

The Phenomenon of Cheating Among Students in the Era of Artificial Intelligence

Received date:21/12/2024 Accepted date:22/04/2025 Published date: 25/04/2025

NASRI Zouaoui¹

¹University of Oran 2, Algeria, **Email:** nasri.zouaoui@univ-oran2.dz

Abstract:

This study explores the phenomenon of digital cheating in universities and its sociological dimensions in light of current technological transformations. Based on interviews with students and teachers from the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Oran 2, it reveals that cheating, once a condemned individual act, has become an accepted collective practice, reflecting the erosion of traditional values of effort and rigor. This change negatively impacts the quality of education, posing a major challenge to universities: to perpetuate this trend or to rebuild strong academic values to preserve their societal role.

Keywords: Digital cheating; Universities; Traditional values; Students; Artificial intelligence.

Corresponding Author: NASRI Zouaoui, **Email:** nasri.zouaoui@univ-oran2.dz

1. INTRODUCTION:

Artificial intelligence (AI) has become an essential tool for improving the lives of citizens, institutions, and society in general. This raises questions about our ability to use it, particularly on an individual scale. AI has established itself as a true support mechanism in fields such as medicine, industry, economics, and especially scientific research, thus fostering progress and innovation. However, in our universities and educational systems, particularly in the field of social sciences, its impact remains limited to its role as a practical tool contributing to the theoretical enrichment of academic research.

The pedagogical function encourages us to explore the perception of social science students regarding AI applications, taking into account the ethical and philosophical challenges they encounter. Most complain about being poorly directed towards social sciences due to their low results in the baccalaureate. Therefore, they develop strategies to manage their academic reality, particularly thanks to the widespread availability of smartphones equipped with the latest AI applications.

- Problematic: In the context of the current technological revolution, artificial intelligence has become the ideal tool for success in various fields, including academic research. With the increase in its use in scientific research thanks to its precision and speed in analyzing social data and developing educational policies, a question arises: how do social science students interact with tools like Chat-Gpt? Experience has shown that its use goes beyond its role as a tool for improving their scientific performance to become a source of ethical concerns, particularly when it is used as a means of cheating.



In this article, we will propose a sociological and psychological analysis of the phenomenon of cheating among students using the intelligent technology of Chat-Gpt. To do this, we will begin by formulating the problem in light of previous discussions on the ethical, cultural, and philosophical dimensions of AI in the academic environment :

To what extent have the tools of technological modernity contributed to changing the dynamics of cheating among students? How can this phenomenon be explained through a sociological and psychological perspective in light of the use of advanced AI technologies like Chat-Gpt?

- Study Objectives:

- Analyze the sociological dimensions of the cheating phenomenon and provide an explanation of the impact of the social, familial, and cultural context on students' decision-making regarding cheating.
- Identify management strategies to combat this phenomenon.
- Discuss solutions likely to reduce this phenomenon.
- Raise students' awareness of the impacts of cheating on the credibility of their degrees and academic paths.

- Study Methodology:

The descriptive methodology proves to be an effective tool for interpreting this phenomenon, particularly as we seek to offer a comprehensive explanation of behaviors related to cheating during exams, emphasizing the psychological and social realities contributing to the expansion of this phenomenon.

- **Fields of study:** The study was divided into three areas:
 - *Human domain:* a targeted sample of 61 people (11 teachers and 50 students).
 - *Spatial domain:* Faculty of Social Sciences at Mohamed Ben Ahmed University of Oran 2.
 - *Timeframe:* From early October to mid-December 2024.
-
- **Study Tools:** The study relied on the semi-structured interview as a primary data collection tool, applied to a sample of 61 participants, including 11 university professors and 50 students. The interview was designed based on a guide comprising ten key themes derived from previous theoretical literature and preliminary field observation. These themes addressed topics such as psychological and social pressures leading to cheating, poor academic guidance, fear of repeating academic years, course overload, weak comprehension, overcrowded lecture halls, the fragile student-professor relationship, the impact of cheating on high-achieving students, university institutional responses, and future challenges in combating cheating in the age of artificial intelligence.

The interview guide was reviewed by two experts (one from the Department of Sociology and the other from the Department of Psychology) to ensure clarity, validity, and content relevance.

The interview was conducted with professors to capture their analytical insights into the phenomenon, while both the interview and observation tools were used with students, particularly during exam periods. These interactions occurred directly in examination halls and were enriched by the researcher's professional engagement as a university instructor,

allowing for the collection of authentic data regarding students' cheating behaviors and mechanisms.

The observation was conducted through a non-participant approach, allowing the researcher to record detailed notes on students' behavior within examination rooms. An observation guide, aligned with the themes of the interview, was used to ensure consistency in the data collection process.

- **Definition of concepts:**

- Cheating on exams: Cheating in all its forms is an illegal practice in all religions, and it is socially, ethically, and academically unacceptable. It is defined as the use by a student of any means that allows them to obtain answers or grades during an exam in a non-legitimate manner, whether written or oral. (Al-Emayra, M., 2002, p.166).
- Operational Definition: Cheating in exams is defined as any behavior or practice undertaken by a student during examinations with the aim of obtaining results that do not reflect their actual academic level. This is done through the use of unauthorized means, particularly electronic devices and digital media, without the knowledge of the instructors.
- Artificial intelligence: It is the ability of a machine or device to perform certain activities requiring intelligence, such as logical reasoning (Ahmed, M., 2008, p.816). When intelligent technology is integrated with AI, it becomes more efficient and capable of learning, and we are referring here to smartphones.
- Operational Definition: Artificial intelligence refers to students' use of digital programs and systems to process information, generate content, or answer questions during examinations in a manner that exceeds normal human capabilities.

2. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

2-1 Sociological and psychological interpretation of the phenomenon of cheating in the university environment:

Some researchers consider cheating as a form of deviance. Robert Merton, in his theory of social pressure on social structure, used this idea to explain deviance by distinguishing the goals pursued by members of society and the means they have to achieve them (Xavier. L., 2017). Merton argues that individuals may adopt illegal behaviors when legitimate means are inaccessible to achieve the desired goals, particularly when these goals are related to academic success, which serves as a protective basis against the violation of social laws (Al-Maghrebi. S. 1960. p.164).

Students consider success as a means to access the job market and improve their social standing. According to 95.08% of respondents, the main reason students use cheating tools, such as Chat-Gpt, is to achieve results that allow them to graduate at the same time as their peers and within the expected timeframe.

All respondents agree that before the advent of mobile phones, cheating methods were mainly handwritten (on tables, hands, or with secret papers), but today, these methods are largely dominated by smartphones connected to the Internet. The Chat-Gpt application allows students to quickly find answers to all the questions asked, effortlessly.

Marshall McLuhan's theory of the "global village" found resonance in collective representations, particularly after the emergence of the term "global village," illustrating the change in communication modes through digital media. It suggests that

technological progress in media has transformed the way information is exchanged, thereby reducing the gap between traditional education and digital education, thus erroneously redefining the notion of knowledge, success, and academic superiority.

For many students, intellectual effort is no longer the primary condition for success, especially among those who have been used to cheating since high school, particularly in literary sections where memorization predominates.

2-2 Sociological and psychological factors behind cheating:

It is difficult to sociologically analyze the phenomenon of cheating without taking into account the psychological motivations of social actors. **Sigmund Freud** proposed an explanation for cheating behaviors by stating that students, when subjected to psychological or social pressures, resort to cheating as a strategy to alleviate anxiety. Indeed, family pressure to succeed drives many students to resort to cheating to meet this demand. The behaviors of students are then guided by specific norms that conflict with social expectations regarding acceptable conduct (El-Jawhari, El-Samari, 2011, p.64).

The family plays a crucial role in shaping children's behavior. The increased pressure from parents on their children has created a generation that no longer cares about the means used to achieve academic results. Since childhood, children are pushed to achieve the best grades, which sometimes leads them to resort to cheating to alleviate family pressure (Valerie. J., 1986, p.107).

Today, our societies are excessively focused on material success, which has become the main criterion for an

individual's social value. This has led to a questioning of traditional values and social rules. The students reported that expressions like "the coward will have little chance," "who hears about you?" and "life gets tough and the poor can't make it" have contributed to establishing new attitudes, such as "succeed at all costs" and "justify any means to achieve the goal."

The phenomenon of cheating at university is also a response to the lack of healthy educational policies implemented by families. The absence of genuine communication and constructive psychological support, as well as the lack of values focused on effort and effective learning, has led 96% of surveyed students to perceive university institutions as merely a tool for success, without seeing education as a continuous process of acquiring knowledge and personal-development.

2.3. Sociological analysis of cheating using Chat-Gpt:

2.3-1 Social and psychological pressures that drive students to cheat: When a student believes that academic success and obtaining a university degree are essential conditions for professional success, cheating becomes a means of adaptation in an environment where pressure is considered a social and cultural value linked to individual success. The researcher Ellen Lorenz addressed this issue through the theory of social influence, explaining that students' behaviors in the academic environment depend on their social interactions and the pressures resulting from these interactions. This is particularly relevant when considering that previous studies have shown a

high rate of cheating among students, with 38.5% of students in scientific specialties and 66.8% in literary specialties resorting to cheating (El-Zerrad, F, 2002, p. 263).

The results of this study show that the pressures that drive students to cheat are diverse and vary from one student to another. Among these pressures, we find:
- **A. Poor guidance:** The study revealed that 94.00% of the surveyed students expressed a lack of interest in their academic major, stating that their enrollment in the sociology program was not a personal choice but rather the outcome of the university orientation system, which is based solely on academic grades. This sentiment was corroborated by 72.72% of the professors, who confirmed that a significant proportion of sociology students lack intrinsic motivation to pursue higher education in this field.

These findings reflect a state of academic alienation, where students experience psychological and cognitive detachment from their field of study. Such a condition often leads them to adopt escapist behaviors, such as cheating, or covertly aggressive attitudes toward the institution or teaching staff as a reaction to perceived injustice or marginalization.

This phenomenon can be interpreted through the lens of Relative Deprivation Theory (Runciman, 1966), which suggests that individuals are likely to engage in protest behaviors when they perceive themselves as being unjustly deprived of something they believe they rightfully deserve such as being guided toward a desired academic specialization. Accordingly, the study found a clear link between academic dissatisfaction and the prevalence of cheating behaviors in the university environment. It concluded that the lack of academic

motivation is one of the most significant determinants of unethical conduct within examination settings.

- **B. Fear of failure:** The study revealed that 95.08% of students experience significant psychological pressure resulting from unstable family backgrounds or from families that place excessive expectations on them. Furthermore, 94.00% of respondents indicated that fear of failure or academic repetition is a major factor driving them to rely on artificial intelligence tools -most notably ChatGPT- as a way to manage anxiety and secure quick academic success.

These findings suggest that cheating behavior in this context is not merely an attempt to avoid studying but rather a psychological defense mechanism against the stress associated with the idealized image of the “successful student,” often imposed by family or societal expectations. This behavior can be interpreted through the “Test Anxiety Theory”, which posits that the pressure stemming from fear of failure often leads either to a decline in academic performance or the adoption of compensatory strategies such as cheating.

Additionally, these practices may be understood within “Bandura’s Social Learning Theory”, as students learn from their peers how to use AI tools during exams, gradually normalizing this behavior within what can be described as a “subculture of cheating” among peer groups that share similar values and rationalizations.

Thus, the study demonstrates that students from families with high expectations are more likely to engage in cheating as a strategy to protect their social image in the face of possible academic failure.



- **C. Frequent absences and course accumulation:** The study found that 64.00% of students experience frequent absences, largely due to social and professional obligations, such as freelance work, family responsibilities, or participation in athletic activities. These findings highlight a new dynamic of the university student, who is no longer fully dedicated to academic life but rather split between the demands of daily living and the requirements of academic training.

The accumulation of coursework resulting from such absences -often imposed by the student's external environment- creates a significant knowledge gap, which many students find difficult to bridge. As a result, they turn to quick fixes during examinations, such as coordinated group cheating, whether through "homogeneous teams" or by using technological tools that enable them to keep pace with assessment requirements.

These behaviors can be interpreted through the lens of Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964), wherein students weigh costs and benefits and conclude that cheating -given their specific circumstances- is the "least harmful" and most efficient strategy for achieving academic success with minimal cognitive investment.

This interpretation aligns with our field observations, which indicate that growing social and economic pressures are giving rise to new student profiles -more pragmatic and less committed to traditional academic values.

On the other hand, 36.00% of students who do not face such external pressures, such as those living in university dormitories, justify their use of cheating by citing curriculum overload and the high number of modules, suggesting that the issue is not solely rooted in external conditions. Instead, it points to structural shortcomings in academic program design,

underscoring the need for a comprehensive review of pedagogical planning policies.

- **D. Misunderstanding of the lessons presented in the classes:** Students unanimously (100%) agreed that lecture delivery methods vary significantly from one professor to another, pointing out that the lack of a unified pedagogical approach results in disparities in their comprehension of the material. Additionally, 68.00% of the students identified poor understanding of course content as the primary reason behind cheating—particularly when lessons are delivered through rote dictation, without explanation or interaction, which leads students to feel excluded from the learning process.

These findings point to a pedagogical dilemma at its core, where the student shifts from being the center of the educational process to a passive recipient, generating feelings of helplessness and prompting cheating as a compensatory strategy.

This phenomenon can be interpreted through the lens of Constructivist Learning Theory, which emphasizes that deep understanding occurs through interaction, experimentation, and personal contextualization. The lack of cognitive stimulation caused by rote methods contributes to a loss of academic meaning, a concern articulated by Paulo Freire in his critique of the “banking model” of education. Freire argues that education which disregards the learner’s experience produces negative behaviors, such as cheating or academic disengagement.

These results are further supported by the study of Boutros (2015, p. 419), which emphasizes that the professor holds a key responsibility in creating a positive learning environment and delivering engaging lessons that foster students' self-concept.

Thus, the responsibility for academic dishonesty does not lie solely with the student, but rather extends to the entire educational system.

- **E. Large class sizes:** Our teaching experience has made us realize a fundamental educational reality, the school building represents the physical and social environment where students spend most of their academic day-learning, interacting with school programs, engaging with peers and teachers through lessons and activities (Al-Banna. H, 2013, p. 49). In this regard, the study revealed that 82.00% of students believe that overcrowding in lecture halls is a major factor contributing to poor academic performance and the spread of cheating. This situation hinders meaningful engagement with lectures, especially for those seated at the back rows, who often report poor auditory access and general classroom disorder.

These findings suggest that the university environment is no longer fulfilling its pedagogical function effectively, mainly due to the inadequate educational infrastructure relative to the annually increasing student population. This observation can be explained through the lens of Educational Ecology Theory, which emphasizes that the physical environment -including classroom size and student density- directly influences educational interaction and students' mental and cognitive readiness.

Moreover, the feeling of marginalization within the university space leads some students to compensate for their lack of understanding and interaction through cheating, especially since overcrowded halls make monitoring difficult, thus reducing the fear of punishment and increasing the temptation to take such risks.

Referring again to (Al-Banna.H, 2013) work, the university institution is not merely a physical space; it is a social and pedagogical environment that must facilitate learning and interaction. In the absence of such conditions in Algerian universities, cheating becomes, for many students, a compensatory strategy rather than a mere ethical violation.

- F. The widening gap between students and professors:

The study revealed that 68.00% of students perceived a clear communication gap between professors and students, noting that many felt professors adopt an authoritarian style in the educational relationship. This weakens opportunities for dialogue and fosters a sense of isolation among students. The same percentage indicated that the lack of interactive engagement between both parties leads to a weakened sense of belonging to the academic institution, which may result in negative behaviors such as cheating or academic disengagement.

This phenomenon can be analyzed through the lens of Educational Communication Theory, which posits that the quality of the student-teacher relationship plays a crucial role in motivating and guiding the student, both in terms of academic performance and behavioral attitudes. When the educational relationship lacks sufficient levels of trust and constructive interaction, it may generate a state of "academic indifference", prompting students to resort to illegitimate means (such as cheating) as an alternative to genuine study.

The study by (Al-Nouayseh. F,2012, p. 75) supports this perspective, asserting that a professor who effectively employs communication tools can overcome even external challenges such as overcrowded classrooms or students' low motivation. In

this context, the professor bears part of the responsibility, not only in delivering knowledge but also in building a psychologically and pedagogically supportive climate that restores the student's trust in the educational process and reduces the likelihood of deviant academic behaviors. As (Haroun. R,2003, p. 342) states, the professor must prioritize communication in the classroom, regardless of the number or type of students. Teaching is not simply about speaking while students passively listen-it is a shared process in which the student is an active participant.

Furthermore, 56.00% of the students surveyed reported that they did not know the names of some of their professors and had no communication with them either inside or outside the classroom, due to the absence of effective communication mechanisms. This lack of interaction led them to feel disconnected from certain courses, attending only to avoid administrative penalties. This relational gap between students and their instructors ultimately contributes to their resorting to cheating as a way to secure better grades.

Although all these factors represent social pressures and are often cited by students as justifications for cheating- as a form of adaptation to their academic reality- our field-based observations as educators reveal emerging causes in today's context that also negatively influence students' academic behavior. Among these are mobile phones and AI applications, which have given rise to new cognitive patterns. It has become evident that instead of engaging in critical thinking, individual effort, and genuine research, students are increasingly relying on modern technologies that provide ready-made answers with minimal effort and time. This shift has significantly undermined scientific analysis and critical thinking skills, which are essential for



academic and intellectual development especially considering that this group of students represents the foundation upon which tomorrow's society will be built.

-2-4 Impact of cheating on the results of brilliant students:

Talking about the issue of social inequalities leads us to understand that the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu preceded us in explaining that modern technologies will become an important factor that could deepen social class gaps. Attempting to apply this vision to our current university reality allows us to observe that students who use Chat-GPT technology have a competitive advantage over their peers who do not use this technology, cannot access it, or do not possess it.

After the results obtained at the end of each semester, we noticed that the brilliant students complained about the high grades achieved by their cheating peers. Here, we believe that this reality, created by modern technologies, will contribute to increasing the success rate of certain students at the expense of deserving students.

82.00% of respondents confirmed that the grades obtained by students in various exams, particularly those based on memorization questions, are not real, as these points were fabricated using different cheating tools, starting with taking photos of answer sheets and sending them to each other via messaging apps (Viber, Messenger, WhatsApp).

Although evaluation mechanisms differ from one teacher to another and it is easy to distinguish brilliant students from others, it must be emphasized that traditional evaluation methods based on "grades" as a criterion for moving from one level to another need to be reconsidered in light of the circumstances

created by modern tools, which we believe will benefit some students to the detriment of others if they are not taken seriously.

- 2.5 Reactions from the university institution "Fighting Cheating in the Digital Age":

We often read that many major universities around the world have begun to take practical measures to combat the phenomenon of cheating among students, using special technologies based on artificial intelligence that detect texts produced by artificial intelligence applications. However, in our countries, apart from the individual attempts of some universities, it seems that this problem has not yet received the attention it deserves, as the criminalization of cheating is no longer sufficient to put an end to this phenomenon. Thus, we believe it is now necessary for universities to rethink and develop their evaluation methods so that they respond to the reality imposed by modern technologies.

82.00% of the teachers surveyed indicated that they preferred to replace the grade based on "memorization" with a grade based on the student's intellectual output, their participation, and their interaction with the courses provided throughout the semester.

- 3. Future challenges in addressing the phenomenon of cheating:

Based on the results of the study, which generally reflect the views of students and teachers on the spread of cheating through smart devices and applications, a significant demand is now emerging in the academic field, namely the need to combat this phenomenon that directly affects university outcomes on one hand, and, on the other hand, the educational, cultural, and social structures of our society.



Regarding the educational infrastructure, we have observed that cheating, which was once considered an individual, isolated, and immoral behavior, practiced secretly to avoid being seen by other students, is now practiced collectively and with pride among students. This shows a profound change in values within the social structure, as the notion of social and moral responsibility no longer has a place among the majority of students who cheat in their educational journey. This behavior is now perceived by them as a socially acceptable, even valued "among themselves," means of achieving the expected results.

Thus, it is out of the question to have two eras in the same room: that of the professors who rely on traditional surveillance and that of the students who use modern technologies and artificial intelligence to cheat. The administration must necessarily address this phenomenon, born from the manifestations of modernity, by using appropriate technologies, such as surveillance cameras or artificial intelligence programs, if grading is maintained as the criterion for measuring students' success or failure. 100% of the teachers surveyed confirmed that the use of surveillance cameras would be sufficient to eradicate all forms of cheating among students, which would have a positive effect on the quality of education and relieve teachers from the constant conflict with students.

Thus, considering what is happening in the academic environment, it is also important to highlight the perspective of society and employers on the university, as the expansion of the cheating phenomenon among students will have long-term repercussions on our educational system. Indeed, the issue of academic dishonesty via social media has often been raised, leading many to doubt the integrity of university degrees. What

will happen when the issue of students using artificial intelligence applications to cheat during exams, in writing research papers and theses, is raised ?

-4. CONCLUSION:

Academic cheating among university students, especially through the use of artificial intelligence tools, has come to reflect a profound social transformation in our system of values, as well as in our cultural and educational structures. Cheating, once viewed as an isolated and morally unacceptable act, has increasingly become a collective phenomenon tacitly accepted among students often even a source of pride. The “smart” student is now seen as the one who can bypass rules and regulations to obtain good results, signaling a shift in the meaning of social responsibility and a weakening of ethical commitment among many students.

The growing culture of “quick solutions,” which has spread across society, now strongly influences academic behavior. It has produced a new model of the pragmatic student one who is more concerned with results than with learning processes. This trend urges us to reflect deeply on the collapse of traditional values based on individual effort and perseverance. Even more alarming is the erosion of the noble academic relationship that should bind students and teachers a relationship built on trust, respect, and cooperation.

Faced with this reality, the academic community finds itself at a crossroads: either it continues to ignore this value shift and risks producing a generation of “half students” who will reproduce the same negative values in their future professional and social lives; or it embarks on a serious and realistic reform

process that combines technological monitoring tools with the restructuring of pedagogical programs, aimed at rebuilding students' ethical and social values. This is essential to ensuring the quality of education and preserving the university's vital role as a moral and cultural engine within society.

What we are experiencing today is a state of moral and cognitive fluidity, as described by sociologist Zygmunt Bauman (1925–2017) It compels us to stop viewing cheating merely as an individual flaw, but rather as the outcome of broader societal transformations fueled by digital technologies that are now shaping a new kind of reality one that requires new educational tools and responses.

- 5- REFERENCES:

1. Armand & Michel Mattelart, (2005), **History of communication theory**, Beyrouth, Arab organization for translation.
2. Batri Hafid Botros, (2015), **Teaching methods for behaviorally and emotionally disturbed students**, Amman, El-Massira publishing and distribution.
3. Ramzi Fathi Haroun, (2003), **Classroom management**, Jordan, Wail publishing and printing.
4. Saad El-Maghrebi, (1960), **Juvenile delinquency**, Cairo, Dar Al-maarif.
5. Fatima Abd-El Rahim Al-Nouayseh, (2012), **Human communication between Teacher and Student**, Jordan, Dar El-Hamed publishing and distribution.
6. Faycel Mohammed Kheir Al-Zerrad, (2002), **The phenomenon of cheating in academic exams among school and university students (Diagnosis, prevention, and treatment methods)**, El-Riyadh, El-Merrikh publishing.
7. Mohammed Hassan Al-Emayra, (2002), **Classroom behavioral and**

academic problems, their manifestations, causes, and solutions, Amman, El-Massira publishing and distribution.

8. Mohammed Mahmoud El-Jawhari, Adli Mahmoud El-Samari, (2011), **Social problems**, Amman, El-Massira publishing and distribution.

9. Mokhtar Omar Ahmed, (2008), **Contemporary arabic language dictionary**, Cairo, Alem El-kotob.

10. Hala Mesbah El-Banna, (2013), **Contemporary school management**, Jordan, Safae publishing, printing, and distribution.

11. Larminat Xavier, (Published on 29/7/2017), **Sociology of deviance: From theories of deviant acts to deviance as a process, resources in economic and social sciences**, Accessed on 06/12/2024 at: [<http://ses.ens-lyon.fr/articles/sociologie-de-la-deviance>].

12. Valerie J. Haines and others, (1986), **College cheating (Immaturity, lack of commitment and the neutralizing attitude)**, **Research in higher education**, Vol 25, No. 4, Berlin, Springer nature.

