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Academic Dishonesty: A Mixed-method Study of Rational Choice among Students at the College of Basic Education in Kuwait

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Abstract
The research herein used a sequential mixed methods design to investigate why academic dishonesty is widespread among the students at the College of Basic Education in Kuwait. Qualitative interviews were conducted to generate research hypotheses. Then, using questionnaire survey, the research hypotheses were quantitatively tested. The findings suggested that academic dishonesty is widespread among the students at the College of Basic Education because the benefits of academic dishonesty are high, whereas the certainty of detection and severity of the sanctions are relatively low.
Keywords: academic dishonesty, rational choice theory, sequential mixed methods design

Study background

The commonly held view in Kuwait is that Kuwaiti higher education institutes are places in which students engage in all forms of academic dishonesty. The formation of this commonly held view might be attributable to the Kuwaiti media. In March 2014, for example, a local newspaper presented a lengthy report on a wide range of dishonest academic practices (cited in Alsuwaileh & Alradaan, 2015). According to Al-Qabas (2014), at examination times, instead of studying, large numbers of students 'show up' at the 'cheating marketplace' to buy crib notes or to forge formal medical reports to obtain exemptions from their examinations.

This motivated Alsuwaileh and Alradaan (2015) to examine whether this commonly held view can be supported by scientific evidence. Following the publication of above-cited report, those authors conducted a study that aimed to examine the extent of academically dishonest practices among students at the College of Basic Education (CBE), which grants bachelor's degrees in education and represents the second-largest public (free) institution of higher education in Kuwait (after Kuwait University). The results indicated that dishonest academic practices were very common at the CBE. Therefore, those authors recommended that a study examine why academic dishonesty is so widespread at the CBE. In response, the purpose of this study is to investigate why academic dishonesty is so widespread among CBE students.

Research Significance

Surveys of university students that have been conducted in various contexts indicate alarmingly high rates of academic dishonesty (Alsuwaileh & Alradaan, 2015). Most research suggests that from 20 to 70 percent of university students have engaged in an academically dishonest practice at least once (e.g., Sisson & Todd-MacManciillas, 1984; Tom & Borin, 1988; Whitley, 1998; Naghdipour & Emeagwali, 2013). In Kuwait, the context of our study, more than 80 percent of students report that academically dishonest practices are 'very common' (Alsuwaileh & Alradaan, 2015). Thus, this study attempted to provide stakeholders such as policymakers and lecturers with a better understanding of why academic dishonesty is so common at the CBE, enabling those stakeholders to make evidence-based decisions that minimize the occurrence of these practices.

Literature Review

Definition of Academic Dishonesty

A research review shows that there is no generally accepted definition of academic dishonesty (Kibler, 1993), an omission that might be attributed to the fact that academic dishonesty is a context-related term (Alsuwaileh & Alradaan, 2015). For example, Lupton, Chapman, and Weiss (2000) find significant differences in Polish and American students' conceptions of what constitutes academic dishonesty. Chapman and Lupton (2004) have also uncovered important differences in Hong Kong and American students' conceptions of what constitutes

academic dishonesty. Indeed, according to Whitley and Keith-Spiegel (2002), what constitutes a dishonest academic practice in one country might only be viewed as mere coordination between students in another country. Interestingly, "Robert I. Sutton, Dean of the Stanford University School of Design, recently stated: if you found somebody to help you write an exam, in our view, that's a sign of an inventive person who gets stuff done" (Simkin & McLeod, 2009, p. 445). Because perceptions of what constitutes academic dishonesty vary significantly among cultures (Lupton et al., 2000; Whitley & Keith-Spiegel, 2002), in the first phase of our study, the student interviews, we examined CBE students' perceptions of what constitutes academic dishonesty.

Demographic Factors Associated with Academic Dishonesty

Many studies have shown that demographic factors, especially age, gender, and grade point average (GPA), are associated with academic dishonesty (Ogilvie & Stewart, 2010; Tibbestts & Myers, 1999). The following sections will discuss each of these factors.

Age. The results of mainstream research indicate that younger students are more likely than older students to engage in dishonest academic practices (e.g., Baird, 1980; McCabe & Trevino, 1997; Franklin-Stokes & Newstead, 1995). However, this research does not seem to provide a clear reason that this is the case. Nevertheless, Haines et al. (1986) argue that younger students are more likely to engage in academically dishonest practices than older students because younger students are more immature (in terms of both age and personality) and are generally characterized by a lack of commitment.

Gender. Most of the related studies revealed that male students engage in dishonest academic practices more often than females (e.g., Baird, 1980; McCabe & Trevino, 1997; Kuntz & Butler, 2014). Sex-role socialization theory provides a possible rationale for this difference. According to sex-role socialization theory, "[w]omen are socialized to obey the rules, whereas socialization for men is less binding in this respect" (Ward & Beck, 1990, p. 333). Thus, women are likely to avoid academic dishonesty, while men are more likely to risk such behavior and its consequences.

Grade point average (GPA). Most studies report that students with lower GPAs are more likely than students with higher GPAs to engage in dishonest academic practices (e.g., Baird, 1980; Bunn, Caudill & Gropper, 1992; Lipson & McGavern, 1993; McCabe & Trevino, 1997). Students with lower GPAs might be more likely to risk engaging in dishonest academic practices because they have more to gain and less to lose (McCabe & Trevino, 1997). Thus, students with high GPAs may feel no need to engage in academic dishonesty, while those with lower GPA may risk such practices in order to achieve better grades.

Research Framework

According to Sattler, Graeff, and Willen (2013), despite the fact that it is very beneficial for a researcher to utilize a framework for the studied problem, the number of studies of academic dishonesty that did not use an explicit theoretical framework exceeds the number of theoretically grounded studies. Having reviewed the studies that utilized theoretical frameworks, we found competing frameworks that might be helpful in understanding why academically dishonest practices are very common among the CBE students. Those frameworks include social bond theory, social learning theory, self-efficiency theory, deterrence theory, and rational choice theory. We chose the rational choice theory as the framework to explain why CBE students engage in academically dishonest practices. The reason for our choice will be stated later in this section.

Numerous studies have shown that rational choice theory is an appropriate framework for explaining academic dishonesty among university students (e.g., Sattler et al., 2013; Simkin & McLeod, 2009; Tibbetts & Myers, 1999). Drawing on the assumptions of rational choice, these studies hypothesize that academic dishonesty is not an arbitrary or accidental action but instead a premeditated and calculated one (Simkin & McLeod, 2009; Tibbetts & Myers, 1999). Students who engage in dishonest academic practices 'subjectively' weigh the perceived formal and informal sanctions, the certainty of detection, and the benefits of being academically dishonest. If the relative benefits of the dishonest academic practice exceed its costs (formal and informal sanctions), students will engage in that practice (ceteris paribus) (Sattler et al., 2013).

We chose the rational choice theory as a framework because based on our experience working closely with CBE students, we noticed that many of those students would engage in academically dishonest practices simply because they could gain 'benefits' from such practices, whereas the certainty of detection and severity of sanctions was relatively low.

Accordingly, we hypothesized that dishonest academic practices are widespread among CBE students because the certainty and severity of sanctions are low and the benefits are high. Because rational choice theory does not imply the sanctions and benefits in a specific situation (Sattler et al., 2013), a contextual specification of the sanctions and benefits involved in this case was needed. Therefore, during the first phase of our study—namely, the student interviews—we investigated the perceptions of CBE students in terms of the potential sanctions and benefits associated with dishonest academic practices. In the second phase, and based on the students' perceptions of what constitutes academic dishonesty and the potential sanctions and benefits of

academic dishonesty within the CBE context, we quantitatively examined whether the above-stated hypothesis can be supported.

Methods

The vast majority, if not all, of the research on academic dishonesty has been quantitative in nature (e.g., Ogilvie & Stewart, 2010; Sattler, Graeff & Willen, 2013; Simkin & McLeod, 2009; Tibbetts & Myers, 1999). However, quantitative research is believed by many methodologists to produce knowledge that is too wide and abstract; moreover, this type of knowledge might be unhelpful in understanding complex social phenomena (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). From our perspective, these studies mask a great deal of information that is necessary for a better understanding of academic dishonesty. To some extent, these studies provided information about the causality of relationships, although they could not draw a clear picture of the nature of those relationships. Of course, this is not to say that relying only on qualitative approaches that focus on the notion of "depth" in examining social phenomena is any better than relying on quantitative approaches. Indeed, being satisfied with qualitative research methods alone might merely mean that we sacrifice "width" for "depth" when attempting to understand a complex social phenomenon (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011), such as the problem being studied. Therefore, it seemed that a more comprehensive approach was necessary to obtain a broad, deep understanding of why academic dishonesty is so common at the CBE. Thus, we chose to adopt a mixed-methods approach because it allows us to combine qualitative and quantitative methods in a manner that utilizes the strengths of each within a single study (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

There were additional reasons for using a combination of methods in this study. We first conducted face-to-face interviews, a widely used strategy known as "instrument development" (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010). According to Bryman (2006), instrument development "refers to contexts in which qualitative research is employed to develop questionnaire and scale items so that better wording or more comprehensive closed answers can be generated" (p. 106). In our study, we used the findings from the student interviews to construct a questionnaire for students (see the research-design section). Additionally, and because there was very little information about our research question in the Kuwaiti context, these interviews were used to explore issues that might be important in explaining why academic dishonesty is so widespread at the CBE.

Moreover, the mixed-methods approach made it possible to triangulate the data of our two research instruments. This study sought convergence and corroboration of the findings across the students' interview and questionnaire (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010). Furthermore, this study's qualitative data were used to 'illustrate' the students' questionnaire findings, a strategy often referred to as "putting 'meat on the bones' of 'dry' quantitative findings" (Bryman, 2006, p. 106; Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011).

Research Design

Our study consisted of the two following sequential phases: student interviews and student questionnaires. The aims and procedures of these two phases are briefly described below.

Phase 1: Student interviews. Phase 1 involved semi-structured interviews with 20 students about their perceptions of academic dishonesty. The aim of the student interviews was both (a) to explore, drawing on what we learned in our review of the literature, the students' perceptions of the definition of academic dishonesty in the context of the CBE and (b) to investigate the potential sanctions and benefits related to academic dishonesty. Phase 1 was crucial because it was preliminary and informative with respect to the construction of the questionnaire for the students.

Phase 2: Student questionnaires. In Phase 2, drawing on the findings from the students' interviews, a questionnaire was developed to address why academic dishonesty is very common at the CBE. The questionnaire enabled us not only to reach a larger sample than was possible from interviews alone but also to test hypotheses that were extracted from Phase 1.

Phase 1: Data Collection from Student Interviews

After obtaining permission to conduct the present study from CBE officials, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 students about their perceptions of academic dishonesty. We prepared the interview schedule together with an informed consent form. Twenty students were randomly selected from a list of students that was provided by the CBE's Department of Admission and Registration. To select the sample, a digit (from 1 to 100) was randomly chosen. Accordingly, one participant was selected from every 100 on the list. Because gender has been considered in the related literature as a factor that might have an impact upon students' academic dishonesty, an equal number of male and female students (10 each) was selected. Having randomly selected the 20 participants, we contacted the Department of Admission and Registration at the CBE to provide us with selected participants' class schedules, thus making it easy to meet each participant immediately after their classes. There was great interest in the topic of our study, and all of the selected participants happily agreed to participate. The interviews lasted between 30 and 40 minutes. With the participants' permission, all of the interviews were

tape-recorded.

The students' interview schedule consisted of 15 open-ended questions. These questions were intended to explore (a) students' perceptions of what constitutes academic dishonesty, (b) opinions as to whether and why students believe that academic dishonesty is associated with certain demographic variables, and (c) suggestions as to the potential sanctions and benefits related to dishonest academic practices.

Phase 1: Data Analysis of Student Interviews

The qualitative data from the student interviews were analyzed manually. Although they do not seem to undervalue inductive analysis, wherein meaning and critical codes emerge out of the data, some qualitative research methodologists appear to recommend beginning with theory (e.g., Richards, 2009; Saldana, 2013). As reported by Richards (2009), "even in situations where the researcher seems to lack a theory, s/he must make some theoretical assumptions about the phenomenon under study" (p. 74).

As stated earlier in this article, we had pre-existing assumptions about academic dishonesty. These assumptions were developed during the course of reading the relevant literature. The first assumption is that the definition of academic dishonesty varies according to the context in which it is studied (Alsuwaileh & Alradaan, 2015; Kibler, 1993; Lupton et al. 2000; Whitley & Keith-Spiegel, 2002). The second assumption is that according to the relevant literature, students' age, gender, and GPA may be associated with academic dishonesty (Ogilvie & Stewart, 2010; Tibbetts & Myers, 1999). The third assumption is that there might be connections between the assumptions of rational choice theory and academic dishonesty in the CBE context. Accordingly, we began to analyze our qualitative data, keeping in mind the three key, pre-existing themes:

1. The definition of academic dishonesty;
2. Demographics (i.e., age, gender, and GPA) and their association with academic dishonesty; and
3. The assumptions of rational choice theory pertaining to academic dishonesty, a theme that consisted of the following three sub-themes: (a) the benefits of engaging in academic dishonesty, (b) the certainty (of detection) and (c) the severity of the sanctions (formal and informal sanctions).

In assigning the relevant codes to the three key themes set forth above, the analysis of our qualitative data passed through three stages. In the first stage, each tape-recorded interview was fully transcribed. We then undertook a "purposive reading" of each interview transcript that aimed to question and comment on the data (Richards, 2009, p. 75). The reason for reading each interview transcript separately is to obtain an understanding of the general trends in each interviewee's overall responses. At this stage, we initially and tentatively coded issues such as words, phrases, and sentences that appeared relevant to each other, a process often referred to as "open coding" (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). The codes related to concepts, opinions, actions, etc., along with their possible connections to the three key themes mentioned above.

In the second stage, collating of all of the codes that were produced in the first stage, a bank of codes was generated. The bank of codes showed the frequency of the interviewees' responses (Bryman, 2012). This process was crucial because it made it easier to examine the extent to which our codes related to our pre-existing themes.

The third stage of the analysis involved a re-examination of the codes by returning to the first interview transcripts to determine whether we could merge, add, or drop some codes, or even uncover contradictory evidence. Consequently, the final codes were assigned to relevant themes. These three stages helped me assemble the "big picture" of the phenomenon of academic dishonesty within the CBE context.

Phase 1: Validity of Students' Interviews

To enhance the validity (credibility) of the student interview schedule, numerous strategies were used. The open-ended questions in the student interviews were submitted to a panel of experts to establish the instruments' facial validity (Ary et al., 2008). The questions were also pilot-tested with five students chosen using the convenience sampling method. The students' responses and suggestions were taken into consideration to improve the interview schedule. Direct quotations from the participants were used in the findings section to convey an understanding of the study's context. This strategy also "helps readers experience the participants' world" (Ary et al., 2008, p. 500). Because selection bias is a possible source of invalidity in qualitative research (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004), 20 students were selected at random. Finally, to avoid personal bias, our data analysis and interpretations were double-checked by three researchers (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

Phase 1: Findings from the Student Interviews

This section describes the interview findings, which are categorized using the aforementioned three themes: (a) the definition of academic dishonesty; (b) demographics and their association with academic dishonesty; and (c) the assumptions of rational choice theory. Pseudonyms are used to maintain the participants' anonymity.

The definition of academic dishonesty. The interviewees were asked about which practices they regard as academically dishonest. The responses of the participants suggest that they regard academic dishonesty as the extent to which students are involved in (a) cheating on examinations, (b) visiting a lecturer to influence grades, (c) asking about the content of examinations from someone who has taken them, (d) turning in work done by someone else, (e) buying papers, (f) taking an examination for someone else or having someone else

take an examination for them, (g) signing attendance sheets on behalf of their absent classmates, (h) lying, or (i) plagiarism.

The participants interviewed were also asked about the incidence of academic dishonesty among their colleagues. All of the students interviewed believed that academic dishonesty is very common at the CBE. Because all of the interviewees mentioned cheating on formal examinations, it appears that this practice is the most important type of academic dishonesty.

"Visiting a lecturer to influence grades", "asking about the content of examinations from someone who has taken them", "turning in work done completed by someone else as one's own," and "buying papers" were forms of academic dishonesty mentioned by most of the participants.

One significant finding was that although seven female participants (of 10) mentioned "taking an examination for someone else or having someone else take an examination for them," only one male participant (of 10) stated likewise. That male participant indicated that this particular practice is widely used by female students. "Plagiarism" was mentioned by only three of the 20 students interviewed.

Demographics and their associations with academic dishonesty. Of the 20 students interviewed, 14 believed that female students are more likely to engage in academically dishonest practices. Indeed, only four participants believed that male students are more likely to be involved in such practices, whereas the other two participants suggested no relationship between the two variables. The participants identified two reasons for this finding: Islamic attire and competitive achievement—or as some participants characterized it, jealousy. Of the 14 participants who believed that female students engage more often in academically dishonest practices than male students, nine suggested that their beliefs can be attributed to females' Islamic attire. In Kuwait, which is an Islamic country, the vast majority of females wear Islamic attire consisting of head covers and face veils. According to the responses of the nine participants, females' Islamic attire facilitates dishonest academic practices such as cheating on examinations using hidden electronic hands-off devices, or even whispering during examinations without being noticed. Additionally, according to the participants' perceptions, females can easily sign attendance sheets on behalf of their absent classmates because lecturers—especially male lecturers, who are religiously forbidden to see female students' hair and faces—find it difficult to recognize female students wearing Islamic attire.

"Our faces are covered!... we can whisper during tests without being noticed." (Merry)

"I would use hidden electronic hands-off devices if I dressed like a female… nobody would notice." (James)

Six of the abovementioned 14 participants who believed that female students engage in academically dishonest practices more often than male students attributed their beliefs to competitive achievement, which they alleged is far more widespread among female students compared to their male counterparts.

"They [females] study harder and cheat more than males because of their jealousy of each other." (Catharine)

"My sister is studying here and she doesn't care about her grade, provided it is higher than that of her fellow females." (Rob)

In relation to students' GPA, the students were asked to define what types of students they would consider higher achievers at the CBE. Most of the participants reported that students with GPAs that are higher than three (out of four) are considered higher achievers. The rationale for their definition is that only students who achieve higher than three are eligible for grants and scholarships. Nonetheless, 12 of the 20 participants believed that there is no link between students' GPA and academic dishonesty. Surprisingly, three participants indicated that students with higher GPAs are more likely to engage in academically dishonest practices than students with lower GPAs—and that is how the dishonest students obtain higher GPAs. In general, however, and except for five participants who believed that students with lower GPAs are more likely to be involved in academic dishonesty than are students with higher GPAs, the findings suggested that dishonest academic practices are widespread among both low- and high-achieving students because it is easy to engage in academically dishonest practices without being caught.

"There is no logical reason that students with high GPAs do not cheat when they can do so with almost zero risk" (James)

Additionally, according to three of the participants, it would be unfair for students with higher GPAs to study honestly when there is a possibility of receiving lower grades than academically dishonest students.

"Some of my fellow students are very bright and yet they cheat because it would be unfair for them to study hard and get the same grades as cheaters." (Sara)

"Honestly, I have a high GPA, and I cheat to get even higher grades." (Hayah)

The students were also asked to define who they consider to be older students in the CBE. Generally, the participants' responses suggested that students who are 22 or older are regarded as "old". According to 12 of the participants, the reason for choosing 22 as the age beyond which students are considered older students is that the vast majority of the CBE's students entered at age 18 and graduated at age 22. With respect to the

possible association between age and academic dishonesty, three participants believed that older students are more academically dishonest than younger students because they do not have time to study: according to these participants, most older students are married and busy raising children. Four participants indicated that younger students are academically dishonest because they are "busy playing video games and usually go out for fun," as one participant observed. Conversely, 13 participants believed that there is no relationship between age and academic dishonesty. According to them, regardless of a student's age, there is no reason not to become involved in academically dishonest practices.

> "Who knows! Nobody cares about age… both old and young students cheat because they can get higher grades. Why would they [old students] put themselves in a disadvantaged position? It would be unfair." (James)
>
> "Studying is time consuming for both old and young students." (Hayah)

Examination of the assumptions of rational choice theory. Based on the three key assumptions of rational choice theory, this section consists of three sub-themes: (a) the benefits of engaging in academic dishonesty; (b) the certainty of detection; and (c) the severity of the sanctions.

The benefits of engaging in academic dishonesty. All of the participants indicated that the direct benefit of engaging in academically dishonest practices is to obtain higher grades than one can ordinarily earn without engaging in such practices. Of the 20 participants interviewed, nine suggested that in addition to obtaining higher grades, a student engages in academic dishonesty to save time. This is because, according to the participants, studying is time-consuming. Eight of the participants believed that some students engage in such practices, because they want to obtain higher grades than their friends. Three participants added that some students would engage in academically dishonest practices to obtain very high GPAs so that they can gain grants and/or scholarships enabling them to continue their studies abroad for masters and doctorate degrees at the CBE's expense. Two participants suggested that some students make new friends by practicing academic dishonesty.

> "Students cheat to get high grades, of course." (Bader)
>
> "Most of the courses we take require memorization, which takes time, whereas they can crib note the entire subject in ten minutes." (Jasem)
>
> "Studying is time-consuming." (Hayah)
>
> "People cheat to get scholarships for study in America or Britain, incurring no expenses." (Sara)
>
> "They [academically dishonest students] get grants and scholarships… some cheaters make new friends because they are seen as helpful people." (Sara)

It was noted that none of the participants made any indication that their future careers could potentially benefit from their academic dishonesty. This is not surprising, however, because the Kuwaiti government guarantees all Kuwaitis jobs with the same salary ladder. In other words, once students graduate from the CBE, they will become teachers at governmental schools and will all have the same starting salary.

The certainty of detection. Eighteen participants agreed that the certainty of being detected while engaging in academically dishonest practices is relatively low.

> "They [the students] can do it [cheat] with almost zero risk… the classes are very crowded… some lecturers have more than 80 students in each class although there should be far fewer." (James)
>
> "I have been studying here for year and a half and I can't think of any incident of such a thing [detection of academic dishonesty], although it is very common [academic dishonesty]." (Wilson)

Some participants insisted that the certainty of detection is even lower for female students in Islamic attire.

> "They [the students] can make it [cheat] with almost zero risk, especially female students, as I told you earlier [because of their Islamic attire]." (James)
>
> "It's very difficult to detect a female student who, for example, cheats on examination or signs attendance sheets on behalf of her friends." (Mai)
>
> "I know so many female students who don't wear Islamic attire off-campus, but they wear it here because it helps them cheat or engage in many of the forms of dishonesty that you mentioned earlier without being caught." (Salwa)

One student considered only one form of academic dishonesty—namely, buying papers from the Internet—as easily detected. However, he added:

> "Therefore, students no longer buy papers from the Internet… there are specialized shops where they can buy papers that are not on the Internet." (Khaled)

Severity of the sanctions. The question of "the severity of the formal sanctions when a student is caught with an academically dishonest practice" resulted in somewhat shocking responses. The data analysis revealed that most of the participants are unfamiliar with penalties for academic dishonesty. Indeed, the responses of some participants sounded more like questions than statements.

> "I don't know, perhaps zero?" (Tariq)

"Probation?" (Mai)

"A first warning?" (Bader)

Eleven participants indicated that a student might only be given zero in the course in which s/he was found to have been academically dishonest. The student would then retake the course with a different lecturer.

"They would be given zero of course… it's not a big deal, though, they can take the course again and choose a more lenient lecturer." (Salwa)

Three added that the lecturer would decide whether to give them a zero on the task in which they had been academically dishonest or to force them to drop the course or even the entire semester. One of those three participants, who is a senior female student, summarized the other students' responses as follows:

"It depends on the lecturer himself whether to give them zero or to kick them out for a semester… some would be content with blaming the cheater." (Rema)

The participants were also asked about informal sanctions for academic dishonesty. This question resulted in largely consistent responses. According to most of the participants, embarrassment is the only informal sanction for academic dishonesty. Interestingly, the participants' responses suggested that they would be embarrassed more by the lecturer than by their friends or families. Indeed, eight students did not make any mention of their families when responding to this question.

"No, I don't think they would feel ashamed because everybody does it… they would be embarrassed but not ashamed… they wouldn't care about their friends because most of them are cheaters too… their embarrassment would be caused by the lecturer because being caught cheating would really be embarrassing." (Jabber)

"My friends cheat too so they are no problem, the problem is the lecturer… no not my family, my mother takes me to the photocopying shop to make crib notes (laughter)." (Samiyah)

"My family would not know and even if they do it would not be a problem… I would look stupid if my friends know about it [being caught cheating] … this is just my guess as I told you earlier it's unlikely to happen [being caught cheating]." (Omar)

The participants were asked whether they believe that these formal and informal sanctions are enough to prevent students from engaging in academic dishonesty. Only four students indicated that they are "quite enough," as one female participant said.

"Yes, I think they [sanctions] are enough… they can't kill them [cheaters]!" (Samiyah)

The other 16 students suggested that such sanctions are not enough simply because academic dishonesty remains widespread.

"What you talking about! If it was a deterrent you wouldn't find it [academic dishonesty] so often." (Rema)

"I don't think students will stop cheating because they may take zero for which they can compensate later… that's if, and only if, they are caught." (Salwa)

"No, they are not enough [the sanctions] and students will continue cheating." (Ali)

"Only permanent expulsion from the College would be severe." (Ali)

"Zero and embarrassment… what a good deal!… No, they won't stop [cheating]." (Jabber)

Finally, the participants were asked whether they would consider a survey question about the form and frequency of their academic dishonesty as a threatening question. All of the students indicated that such questions would not be not threatening provided their names are not disclosed.

Phase 1: Conclusion

Phase 1 was crucial because it was preliminary and informative with respect to the construction of the questionnaire for the students. Indeed, without the qualitative findings of Phase 1, we would have focused on our biases or our perceptions of academic dishonesty, which could be limited. Most importantly, however, the following four alternative hypotheses were generated based on the findings in Phase 1:

Hypothesis 1: Female students engage in academic dishonesty more often than their male counterparts.

Null Hypothesis 1: Student's academic dishonesty is not related to their gender.

Null Hypothesis 2: Students' academic dishonesty is not related to their academic achievement as measured by their GPAs.

Null Hypothesis 3: Students' academic dishonesty is not related to their age.

Hypothesis 4: The assumptions of the rational choice theory explain why academic dishonesty is common among CBE students (benefits of engaging in academic dishonesty, certainty of detection, severity of sanctions). *Null Hypothesis 4:* The assumptions of the rational choice theory do not explain why academic dishonesty is common among CBE students.

These four hypotheses were examined in Phase 2.

Phase 2: Students' Questionnaire Survey

The following sections present the details of Phase 2 of this research. It includes a description of the sample, the procedures, and the measurement of the variables. These sections are followed by a discussion of the analyses

and the results.

Sample. The target population of this study was all 12,833 of the CBE's students (Alsuwaileh & Alradaan, 2015). The sample was selected from this population using a cluster-sampling method. Twenty classes out of 202 were chosen at random (the mean class size was 64 students). The result of this cluster-sampling method was 1,193 students from all year levels. Participation was voluntary and anonymous, but 58 students exercised their right to nonparticipation by not completing the questionnaire either in whole or in part. Thus, the number of processed questionnaires was 1,135 (589 females and 537 males). This number comprises 8.8% of the CBE's students; and it represents a 95% response rate.

Procedures. Data were collected using a self-administered questionnaire that was entirely constructed based on the findings of Phase 1, namely, the student interviews. The participants were presented with a hypothetical student named "Sabah" (a gender-neutral name) who studies at their college and engages in the nine academically dishonest practices derived from Phase 1 (see participants' definition of academic dishonesty). Additionally, the findings of Phase 1 regarding the benefits and certainty of detection and the severity of the sanctions were used as Sabah's beliefs in relation to academic dishonesty in her or his context.

Measurement of variables. The dependent variable was the participants' self-reporting on the extent to which they are like Sabah, who studies at their college and becomes involved in the nine academically dishonest practices. The dependent variable was measured on a single 11-point scale ranging from 0 (not like Sabah at all) to 10 (typically like Sabah). The participants were also asked to identify the academically dishonest practices (of the nine identified practices) in which they have engaged.

The independent variables included the benefits of academic dishonesty, the certainty of detection, the severity of the sanctions, and three demographic variables: gender, age and GPA. These independent variables were measured as follows.

The benefits of academic dishonesty. Sabah's beliefs about the benefits of engaging in academic dishonesty were derived from the findings of Phase 1. Sabah believes that engaging in academically dishonest practices help her or him obtain higher grades, save time, obtain higher marks than her or his friends, gain bursaries and scholarships, and make new friends. The participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they agree with Sabah's beliefs about the benefits of engaging in academic dishonesty on a single 11-point scale ranging from 0 (I do not agree with Sabah at all) to 10 (I completely agree with Sabah).

Certainty of detection. Participants' perceptions of the certainty of detection were measured using a single 11-point scale, which asked them to indicate the extent to which they agree with Sabah, who believes that she or he will not be caught by her or his lecturers, although she or he often engages in the nine academically dishonest practices. The scale ranges from 0 (I do not agree with Sabah at all) to 10 (I completely agree with Sabah).

Severity of the sanctions. On a single 11-point scale ranging from 0 (I do not agree with Sabah at all) to 10 (I completely agree with Sabah), the participants were required to indicate the extent to which they agree with Sabah, who believes that although it would be embarrassing to be caught by her or his lecturers, she or he will not stop engaging in the nine academically dishonest practices because the sanctions will not be severe.

Demographics. Participants were asked to indicate their gender: female or male. Drawing on the participants' definition of what constitutes old or young students in Phase 1, the participants' age was measured by asking them to report whether they were at least 22 years of age or younger than 22 years of age. Likewise, based on the participants' definition of academically high and low achievers in Phase 1, GPA was measured by asking the participants to indicate whether their GPA was lower than 3.0 (out of 4.0) or 3.0 or higher. The demographic variables were included to examine the impact of individual traits upon engaging in academically dishonest practices.

Phase 2: Findings

The findings section presents subsections on the questionnaire reliability, academic dishonesty, and types of academically dishonest practices. These subsections are followed by subsections labeled Hypotheses 1, 2, 3, and 4.

Questionnaire reliability. The questionnaire was found to have good internal consistency. The Cronbach's alpha for the questionnaire was ($\alpha = .838$).

Academic dishonesty. Of the participants, 77.1 percent self-reported the degree of their engagement in academically dishonest practices, that is, the extent to which they were like Sabah, as five or greater on a scale of 11, with 10 being typically like Sabah and 0 being not at all like Sabah. A 10 was self-reported by 3.2% of the participants, that is, these participants indicated that they were typically like Sabah. Only 4.2% (48 participants) of the participants reported zero engagement in academically dishonest practices, that is, who indicated on the scale that they were not at all like Sabah. The mean response related to the extent to which the participants engage in academically dishonest practices was 6.69, with a standard deviation of 2.603.

Types of academically dishonest practices. According to the perceptions of the participants and across the range of the nine academically dishonest practices displayed in Table 1, "asking about examinations from

someone who has already taken them" appeared to be the most common academically dishonest practice at the CBE—79.9% of the participants self-reported engagement in this practice. Cheating on formal examinations was the second most-common academically dishonest practice, as reported by 69.5% of the participants. Conversely, "taking an examination for someone else or having someone else take an examination for them" is the least common academically dishonest practice, as only 8.6% of participants indicated involvement in this practice.

Table 1 *Academically Dishonest Practices and the Percentage of Participants' Self-Reporting Engagement in Each Practice*

Practices	**Total**
Asking about examinations from someone who has already taken them	79.9
Cheating on formal examinations	69.5
Visiting a lecturer to influence grades	61.7
Turning in work done by someone else as one's own	60.6
Buying papers	53.1
Signing attendance sheets on behalf of absent classmates	52.7
Lying about medical or other circumstances to receive special consideration from examiners	50.3
Plagiarism	16.1
Taking an examination for someone else or having someone else take an examination for them	8.6

Research hypothesis 1. Alternative hypothesis 1 posits that "female students engage in academic dishonesty more often than their male counterparts." A t-test was used to compare the means of male (n= 537) and female (n= 589) participants on the academic dishonesty variable. As predicted, female students were found to engage in academic dishonesty more often than male students (t = 5.115, p < .01). The academic dishonesty means were 6.44 for male participants and 6.92 for their female counterparts.

Research hypothesis 2 (null). A t-test was carried out to address hypothesis 2, which asserts that "students' academic dishonesty is not related to students' academic achievement as measured by their GPA." As defined by the students interviewed (see Phase 1), the participants were divided into two levels: students with higher GPAs (3.0 or above out of 4.0) and students with lower GPAs (less than 3.0). The results confirmed hypothesis 2 (t = -.804, p < 0.01). The academic dishonesty mean of students with higher GPAs (n= 323) was 6.67, whereas that of students with lower GPAs (n= 812) was 6.75. This means both low- and high-achieving students engage in academic dishonesty at levels that are not different to a statistically significant degree.

Research hypothesis 3 (null). A t-test was carried out to address hypothesis 3, which stated that "students' academic dishonesty is not related to students' age." As defined by the students interviewed, the participants were divided into the following two levels: older (22 years or older) and younger (younger than 22 years). The results confirmed hypothesis 2 (t = -.710, p < .01). The academic dishonesty mean of older students (n= 189) was 6.77, while that of the younger students (n= 946) was 6.68. Thus, academic dishonesty is practiced by both older and younger students without significant differences.

Research hypothesis 4. Hypothesis 4 posits that "the assumptions of rational choice theory explain why academic dishonesty is common among the students at the CBE." Based on the assumptions of rational choice theory, academic dishonesty is common among the students at the CBE because the benefits of engaging in academic dishonesty are high, whereas the certainty of detection and the severity of the sanctions if dishonesty is detected are low. To examine hypothesis 4, and after confirming that the assumptions of linearity and normality were not violated, a multiple regression model was constructed with academic dishonesty as the dependent variable and benefits, certainty of detection and severity of sanctions as the independent variables. As shown in Table 2, the linear combination of these three assumptions of rational choice theory was significantly related to academic dishonesty (F =307.158, p < .05). The sample multiple correlation coefficient was .67, indicating that a significant amount (45%) of the variance of the students' engagement in academic dishonesty can be accounted for using the linear combination of the assumptions of rational choice theory (see Table 3 and Table 4). It is obvious from Table 4 that each of the three assumptions of the rational choice theory significantly explains why academic dishonesty is common among CBE students.

Table 2 *Results of Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) examining whether the assumptions of rational choice theory predict academic dishonesty*

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	1308.295	3	436.098	307.158	0.000*
Residual	1605.776	1131	1.420		
Total	2914.070	1134			

* Statistically significant at the 95% confidence level. Notes: **Predictors** = benefits, certainty of detection and severity of sanctions. **Dependent variable** = Academic dishonesty (the extent to which you are like Sabah). **df** = degrees of freedom. **F** = Fisher F-statistics. **Sig**. = the significance of F statistics.

Table 3 *Model Summary of the Extent to which the Linear Combination of the Assumptions of Rational Choice Theory Can Account for Academic Dishonesty*

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.670[a]	0.449	0.447	1.192

[a] **Predictors** = benefits, certainty of detection and severity of sanctions. **Dependent variable** = Academic dishonesty (the extent to which you are like Sabah).

Table 4 *Coefficients[a] of the Assumptions of Rational Choice Theory and Academic Dishonesty*

Model	**Unstandardized Coefficients**		**t**	**Sig.**
	B	**Std. Error**		
(Constant)	1.697	0.175	9.722	0.000*
Benefits	0.241	0.029	8.326	0.000*
Certainty of detection	0.376	0.038	10.020	0.000*
Severity of sanctions	0.046	0.019	2.381	0.017*

[a] Dependent Variable: Academic dishonesty.

*Statistically significant at the 95% confidence level.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study consisted of two sequential phases: student interviews (Phase 1) and student questionnaires (Phase 2). In Phase 1, qualitative interviews were carried out to explore students' perceptions regarding academic dishonesty. Phase 1 was important, because little was known in relation to academic dishonesty in Kuwait, where our study was conducted. Indeed, Phase 1 not only resulted in the generation of four alternative hypotheses, which were tested in Phase 2, but it also enabled us to address students' perceptions of what constitutes academic dishonesty in the CBE context. Additionally, Phase 1 was crucial, because it allowed for the triangulation of its findings with those of Phase 2. The Phase 1 responses also functioned as illustrations of the students' questionnaire findings.

The findings of Phase 1 revealed that academic dishonesty is very common at the CBE. Phase 2 confirmed that academic dishonesty is widespread at the CBE. The findings of both phases suggested that "asking about examinations from someone who has already taken them," "cheating on formal examinations" and "visiting a lecturer to influence grades" are very common practices at the CBE. It is difficult to determine why the latter practices are the most common among the students at the CBE. However, our data contain signals that indicate that these practices have a relatively lower certainty of detection and severity of sanctions compared to other practices. For example, in Phase 2 the practice of "taking an examination for someone else or having someone else take an examination for them" was found to be the least common dishonest academic practice. One might argue that taking an examination for someone else is too serious to be common even in a context in which academic dishonesty is very common because it requires substantial impersonation. What supports this interpretation is that this practice was common among female students, the vast majority of whom wear Islamic attire that makes them quite difficult to identify, whereas the practice is not common among male students because the certainty of detection for males would be higher given that their faces are not covered.

Interestingly, plagiarism was not found to be common at the CBE. This is an unexpected finding, because it is inconsistent with the mainstream research findings. This finding must be interpreted with caution. As far as we can tell, a standard translation of "plagiarism" does not exist in Arabic and any translations that do exist might be difficult to understand. Indeed, in the students' interviews, we noticed that most of the participants were not familiar with the word "plagiarism" or its translation in Arabic. Moreover, it is rather difficult to accept the participants' responses at face value and infer that plagiarism is not widely practiced among CBE students. According to Pavela (1978), plagiarism is the "deliberate adoption or reproduction of ideas or words or statements of another person as one's own without acknowledgement" (p. 78). If we agreed with the latter widely accepted definition of plagiarism (Whitley & Keith-Spiegel, 2002), then we must accept that plagiarism is common among the said students, because they were found to engage heavily in practices to which Pavela's (1978) definition of plagiarism might apply, including "turning in work done by someone else as one's own" and "buying papers."

In Phase 2, consistent with the findings of Phase 1, academic dishonesty was found to be committed by female students more often than by male students. This result is inconsistent with the mainstream related literature, which usually reports the opposite (e.g., Baird, 1980; Kuntz & Butler, 2014; McCabe & Trevino, 1997). Nevertheless, according to Alsuwaileh and Alradaan (2015), the phenomenon of academic dishonesty is context-related. Indeed, a contextual interpretation for this result is that it was apparently noticed that the vast majority of female students at the CBE wear Islamic attire. As reported by the students interviewed in Phase 1, females' head and face veils may facilitate dishonest academic practices such as "cheating on examinations" by using hidden electronic hands-off devices, whispering during examinations without being identified and "taking an examination for someone else or having someone else take an examination for them." Additionally, and as

revealed in Phase 1, females can easily sign attendance sheets on behalf of their absent classmates because lecturers—especially male lecturers—find it difficult to recognize the identity of female students wearing Islamic attire. It is worth stating that Phase 2 statistically confirmed that female participants reported engaging in the latter-mentioned practices noticeably more often than their male counterparts. Phase 1 also offered another possible reason that female students engage in academically dishonest practices more often than their male counterparts. According to some of the students interviewed, competitiveness with regard to achievement is enormously widespread among female students compared to their male counterparts, motivating some female students to seek to obtain high grades regardless of how such grades are obtained.

Compatible with the findings of Phase 1, the findings from the students' questionnaires revealed that no significant differences appeared between older and younger students and their engaging in academically dishonesty practices. This result is also inconsistent with the previous research, which indicates that younger students tend to engage in dishonest academic practices more often than older students (e.g., Baird, 1980; Franklin-Stokes & Newstead, 1995; McCabe & Trevino, 1997). Phase 1 provides possible explanations for why there was no difference between older and younger students in the frequency of engagement in academically dishonest practices. The findings from the student interviews demonstrated that both older and younger students engage in academically dishonest practices because of their desire to obtain high grades. The responses of the students interviewed suggested that younger and older students do not have time to study. The analysis revealed that while younger students are busy "playing video games and having fun," older students tend to be "married and busy raising their children." The responses of the participants suggested that regardless of students' age, they feel that they would be "left disadvantaged" if they did not engage in academically dishonest practices.

In relation to students' GPAs and in line with the findings of Phase 1, the findings of Phase 2 demonstrated no statistically significant difference in the frequency of engagement in academically dishonest practices between students with higher GPAs and those with lower GPAs. This finding also seemed to be at odds with most of the related studies in which students with higher GPAs were found to undertake fewer dishonest academic practices and vice versa (e.g., Baird, 1980; Bunn et al., 1992; Lipson & McGavern, 1993; McCabe & Trevino, 1997). The participants in this study did not follow such a pattern, given that dishonest academic practices were widespread among both low- and high-achieving students. The findings of Phase 1 provided a contextual explanation for this paradox. According to McCabe and Trevino (1997), students with lower GPAs are more likely to undertake the risk of engaging in dishonest academic practices, because they have more to gain and less to lose, whereas those with higher GPAs have a great deal to lose if caught engaging in academically dishonest practices. In Phase 1, the students interviewed reported that academic dishonesty is common among both low- and high-achieving students, because the risk of detection and the severity of sanctions related to engaging in academically dishonest practices is rather low.

More importantly though, this study sought to investigate whether rational choice theory can explain why academically dishonest practices are common at the CBE. Rational choice theory assumes that individuals are rational beings who can calculate the costs and benefits of their behavior in specific situations (Ogilvie & Stewart, 2010; Sattler et al., 2013). The findings of Phase 1 not only suggested that the rational choice framework had a high potential for explaining academic dishonesty but also provided contextual specifications of the benefits and sanctions at the CBE. Phase 2 provided empirical evidence that the rational choice theory is suitable for explaining why CBE students engage in academically dishonest practices. This finding is consistent with previous research (e.g., Tibbetts & Myers, 1999; Simkin & McLeod, 2009; Sattler et al., 2013) wherein university students were found to engage in academically dishonest practices more if the relative benefits of the dishonest academic practice exceed the costs. The estimated model of rational choice theory accounted for 45% of the total variance in academic dishonesty, which is clearly a significant amount. Consequently, one can argue that academically dishonest practices are widespread among CBE students at the CBE because the benefits of academic dishonesty are high, whereas the certainty of detection and severity of the sanctions are relatively low.

In the context of our study, the benefits of engaging in academically dishonest practices included receiving higher grades, saving time, receiving higher marks than friends, receiving scholarships for masters and doctorate degrees, and making new friends. The findings of our study suggested that the certainty of detection is rather low, especially for female students because of the Islamic attire that hides their heads and faces. Some of the students interviewed attributed the low certainty of detection to the fact that class sizes at the CBE are large. The findings of Phase 2 confirmed that the class sizes are indeed large, with an average of 64 students in each class. In relation to the severity of the sanctions, the findings of Phase 1 suggested that students were unfamiliar with the sanctions for academic dishonesty. In Phase 2 and among the three assumptions of rational choice, the students' responses related to the severity of the sanctions had the greatest standard deviation, meaning that there was some disagreement concerning the sanctions for engaging in academically dishonest practices. This confirms that many CBE students are indeed unfamiliar with the severity of the sanctions for academic dishonesty. This is perhaps because it is very rare for CBE students to be caught engaging in academic dishonesty and therefore most CBE students do not know how severe the sanctions can be.

In conclusion, among the three demographic factors studied—age, gender and GPA—only the students' gender matters in regard to engaging in academically dishonest practices at the CBE. Female students appeared to engage in dishonest academic practices more often, and it is likely that this occurred because of the nature of their clothes (Islamic attire). The assumptions of rational choice theory explained a significant amount of academic dishonesty in the context of the CBE. It is very probable that academic dishonesty is so common among the students at the CBE, because they can reap benefits, whereas the certainty of detection and severity of sanctions are thought to be relatively low. Accordingly, we recommend (a) using female proctors so that they can search suspicious female students without religious restrictions, (b) finding ways to increase the certainty of detecting academically dishonest students and, (c) making clear the availability and the need for sanctions.

Research Limitations

Statistically speaking, although the assumptions of the rational choice theory accounted for 45% of the total variance in academic dishonesty at the CBE, which is certainly a significant amount, this result implies that other relevant factors have not been included in this study. Indeed, as stated earlier in this paper, we chose the rational choice theory because of our 'subjective' experience and observations from working closely with students, during which time we noticed that many of them would engage in academically dishonest practices. because they would benefit from such practices, whereas the certainty of detection and severity of sanctions would be relatively low. However, we make no claim that rational choice theory is better than any of the other competing frameworks—for example, social bond theory, social learning theory or the self-efficiency theory—in explaining academic dishonesty. On the contrary, we would encourage other researchers to use different frameworks to provide even better understanding of why academic dishonesty is so widespread at the CBE.

This study attempted to investigate the extent to which rational choice theory explains why academic dishonesty, as "a concept," is very common at the CBE. In other words, we did not investigate the seriousness of each academically dishonest practice because in this study, academic dishonesty was viewed as a comprehensive concept. Accordingly, we make no claim that the benefits, certainty of detection, and the severity of the sanctions for each of these practices is equal.

The CBE was chosen for this study only because it was accessible to the researcher. Thus, the generalizability of the findings across other institutions of higher education in Kuwait is limited. Furthermore, generalizability outside of Kuwait may be even more limited.

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