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# e-cheating in the UAE

*A critical review of existing literature*

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**Abstract:** *The UAE's education sector has been booming for the last decade or so, attracting students not only from within the country but from across borders. While primary, secondary and tertiary levels education providers are being scrutinized for their quality of education and teaching experience, and simultaneously the country is spiraling towards an e-teaching/e-learning environment, very little or no research has been carried out to study the impact of all the technology that is readily available, the online sources that libraries are subscribing to, to the attitude of students towards e-cheating. Where focus has been given to software piracy and plagiarism to a smaller extent, the literature lacks depth and width in shedding light to recognizing factors that may help to understand what effects students' attitude towards e-cheating and how. This paper, however, identifies research questions that have not been addressed sufficiently in the literature and suggests specific research areas for further investigation into a study to identify the societal factors and causal implications of increased online-sources and readily-available e-technology on students' attitudes towards e-cheating in a globalized society such as the UAE.*

**Keywords:** *e-cheating, cheating, cyber-ethics, plagiarism, UAE, United Arab Emirates*

## 1. Introduction

At the beginning of this study, it seemed the existing literature was complete, focused and thorough. However, as literature review was carried out further, there were very noticeable gaps uncovered within the existing literature when it came to studying the effects of various societal factors on students living in a globalized society such as that existing in the United Arab Emirates (a member of the Gulf Cooperation Council, Middle East), and their attitude towards e-cheating.

The author found little or no academic research that was carried out on the population of UAE, with no significant data showing the current rates of e-cheating within the student population in the country, the factors affecting their attitudes towards e-cheating and their ultimate impact, if any, in the professional world.

In undertaking this study as part of a dissertation study, the author has reviewed existing literature to pinpoint what has been written about e-cheating in the UAE, factor studies, solutions put forward by emerging studies, but also highlighted the limitations of the literature to raise questions on the issue of possible causal implications of increased technology, effects of vast amounts of continuously increasing databases of sources on virtually all topics made readily available to students via the publicly accessible sites and academic libraries and other societal factors towards students' attitude on e-cheating in the UAE.

## 2. Background

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is a federation of seven emirates that gained its independence in 1971. It houses a population of over 2.95 million people, of whom 80% are non-local Arabs, Asians, Europeans, Africans and Americans (The Emirates Network 2005). It is primarily a Muslim country, but Christianity, Hinduism, etc. are also prevalent. The official language of the UAE is Arabic though other languages like English, Hindi, Russian and Farsi are also widely spoken.

According to the World Factbook publications, 'UAE has an open economy with a high per capita income and a sizable annual trade surplus' (CIA, 2010). The UAE has gone through a transformation from an 'impoverished region of small desert principalities to a modern state with a high standard of living (CIA, 2010). Its GDP (purchasing power) stands at \$200.4 billion as noted in 2009 by Central Intelligence Agency, though its GDP (growth rate) has fallen by 4% in the same year due to the recent recession that hit Dubai mostly as it diversified from oil to real estate and tourism (CIA, 2010).

## 3. Education in the UAE

The UAE has thousands of schools with curricula from around the world covering American, Australian, British and Indian curricula, to name a few. According to a study done by State University, 'the total number of students at primary and secondary level in public and private schools in the UAE has steadily grown each year and reached 563,461 in 1998, up from 480,973 in 1995, an increase of 4 percent per annum'

(Education Encyclopedia, 2010). Furthermore, 'teaching and administrative staff increased to 43,510 in 1999, up from 37,425 in 1995, while the number of schools increased to 1085 from 901 for the same period' (Education Encyclopedia, 2010).

Up until 2008, there were no strong guidelines or checks to maintain quality in schools. Dubai Government set up a knowledge and human development authority 'to assure quality and to improve accessibility to education, learning and human development, with the engagement of the community' (Government of Dubai, 2010).

In recent years, the UAE has also become the central hub for many tertiary-level institutes that offer varying ranges of degrees via affiliations and accreditations from as far as the US to Australia to neighboring countries such as Iran. According to the study done by State University, a record 10,703 people sought higher education places in the 2000-2001 academic year [which meant] of all secondary school graduates, this included 95 percent women and 73 percent of the men, reported to be the highest number of higher education admissions per capita anywhere in the world' (Education Encyclopedia, 2010).

According to the study, the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research controls higher education in the UAE.

'Primary functions of that ministry are to plan and coordinate higher education activities in the UAE. Although the UAE has achieved much expansion in the field of education, there is an unspoken awareness on the part of many that a constant updating of policy and continual investment in infrastructure is required to ensure that graduates are equipped to enter the workforce and assist in the country's development. Although quantitative measures of progress are most often found in the press, issues of quality regarding curriculum, pedagogy, and teacher preparation and leadership are increasingly being discussed.'

(Education Encyclopedia, 2010)

#### **4. Technology in the UAE**

The UAE is believed to be the leading industrial, commercial and trading center in the Middle East (Rosenthal, 2009). According to Rosenthal's research into the information technology environment in the UAE, the country's 'plan to economically diversify into the non-oil sectors has been successful in large part due to a combination of an open, liberal, pro-business environment coupled with a strong telecommunications/information technology infrastructure (Rosenthal, 2009). Where the UAE's imports cost over \$141 billion as of 2009, a lot of the items imported are technology and communication based (CIA (2010), Rosenthal (2009)).

The UAE has approximately 9.358 million users of mobile services (that include Black Berry) and 379,106 internet users (CIA, 2010). Etisalat is the primary service provider for all communication services, with a distant second followed by Du which is dependent on Etisalat for its primary source of communication fibers. Other examples of advancement in technology usage in the country include the first urban metro network in the gulf that is driver-less, using RFIDs for its toll systems and developing potential relations to bring nuclear technology into the country (WAM (2010), Railwaytechnology.com (2010))

#### **5. Too focused on software piracy – missing the aspect of e-cheating?**

With growing populations of expatriates, industries, and businesses, the UAE has become a victim to cyber crimes such as piracy like the rest of world.. According to a study done by AGIP (2004), the UAE faced a 34% piracy rate while the entire Middle East region stood to lose a whopping \$898.9 million in 2003. Although this is much better than 65% in Oman, 68% in Kuwait, 64% in Bahrain, 63% in Qatar and 70% in Eastern Europe (AGIB 2004), according to the International Data Corporation (IDC) software piracy is still a major challenge for the economies worldwide (AGIB 2004).

A large portion of the UAE's population is students- either expatriate or local. As globalization has set in and nations shed their barriers to become more globalized, these students are becoming leaders in other parts of the world. With the boom in technology, there is a desperate need for fluency in computer skills from students anywhere they go once they have graduated.

Added to this need, literature has revealed that copying or downloading movies and music has become rampant among the younger generation in the country. This attitude has lent itself to other areas of student life such as software piracy where studies have shown that they do not hesitate to copy from Internet, friends, or relatives and so on because they do not see it as illegal or wrong (IPSOS (2003), Khan (2006)).

Further studies have shown that those students who are inclined on piracy now while in schools or universities do take these attitudes into the next phase of their lives – the workforce (Ang and Lo (1998), Khan, al Qaimari, Samuel (2006)).

However, with the above mentioned studies, the review has found that most of the literature, though non-academic in nature, has focused on the impacts of software piracy on the nation, rather than e-cheating among students.

## 6. E-learning in the UAE

In 1995, Shaikh Nahyan Bin Mubarak Al Nahyan, Minister of Education, while opening the fourth annual e-Merging e-Learning Conference in Abu Dhabi, announced that the UAE aimed 'to become the foremost centre for e-learning in the region' (TMC News, 2005). The gulf region represents the fastest-growing eLearning market in the world. In particular, the UAE 'has a specific dedication to the use of new technology in the knowledge economy, and IT spending in the UAE rose from 1065 Million USD in 2003 to a forecast spend of 1160 Million USD in 2004 - a market growth of nearly 9%' (Elearnity, 2004). By 2008, 27 schools had implemented e-learning into the classrooms so that 'a teacher with a wireless connection could share a video clip of a science experiment with the class, allowing pupils to watch it again when they did their homework rather than relying on hurriedly-written notes' (Kwok, 2008). 'Dubai is a clear regional leader in the domain with its Knowledge Village venture and an increasing number of universities and virtual campuses being set up and multi-nationals like the Emirates airline winning global awards for eLearning projects' (Elearnity, 2004).

According to author's previous studies, in local universities such as Higher Colleges of Technology in the UAE, almost every classroom is equipped with high-tech hardware and software to carry on e-learning with ease (Khan, 2006). These include projectors, laptops with wireless networking to access the Internet, and so on. At the University of Wollongong in Dubai, the annual Dean's symposium on Excellence in Learning and Teaching in May 2006 focused on e-learning. Representatives from around the region discussed and demonstrated examples of actual e-learning practices in higher education institutions around UAE (Khan, 2006). From teaching methods to assessments, e-learning tools have infiltrated the academic world with accelerating force. 'Role plays are being carried out online across continents, students are meeting and discussing concepts over discussion boards and other online meeting arenas, teachers are sharing files over WebCT, lectures are being transmitted as mp3 files over the internet via video conferencing or as downloadable files' (Border, Stoudt and Warnock, 2006). However, little or no literature was found that discussed the importance of ethics in IT among students in these universities, if at all.

## 7. E-learning or e-cheating?

Cheating in the academic environment is nothing new (Khan, Samuel (2009). Current literature states 'three-quarters of all high-school and college students admit to cheating on tests and papers. Not only do they cheat, but they justify their behavior as business as usual' (Goode, 2007). Kidwell, Wozniak, and Laurel (2003) and Chapman, Davis, Toy, and Wright (2004) also found that 75 percent of students reported

cheating [which is] similar to the 63 percent found by Nonis and Swift (1998). According to Mullens, McCabe found that '68 per cent of students admitted to one or more incidents of serious cheating, such as plagiarizing or submitting work done by somebody else ...' (Mullens, 2000).

It is no surprise then that technology used in academic institutions is giving rise to more cases of cheating. 'For students and academics alike, the Internet has become a valuable resource because of its potential to enhance the educational experience' (Jones, Reid, Bartlett, 2006). Gaining momentum in the 90's and early twenty-first century, Internet usage reached feverish heights in the academic world. '71 percent of [teenagers studied] relied mostly on Internet sources for the ... project they did for school and 34 percent of ... young people ages 12-17 download study aides from the Internet' (Lenhart, Rainie, & Lewis, 2001).

However, none of the studies mentioned above focused on the UAE population. Very little, if any studies have been found that actually focus on the UAE or the Middle East. One study by Donald McCabe at three local universities in 2009 revealed 'slightly more than 40 per cent of UAE students consider 'cut and paste'-type plagiarism from the Internet as either not cheating or only trivial cheating' (Khaleej Times, 2009). Although MacCabe has claimed his study has yielded similar results as in the US, little or no evidence has been provided of the same.

Further, author found no literature that attempted to recognize any factors that may affect students' attitude towards e-cheating. Though very few literature have been found that talk about how to pick up on plagiarism or deal with it in the UAE, little or no literature has studied possible impacts of parents' attitudes (to software piracy), teachers' attitudes (to software piracy), school curricula and students' buying power (financial status), increased online sources and readily-available technology to their attitude towards e-cheating. Academic institutions in the UAE need to understand what is affecting students' attitude towards e-cheating. And how?

## 8. Conclusion

This review clearly identifies the gap that now exists in the literature. The author proposes a two-part study: first part will focus on if there are any casual implications of readily-available technology and increased online sources on students' attitude towards e-cheating that will target all types of technology? How students avail such technology and how they view them? Study will also measure the rate at which libraries across academic institutions are converting to and using online sources. Second part will focus on if the factors such as parents' attitudes (to software piracy), teachers' attitudes (to software piracy), school curricula and students' buying power (financial status) are factors to be considered and study how

these are impacting students who do cheat whether knowingly or unknowingly, if at all?

The study will be carried out over two and a half years. It will look at a sample population of over five different universities and over 300 students from varying ethnic and educational backgrounds. As the United Arab Emirates is a multicultural nation, with more than 80% of the population constituting expatriates, the author believes the data collected will provide an unbiased result grid that may be mapped by a follow-up study in other countries to tally the findings.

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