means that that father is not far from failing in his educational approach.

Consequently, our role here, is neither to judge the cheaters, nor to condemn them, but rather to take into account such a choice and act accordingly to first, understand its deeper reasons, and then try to propose solutions aiming to reduce its impact on our society.

Undeniably, as true as some citizens have made the responsible choice between works that they found too hard, and stealing that they know is not good, but preferable, the cheaters have as well made the responsible choice to base their success strategies on cheating, instead of studying hard, no matter the cost.

Likewise, as Daniel, Adams, and Smith (1994) reported, "students' cheating highly relates to their expectancies to graduate, stress and course and program requirements." For having failed at least twice, they no longer rely on their ability to succeed by their own means. They feel that they will never fulfil the requirements of the program, therefore, their only chance to graduate goes through cheating.

This belief is so present in the cheaters' mind that our emotions will hardly change anything. Equally, the United States of America have adopted the death penalty, with the aim to stop the

criminality, but the fact of murdering criminals did not stop crime there! In the contrary, some people believe that it has increased the law-breaking if it has not legalized it.

The interesting thing in our results is that they are in full agreement with the results of Peter Ashworth & al (2006) who asserted that candidates are “attached to certain values which make them regard a highly punishable behavior as something justifiable.” This is a proof that what we have observed, already exists elsewhere and the results tend to be generalized.

Here, cheating which should be highly punishable has become, not only a good strategy for success but also a legal strategy of success! As in the case of criminal law in the USA, the fact of regulating a crime is also a way to legalize that crime!

Yes, you have read it well, committing crime and cheating become legal as soon as the law regulates them. Subsequently, anyone can decide to commit crime at the only condition to accept the legal consequences stated by the law. The only problem is that many criminals succeed both, in committing the crime and avoiding the consequences.

To come back to the present study, the cheaters have courageously decided to cheat despite the severity of the law and we cannot deny them their right to make such a decision. In effect, when 96.2 % decide to cheat to succeed or face all the consequences, they are sending a message to the society in which they live.

Moreover, cheaters do not want to hear our emotional judgments such as “they refuse to make effort”, because for them, instead of devoting their effort to studying but still running the slightest risk to fail, they prefer to dedicate their effort directly to cheating strategies that seem to them surer. Indeed, working hard to earn money and pay some friends in crime who would never accept their share of risk without payment is first for them a result of a great effort. Second, this effort is surer and safer for the cheaters than the effort through studying that has proved its inefficiency the past two years during which they failed!

The cheaters can hear only one voice: that of their strong desire to succeed. This makes them become dumb and sightless to any danger relating to their choice. For them, the only success strategy left to them, and which is cheating, cannot be negative. In the contrary, for them, cheating in the context of the examination is a normal strategy. This result is also in total accordance with the results of McCabe and Trevino (1997) who found that “contextual factors have more influence on student cheating behaviors than individual or personal characteristics.”

To close on this point we think that our duty is to be able to decode the hidden messages that some groups of citizens send us. It is normal that the people stop to the emotions that such a choice to live on crime, or succeed thanks to cheating engender, but academicians have to go beyond and decode the relating hidden messages. The cheaters’ behavior is certainly a strident cry toward the authorities to remind them of their duty to ensure the well-being of all the citizens: those who can pass the baccalaureate as well as those who are not intellectually equipped to pass it.

Both groups can serve the country if the authorities accept to be more imaginative, more creative, more combative and more inventive to find original solutions for the integration of non-baccalaureate holders into the various job recruitment test, higher education etc. Continuing to

impose stricter measures from year to year might lead to repeated shriller cries! Besides, the lack of solutions to repeated cries might lead to revolutions! Are our governments compelled to follow all the choices of the former colonial masters? To learn a trade do I necessarily need the baccalaureate?

GENERAL CONCLUSION

This research has enabled us to understand that baccalaureate candidates cheat because this degree is for them (94.1%) a very important grade. For most of them, it is even the symbol of social success, and they too have the right to aspire to this social success.

Yet, without the baccalaureate, they have no access to university education, therefore no access to a higher university degree. Besides, most recruitment test demand the baccalaureate as a minimum degree. Consequently, it seems that without the baccalaureate, their future is in question. In a clearer term, it is a must to pass the baccalaureate if one wants to hope a minimum seat in this Ivorian society.

To attain this objective, and due to the fact that most of them had already failed at least twice, they (78.9 %) want to put all the chances on their side by putting in place a strategy that aims at cheating. The surest way for them to succeed is through cheating.

This desire to succeed through cheating is so harsh that 96.2 of them, though fully aware of the severity of legal reprisals relative to cheating, willingly decided to cheat and face all the consequences in case they catch them.

Face to this cry, the reaction of the government is to take strict punishing measures from year to year, but the cheating rate goes higher and higher. Perceptibly, there is a dialog in which nobody listens between the government and its youth; between the authorities and the cheaters.

In effect, through their courageous decision to cheat to succeed, or face all the consequences, the cheaters are crying to demand to the right person (the government) their right for employments, therefore, their right for food, but nobody is able to hear them from the government side.

For us, the solution to cheating does not lie in stricter measures every year, but in reducing the power of the baccalaureate, that is to say preventing it from being the major degree, the degree without which there is neither a job, nor university degrees. The solution to cheating, lies in the ability of the government to invent enlightening employment and educational policies that give equal chances and several alternatives to the youth of the same country.

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