

A brief history and typology of cheating in Konkour

Social Desk

Cheating on exams is a phenomenon arguably as old as the concept of testing itself. As a practice, it has evolved over time, adapting to the changing educational landscape and technological advancements.

The history of cheating on exams can be traced back to ancient China during the imperial examinations, designed to select the best administrative officials for the state's bureaucracy. Cheating was rampant, with candidates using ingenious methods such as writing notes on their clothing or using special inks.

In the 19th and 20th centuries, as formal education became more widespread, so did the instances of cheating. The advent of standardized testing in the United States in the early 20th century saw a rise in cheating cases, prompting the creation of more stringent invigilation procedures.

The advent of technology in the late 20th and early 21st centuries has given rise to new forms of cheating. The internet, smartphones, and smartwatches have provided students with new, sophisticated ways to cheat, forcing educators and institutions to constantly update their anti-cheating measures.

When it comes to Iran's national university entrance exam (locally known as Konkour), many people only think of buying and selling questions or bringing communication devices to the exam session. However, very few people have considered the idea that makeup could play a part, used to impersonate someone in order to take the exam on their behalf. There was a time when the universities of Iran existed without any entrance exams. From the establishment of the first university in the country until the late 1960s, admission to universities was not based on entrance exams. Each university had its own set of rules and criteria, conducting tests and academic interviews to select and accept students. However, in the following years, the desire to become a doctor and attend

medical school became widespread, which led to the birth of the country's biggest scientific competition, namely the national entrance exam.

Nowadays, these entrance exams have become a significant part in the lives of most families, and the competition surrounding them is intense. With that in mind, the ever-present act of cheating during such exams has burdened the majority of honest students and their families.

History of Iran's Konkour

Due to the rising number of applicants in the medical field, a national entrance exam was conducted for the first time at the medical school of Tehran University. The law and engineering schools also followed suit and adopted the examination system. Individuals who were unable to secure admission to medical school sought opportunities in other fields.

During that period, the individual entrance exams at different universities posed significant challenges for applicants. They had to undertake long journeys to reach major cities like Tehran, Shiraz, or Mashhad in order to participate in those exams.

In an effort to address this issue and implement a higher quality examination system that could accurately evaluate the academic abilities of candidates, the first nationwide university exam was held in 1963. A board of members comprised of professors and university officials conducted the entrance exam.

The establishment of new universities in the 1960s, coupled with the formation of the Ministry of Science and the creation of an entity called the Examination Center in 1968, renewed discussions surrounding the national entrance exam. Consequently, on the morning of Wednesday, August 6, 1969, the first Konkour was held with the participation of 47,703 individuals competing for admission to 12 universities offering 30 majors. Iran's nationwide university entrance exam has been conducted on a regular basis ever since.

How did the early cheaters cheat?

In those times, some individuals attempted to assist one another during exams through gestures, pointing, writing on paper, or employing tools such as erasers whenever they had the slightest opportunity.

Over the years, the methods of cheating in Konkour have undergone significant changes. Some individuals would go to great lengths to access exam questions, spending substantial amounts of money to purchase them before the session. Others would manipulate their registration timings to ensure they could be grouped together and aid each other, or they would selectively focus on specific areas of the exam.

Controversial Konkour

As is so far understood, entrance exams and cheating have forever walked hand in hand. As long as these exams continue to be conducted in this manner, cheating persists. What matters is that a certain percentage of people resort to all possible and impossible means in order to cheat and gain advancement on their competitors.

Throughout the years, various entrance exams have presented unique challenges. For instance, in 2019, it was decided to allocate a quota in entrance exams for Salas-e Babajani in Kermanshah Province, which had been devastated by an earthquake. This decision prompted some individuals to strategize and attempt to somehow place themselves there in order to benefit from the quota. As a result of the infamous entrance exam, Salas-e Babajani became synonymous with trouble. Twenty-one students were caught red-handed carrying prohibited devices such as ear-phones, wristbands, smartwatches, and cameras. These individuals were subsequently identified and handed over to the responsible authorities.

However, it should be noted that the education director of Salas-e Babajani mentioned that these offenders were not native to the city but rather from neighboring cities who had chosen Salas-e Babajani as their region. These

individuals shifted their regions to Salas-e Babajani with the hope of benefiting from the relatively less stringent measures applied to the entrance examination areas in this earthquake-affected region.

The following year, in 2020, while the exam was being held, questions suddenly began circulating in cyberspace, causing alarm among families whose children were taking it.

Fatemeh Zarin-Amizi, the then spokesperson for the country's National Organization for Educational Testing, confirmed the issue and stated to ISNA that one of the volunteers from the arts group managed to bring a mobile phone into the exam session and shared some of the exam questions on social networks.

This offending candidate was taking the exam at Taleqani Hospital under specific conditions of being affected with coronavirus, taking advantage of the situation.

Of course, the saga did not end there. The very next day, within an hour of the commencement of the entrance examination for the candidates of humanities and mathematical sciences, images of the pages of the exam booklets were circulating in cyberspace, causing upheaval.

Before the 2021 entrance exam, several Telegram channels claimed to be selling exam questions. Some individuals trusted these channels and spent significant amounts of money in hopes of gaining an unfair advantage. While authorities denied any fraudulent activity during the event, there were allegations that suspicious incidents were not properly investigated. In the 2022 entrance exam, fraud once again raised suspicions. During the exam for experimental sciences, it was claimed that all the general and specific questions were posted on a Telegram channel at 9:49 a.m., just minutes after the distribution of the specific booklet number two. Additionally, this file included special booklet number three, which had not yet been distributed at that time.

How far cheaters go?

In recent weeks, Telegram channels with names re-



lated to keywords such as "Konkour 2023" and "Konkour cheating" have been operational. It's not known to what extent the contents of these channels have spread on other virtual platforms, allowing some individuals to attempt achieving success in the national exam without any effort, while a few even make a living from it. The incidents of fraud have been increasing over the past years, to the point where a media expert quoted by Fars

News Agency stated, "Approximately a thousand individuals were found to have cheated in last year's entrance exam, but due to the time-consuming nature of verifying the fraud cases, they are now students." Among the new methods, some are downright astonishing and almost seem like jokes. For example, a screenshot is being shared on virtual platforms featuring an advertisement that's looking for a preferably female medi-

cal student, who is willing to take the exam on their behalf for 500 or 1,000 dollars.

While the majority of Iranian students come from honest, working-class families, some individuals, mainly from upper classes, are willing to do anything to gain admission to the country's top universities. What's even more astonishing is that some people are willing to compromise their integrity for money and help them with that.