



A Study of Proctors' Involvement in National Examination Cheating: the Case of "Collège Privé MBF d'Abobo" Exam Center

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Abstract

This research aimed at trying to understand why proctors, whose role and duty is normally to watch over candidates in order to prevent them from cheating, can suddenly become candidates' protectors against official exam supervisors. Our investigations revealed that most secondary school teachers refuse to partake in exam proctoring because the government refuses to pay for it. Consequently most of those who eagerly accept to work for free are mostly secretaries, bookkeepers, primary school teachers, clerks etc. with terrible financial conditions. Being unable to partake in the grading of exam copies that would be their reward, they felt not to have another choice but accepting candidates' financial offers and close their eyes on their cheating. For us, every work deserves payment, therefore, we recommended the government to reconsider the exam proctoring conditions in order to re-motivate secondary school teachers.

Keywords: Proctors, Cheating, Baccalaureate, Examination.

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1. Introduction the Research Problem Statement

Cheating is one of the strategies that most insufficiently prepared candidates use during their examinations, although many people, educational institutions and governments make tremendous effort to avoid academic dishonesty during national examinations. Similarly, all the educational and governmental actors agree with the importance of integrity for all those who are involved in organizing examinations. Accordingly, it is in order to keep this reliability that the choice of proctors requests great care in every country and every educational institution all over the world.

Moreover, proctors are so important that no exam can normally be held in their absence. Since they represent the government, or the educational institution, as well as the administrative officials who appointed them, people expect proctors to be free of any criminal record, honest, fair, quite, courteous, detail-oriented, obedient in following instructions, etc.

Paradoxically, despite the prominent role that invigilators play and the need for them to be reputable, conscious and honest workers, and a set of relationships between actors engaged in the exam monitoring throw the discredit on some of these apparently honest workers.

Thus, the central question is what can make proctors change from the status of candidates' invigilators to that of candidates' protectors against the exam supervisors? How can this change be possible? What are the factors of such a drastic change? What are proctors' reactions against this doubt? Those few questions constitute the basis of our interest in the present research.

1.1. Literature Review

Although the literature on cheating during examinations is abundant, that of proctors' involvement in cheating is rather scarce. The reason is probably because nobody expects proctors to be involved in the academic dishonesty that justifies their presence in an examination center. Consequently, exam administrators and educational institutions focus less attention on them.

If the cheating of proctors really exists, it cannot be separated from the cheating of candidates, because, it is because candidates cheat that we can talk about proctor's involvement. In effect, since nobody can be at the same time a candidate and a proctor, the cheating of proctors always aims to foster the success of at least a candidate. To paraphrase (Zimmerman, 1999) less competent proctors embolden cheating. Definitely, what is the prevalence of cheating, according to the literature?

First, Whitley (1998) reported that an average of 70 % of American students acknowledged to have cheated during their examinations or used plagiarism. Not only this, but also, Brown (1995) reported that "80% of business students admitted to engaging in at least one of 15 unethical academic practices in their graduate career". Likewise, Wajda-Johnston *et al.* (2001) identified up to 55.1% of graduate students who admitted to have cheated during their graduate student career.

As a matter of fact, we can assert that the cheating prevalence is so real that, for Mc Cabe *et al.* (2001) the constant increase of cheating lead to the adoption of a good conduct code by many Universities. By signing that code, American students committed themselves to avoid cheating throughout their studies (Mc Cabe and Trevino, 1993).

Equally, (Crown and Spiller, 1998; Whitley, 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 *et al.* (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.

In the light of what proceeds, we can assert that cheating prevalence really exists and constitutes logically the main reason of the existence of proctors during all the examinations all over the world. The next lines were dedicated to finding out **why candidates cheat!**

The first reply to this question seems to come from Graham *et al.* (1994) for whom the teachers' fairness determines students' reaction towards cheating. Indeed, their works have revealed that 25% of the interviewed students would be more likely to cheat if there is a proof that their teacher is unfair.

Second, for Stearn (2001) "perceptions of student-instructor relationships have an impact on admitted rates of cheating in the classroom". Besides, for Zimmerman (1999) cheating prevalence is higher when instructors lack diligence at catching cheaters and when institutions do not have an adequate response to students' cheating.

In addition to what precedes, Brown (1995) noticed that graduate students are more honest academically than undergraduates ones. This implies that the need for a degree could reinforce the temptation to cheat. Furthermore, Zimmerman (1999) seems to say the same thing when he identifies that "the prevalence of cheating has been strongly associated with the presence or absence of a traditional or modified honor code made known and enforced in the university setting".

Similarly, Mc Cabe 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 *et al.* (1994) reported that Students' Cheating is highly related to their expectancies to graduate, stress and course and program requirements. This is exactly what (Grignon and Gruel, 1999) seems to say. Indeed, when students are confronted with the lack of time to face all the requirements of the program, they use what seems easier for them: cheating!

In conclusion, cheating in general and particularly cheating during exams is a worldwide phenomenon and the reasons for cheating are various. Among those reasons are the work pressure and the high desire to succeed at one's examination. Do the same reasons apply for proctors' involvement in cheating? What are the determinants of proctors' involvement in cheating? What are proctors' reactions against this doubt?

The present study aims to understand the causes of the proctors' involvement in candidates' cheating and doing so implies to:

- Determine the demographic characteristics of selected proctors

- Indicate how selected proctors are remunerated
- Show few implications on proctoring reliability
- Explain the real stakes behind the proctoring eagerness of the Staff from private schools

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 at 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

A total of fifty proctors were assigned to the exam center. In the present research, twelve of them were available for the interview that took place at the end of the exam. They consist of two accountants, two secretaries, one office clerk, four primary school teachers, and three secondary school teachers. All of them were staff members of private schools.

2.3. Data Collection Instruments

Our option in this research was that of qualitative data collection method. We used individual interviews.

3. Results and Discussion

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

3.1. Results

3.1.1. Demographic Characteristics

The first results show very clearly that the large majority of the staff committed to monitoring at the examination center of college Privé MBF consist of the personnel of some private schools located in Abobo, not too far from the exam center. None of them received a particular training for the work that was expected from them.

However, though most of them are not secondary school teachers, they are all aware that their presence at the examination center is, among others, to prevent candidates from cheating, to create a calm environment for the exam to take place in the best conditions.

3.1.2. How Are Selected Proctors Remunerated

Proctoring at the baccalaureate is a non-remunerated activity according to proctors themselves. The only expected gain is that it gives access to the grading of exam copies, which, contrary to proctoring, is remunerated. In clearer terms, proctors accept to scarify their time and effort at proctoring to expect being selected for the grading of exam copies.

3.1.3. Implications on Proctoring in General

The fact of being a non-remunerated activity makes it non attractive to the majority of public school teachers, who refuse to participate.

3.1.4. What Might Compel the Private Staff Accept what the Public Staff Refuse?

The proctors from private schools revealed that their colleagues from public schools are too rich to accept to work for almost a month to earn the equivalent of USD 100. To our question "why do you accept such a small amount?" the following verbatim summarizes all their ideas:

« Est-ce que nous on n'a le choix? Moi, j'ai ma maitrise, avec ça, on me paye 60,000 par mois parce que y a pas travail. En plus, Mai, Juin, Juillet, Aout et Septembre, pas de salaire. Je vis comment si je refuse l'argent ? Eux, ils sont à l'aise avec leur gros salaire que l'Etat leur donne tous les mois. Ils vont faire quoi avec l'argent de bac? »

The English translation gives approximately the following:

"Do we really have the choice? With my masters' degree I'm paid cfa 60,000 monthly because there are no jobs. Besides, I've no salary in May, June, July, August and September. How to survive if I refuse money? As for them, they are at ease with the big salary that the government pays them every month. What do they need the baccalaureate money for?"

To close completely with our result presentation, let us read the following dialogue between our data collector (D.C.) and proctors both in French and English:

DC : que dites-vous aux mauvaises langues qui vous accusent de laisser les candidats tricher pour de l'argent?

Proctor AD: *"Ce sont des jaloux! Nous, on fait quoi? On fait rien de mal. Le président du jury et son vice-Président ont fouillé tous les candidats avant de les laisser entrer dans le centre. Ils vont tricher avec quoi ? On ne peut plus parler de tricherie après ces fouilles!"*

DC: what do you reply to gossipers who accuse you for letting the candidates cheat for money?

Proctor AD: *"They are jealous! What do we do? Nothing bad. The president of the jury and his assistant have already searched all the candidates before allowing them in the exam center. What are they going to cheat with? No one can talk of cheating after all this search! »*

DC : « Nous constatons que vous défendez les candidats ? »

Proctor J K : « *Nous ne défendons personne, nous ne faisons que dire la vérité* »

Translation: «We can see that you are defending candidates?»

Translation: « *We are defending nobody, we are just telling the truth* »

D.C. : « *Que dites-vous de cette autre vérité provenant des candidats tricheurs pris par le président du jury lui-même et qui vous accusent de prendre de l'argent pour les laisser communiquer librement entre candidats* »?

Proctor F Y : « *Ça là est ce que c'est tricherie ? Qui n'a jamais fait ça ? Ça, ce n'est pas tricherie ! Nous on prend leur argent et on les laisse échanger entre eux dans le calme* ».

Translation: “*What do you reply against this other truth from cheaters caught by the president of the jury himself, who accuse you to take their money to let them communicate among candidates*”?

Translation: “*Is this cheating? Who has never done this? This is not cheating! We take their money, and we let them communicate among candidates, noiselessly.*”

3.2. Discussion

In this research, proctors appear at the forefront. However, they are neither the only actors involved in the organization of the baccalaureate, nor the most important ones. Before the proctors, is the government, represented by the ministry of education, which entrusted its power onto “*la DECO*.” We are going to examine the system of relationship between the different actors.

La DECO and its Proctors

“*La DECO*”, that is to say the government, has a budget to organize the baccalaureate, but that budget does not take the payment of key actors such as proctors into account. For this injustice, many teachers who are hired and paid by the government refuse to take part in the organization of such an important national examination, at a period during which these teachers have no class and receive their monthly salaries, but there is no reaction from the government. Consequently the proctoring part of the baccalaureate has to rely on the staff of private schools. The private schools’ teaching staff being too insufficient in number, office clerks, secretaries, accountants and other administrative workers are added as the staffing complement.

We can understand very clearly the high motivation of the private schools’ teaching staff, because, they will take part in the grading of the examination copies and be paid, but what justifies the eagerness of private primary school teachers, office clerks, accountants etc. who do not have the level to grade copies and whose participation stops to the proctoring phase which is not paid?

The following verbatim from KS, a young lady who works as a bookkeeper in the school that welcomed the exam center, can help us understand the issue raised in the above question. She accepted to take part in the proctoring session, knowing that her education level would not allow her to participate in the grading phase.

« *Ils ne font rien, ils ont des voitures et on leur donne des bons d'essence. Or, nous on est obligé de payer notre transport pour venir ici, aller-retour. ...même ton transport, ils ne vont pas te donner* »

The English translation gives approximately the following:

« *They are doing nothing, they have cars and are given bonds for gasoline. However, we are obliged to pay our transport to come here and go back. ...Even the transport will not be paid back*”

As we can see, *la DECO* gives them nothing and they have to pay their transport from home to the examination center and vice versa, feed themselves while they are at the examination center and July, the month during which the baccalaureate exam takes place, is the third month during which most of them have no salary!

Indeed, the bitterness that, that lady was trying to express goes in line with [Graham et al. \(1994\)](#) for whom “the teachers’ fairness determines students’ reaction towards cheating”, therefore students tend to cheat more with unfair teachers. In our context, it is not the teacher who is unfair, but the government, who is supposed to be a kind of father, with all the financial means, but who refuses to pay some of his children that he needs and uses for proctoring at the baccalaureate!

It is true that nobody obliged that lady to take part in the baccalaureate proctoring. She accepted to take part because she really wanted to. The question is did she come with a philanthropic mind, or did she have a hidden agenda while accepting to come and take part?

The same way, [Graham et al. \(1994\)](#) revealed that 25% of the interviewed students would be more likely to cheat with unfair teachers. Consequently, those proctors who accept to come despite the government’s injustice in refusing to pay them, are more likely to accept to be bribed for allowing candidates to cheat. This time, we are not dealing with 25 % of the population, but quite a higher rate. Our proof is the following verbatim, which will convince whoever has some doubts:

« *La surveillance au baccalauréat est un don qu'on ne peut pas refuser, mais on ne peut pas surveiller dans la fin* »

The English version gives approximately the following result:

« *Proctoring at the baccalaureate is a gift that no one can refuse, but nobody can proctor in hanger.* »

One of the ways, if not the best one, to take part in the baccalaureate proctoring when the employer refuses to pay one’s efforts, is to accept financial offers from candidates. For us the government via *la DECO*, should know that primary school teachers, secretaries, bookkeepers, office clerical agents etc. who accept to take part, sometimes very eagerly, in the exam monitoring with the full knowledge that there is no financial counterpart, since their education level does not enable them to participate in the grading session, which is paid, cannot “proctor in hanger.” Besides, the government must also know that those workers’ partaking in the baccalaureate at that period of financial hardship for them cannot be the expression of their benevolence. They certainly have a well-organized hidden plan in their mind, as they accept to make huge sacrifices to come. With this in mind, what relationship do they have with candidates?

Candidates and their Proctors:

Another group of key actors involved in the relation system in action during the baccalaureate examination is the assembly of candidates. At the first glance candidates look like a disparate group, but actually, they are well organized, with a leader in each classroom. Most leaders know proctors' miserable financial conditions and they have a clear idea of how to use it to tempt them. With 32 candidates per room, raising cfa 2000 per candidate makes cfa 64,000, the equivalent of usd 100, that is to say a monthly salary for each proctor coming from a private school. This sum is far enough to provoke a mind change. What, if the mind is already set for the deal, as it is in our case? This is exactly what that lady meant by « *Proctoring at the baccalaureate is a gift that no one can refuse, but nobody can proctor in hanger.* »

Nobody can proctor in hanger means nobody can work for free. Have we noticed that for them, proctoring is a gift, a financial gift? Furthermore, nobody can refuse such a gift, meaning nobody can refuse a financial gift. What happens when the awaited gift is accepted?

The Upside Down Proctoring:

As soon as the money is raised by candidates and accepted by proctors, the abnormal becomes normal. For example, free communication between candidates, which should normally be considered dishonest becomes normal according to FY in the following verbatim:

*“Is this cheating? Who has never done this? This is not cheating! We take their money, and we let them communicate among the candidates, **noiselessly.**”*

With the above verbatim proctoring has acquired a new meaning, a new definition and even the person to proctor has also changed. Proctoring consists in maintaining a noiseless environment. It also consists in preventing the exam administrators from surprising candidates who are cheating. She sounds as if the only bad thing would be the noise during this free communication. Nonetheless, as long as the communication between candidates remains noiseless, where is the problem?

Conversely, communication between candidates is justified and is no longer to be condemned. Asking thousands of answers from another candidate is natural and normal, and acting this way is far from being considered as cheating. *Who has never done this?*

It is normal for her to receive money in order to break the law. *“We take their money, and we let them communicate among candidates,”* Are they really wrong? Between the government who employs them, but refuses to pay them, and the candidates who accept to pay them, who is the real employer?

Thus, we are experiencing a new relation game in which candidates experience a status change as soon as their money is accepted. Proctors who should watch over candidates and report any dysfunction to the general supervisor and his assistant, are now the legitimate proctors' protectors. Proctors are no longer watching over the candidates, but rather the overall supervisor, his assistant, as well as all those who might work against their new deal with their new partners: the candidates! Indeed, one of the proctors stands at the door, and reports any suspicious movement from outside to the candidates, particularly that of the exam administrators. At this stage of our discussion, we are tempted to ask: «who is the winner? The candidates, the proctors, or the government?»

4. General Conclusion

This research was an opportunity for us to understand how those who were officially committed to watch over the candidates in order to prevent them from cheating, turn into the very candidates-cheaters' protectors and defenders against the official authorities committed to supervise the baccalaureate examination. Thus, instead of watching over the candidates, one of the proctors stands at the classroom door to watch over the overall supervisor and his assistant in order to alert cheaters so that the latter will not be surprised cheating.

Though not yet generalized, but located in some few remote examination centers, the present research aims at attracting the attention of the authorities on the urgency to correct what many proctors perceive as a great injustice: refusing to pay the examination proctoring. As pointed out by [Graham et al. \(1994\)](#) “the teachers' fairness determines students' reaction towards cheating” and to paraphrase the same authors we would say that the government's fairness in paying all the actors engaged in the organization of the baccalaureate would determine proctors' reaction towards candidates' cheating. The same way these authors proved that students are more likely to cheat when they have proofs that their teacher is unfair, the government's injustice in refusing to pay proctoring constitutes the number one justification of proctors' academic dishonesty. What does each actor in the exam organization system gain?

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