

The Cheating Practices of Kuwaiti EFL College Students: Attitudes and Opinions

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Abstract—This study is designed to inspect the attitudes of Kuwaiti college students of English as a foreign language (EFL) towards cheating on English exams and their opinions about the factors underlying their cheating behaviour. A mixed-method approach was used to collect and analyse the data. The participants were 182 Kuwaiti EFL students who answered a survey that collected quantitative and qualitative data. Microsoft Excel Software was used to analyse the quantitative data. Thematic analysis was conducted to analyse the qualitative data. It was found that although the participants held a negative attitude towards cheating, they showed a lax stance towards some cheating methods, namely, using leaked exams and learning them from other students. This lax stance raises ethical concerns and highlights the need for intervention. Analysis of participants' opinions revealed various personal and contextual factors affecting students' cheating practices: language instructors' corrupt practices, societal pressure, and students' poor language proficiency levels. Our findings largely echo the literature on college students' cheating practices, precisely research on EFL students' cheating behaviour. They also reflect the Kuwaiti EFL context in which they were identified. Practical implications and recommendations for future research are indicated.

Index Terms—academic corruption, academic integrity, exam cheating, EFL college students, English language proficiency

I. INTRODUCTION

Academic dishonesty, a long-standing concern in higher education, refers to unethical acts or misbehaviours that breach fairness and honesty principles and can manifest in various forms, including plagiarism, falsifying documents, and exam cheating (Holden et al., 2021). Cheating on exams, which is the focus of this study, is the most common type of academic dishonesty among college students (Jenkins et al., 2023). According to King et al. (2009), cheating is a transgression against academic integrity by which students take an unfair advantage that misrepresents their ability and grasp of knowledge. Academic institutions usually provide students with a code of conduct that outlines academic integrity with examples of academic misbehaviours. However, the fact that many students do not adhere to these established standards of behavioural conduct raises serious ethical concerns.

Because academic integrity is crucial in education and cheating is pervasive among college students, researchers have shown interest in investigating such misbehaviour. Studies have shown that students use various methods to cheat (e.g., Choi, 2019; Odongo et al., 2021). Cheating has also been shown to be associated with multiple factors, which can be classified into two major categories: personal and contextual (Noorbehbahani et al., 2022). Personal factors are related to individual characteristics, including academic performance, age, gender, moral attitudes, and learning motivation. Contextual factors are related to the student's social and learning environments, including college cheating policies, teaching methods, parental pressure, and the behaviours and attitudes of teachers and peers towards cheating. Much of the research on this topic has been conducted worldwide, whereby scholars have delved into students' perspectives and opinions to understand this phenomenon. However, relatively little is known about it from a Kuwaiti perspective, precisely the Kuwaiti context of EFL. Against this background, the present study aims to provide a broad insight into the cheating behaviour of Kuwaiti EFL college students. It seeks to identify the methods they use to cheat and the factors contributing to their cheating behaviour by investigating their attitudes and opinions of cheating.

A. Research Aims and Questions

The present study is centred on the cheating practices of Kuwaiti EFL college students. It aims to explore their attitudes towards cheating on English exams and their opinions about the factors underlying their cheating behaviour. Following the aims, our research questions are as follows:

1. What are the attitudes of Kuwaiti EFL students towards cheating on English exams?
2. What are the opinions of Kuwaiti EFL students about the factors influencing students' cheating behaviour on English exams?

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B. Significance of the Study

The study was motivated by Kuwaiti students' cheating behaviour. In 2023, local newspapers referred to leaked exams distributed among students. The Ministry of Interior, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, arrested several networks that had created WhatsApp cheating groups to which hundreds of students subscribed for a fee. Students obtained the questions and answers of several exams, including, but not limited to, English tests. The students were also offered hidden earpieces through which they were fed the answers.

It is well established that cheating negatively affects the quality of education and reduces the validity and trust of students' assessments. However, research on such academic misbehaviour in the Kuwaiti educational context is scarce. Much of the existing body of research investigating cheating includes a wide range of worldwide educational contexts, for example, North America (e.g., Jenkins et al., 2023; King et al., 2009), Europe (e.g., Bacon et al., 2020; Chudzicka-Czupala et al., 2013), and some parts of Asia (e.g., Arab & Ofran, 2023; Costley, 2019). These studies have shed light on the cheating practices of college students and the drivers of academic dishonesty. However, their findings cannot necessarily be generalised to other socio-cultural and educational contexts. Research points to socio-cultural factors affecting students' academic behaviour (Noorbehbahani et al., 2022). Nevertheless, different cultures have different social expectancies and attitudes towards academic performance, leading students to various behaviours. In some cultures, cheating is socially acceptable and not ethically wrong. For example, Chudzicka-Czupala et al. (2013) show that Swiss students attach a significantly higher standard of honesty to academic behaviour, given that social consent to academic cheating is low. On the other hand, Ukrainian and Polish students have a positive attitude towards cheating due to the social acceptance of such misbehaviour. Research presented by Maeda (2021) also demonstrates that Cambodian parents consider cheating a fair practice for success. They are actively involved in their children's cheating, putting them under stress and expecting them to obtain good grades. Therefore, given the influence of socio-cultural factors on ethical behaviour, it could be assumed that Kuwaiti students may differ in their attitudes towards cheating and their justifications for committing academic misconduct because of their different social and cultural heritage.

A few publications, however, have investigated the cheating practices of Kuwaiti college students (e.g., Alsuwaileh et al., 2016; Erguvan, 2022). Nevertheless, while these studies have indicated high rates of cheating among students, they were not concerned with the cheating behaviour of EFL students. Students' fields of study have been constructed as potential determinants for cheating. This is related to subject difficulty playing a role in this behaviour. It is shown that where English is learnt as a foreign language, EFL students often face difficulties acquiring it, therefore resorting to cheating on exams (Arab & Ofran, 2023). Given that English is learnt in Kuwait as a foreign language, the question, thus, arises of whether it constitutes a source of difficulty for students, leading them to cheat on exams. This is what the present study aims to explore. Relatedly, in analysing the advantages and drawbacks of online distance teaching in Kuwait, Al-Abdullah and Almutairi (2024) referred to instances of EFL college students' cheating behaviour reported by EFL instructors. The teachers revealed that cheating was difficult to control, referring to some of the cheating methods used by the students. Nevertheless, the researchers did not delve into students' opinions and attitudes towards cheating and the factors behind their cheating behaviour. The results of their study cannot be undermined, and the noticeable cheating behaviour among Kuwaiti EFL college students requires more focused attention. Therefore, this study attempts to inspect cheating from students' perspectives to build a better understanding of this misbehaviour.

We believe our investigation can help understand the cheating practices of Kuwaiti EFL college students and identify the factors underlying their misbehaviour by exploring their attitudes and opinions. Such investigation should help develop strategies to control cheating and manage the factors influencing their propensity to engage in academic misbehaviour, thereby fostering the integrity of the educational system and the quality of education. Thus, given the scarcity of research in the Kuwaiti EFL context and the negative effect of students' cheating on the quality of education, this paper explores the attitudes of Kuwaiti EFL students towards cheating and their opinions about the factors underlying their cheating behaviour. Consequently, this research contributes to the literature on EFL students' cheating behaviour by providing data from the Kuwaiti context. It aims to support Kuwait's educational system in maintaining academic integrity by providing valuable insights to policymakers, academic institutions, and EFL instructors.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Cheating Methods

Students resort to a variety of methods to cheat on exams. Investigating the cheating behaviour of American college students, McCabe (2005) found that they use cheat notes, learn the exam questions from other students who have already taken the exam, and help other students cheat. Similarly, Odongo et al. (2021) found that Ghanaian college students use body language and body parts to cheat during exams. The students were also reported to arrange their seating in a way that they could swap multiple-choice and true-false answers. Choi (2019) also reported that Korean college students take advantage of leaked exams. Other cheating techniques include but are not limited to writing on the arm or hand and hiding a note behind the ruler or clothes.

Students also take advantage of technology that has yielded more innovative cheating methods. According to Curran et al. (2011), the rise of technology has provided students with a broader spectrum of cheating opportunities, making cheating more sophisticated and complex to detect. Holden et al. (2021) also assert that technology has brought about

access to different cheating resources, making it easier, faster, and more convenient. They warn that technology raises new considerations that teachers have not previously considered. They maintain that it is easy for students in online exams to search the internet and communicate with each other through a messaging system to obtain answers. Empirical studies have demonstrated how college students resort to technology to cheat. Tindell and Bohlander (2012) reported that college students at a northeastern university cheated using text messaging. Similarly, Saleh and Meccawy (2021) found that Saudi EFL college students obtained exam answers through WhatsApp groups. Other cheating methods include impersonalising identity, sharing assignment files, and using the web to copy and paste the answers (Razek, 2014).

B. Factors Contributing to Cheating

Academic institutions usually provide students with a code of conduct that outlines academic integrity and provides examples of academic misbehaviours. However, many students do not adhere to the established standards of behavioural conduct. In the search for explanations, researchers have identified various personal and contextual factors that lead students to cheat on exams. According to Holden et al. (2021), there are many reasons why students may choose to depart from academic integrity. In an investigation of the reasons for Afghan EFL students' cheating behaviour, Arab and Orfan (2023) found that the participants cheated in courses they perceived as complex. Some students blamed their instructors for their poor pedagogical style. Other reasons included seeking better grades and insufficient time to prepare for the exams. In another study, Aljurf et al. (2020) cited peer student obligations, family pressure, and the desire to obtain a degree as reasons for Emirati college students' cheating behaviour. Rahimi and Goli (2016) reported that low achievement in EFL courses was a determining factor for Iranian EFL students to cheat. McCrohon and Nyland (2018) also reported poor English language skills as a driving force behind international Chinese students' cheating behaviour in Australian universities. Teachers' unethical and corrupt practices have also been identified as a reason for students' cheating behaviour. Some teachers change exam grades, alter attendance records, provide better treatment to favoured students, take bribes, and give good grades to those students who attend their private tutoring sessions. According to Maeda (2021), teachers' engagement in such practices creates a sense of injustice among students, leading the oppressed ones to cheat to compensate for teachers' unfair treatment.

Attitudes towards cheating have similarly been established as an important factor influencing students to cheat. Bolin (2004) argues that students are more prone to cheat if they harbour positive attitudes towards cheating, a view shared by several researchers (e.g., Chudzicka-Czupala et al., 2013; King et al., 2009; Rahimi & Goli, 2016). He suggests that there is a link between students' actual engagement in cheating and their tolerance for such misbehaviour. Alleyne and Phillips (2011) relatedly propose that if students favourably evaluate a cheating method, they are more likely to have behavioural intentions towards that method and eventually carry it out. The researchers observe that to explain a given behaviour, one should consider intentions shaped by attitudes towards the behaviour. Attitudes, they maintain, are rooted in individuals' beliefs about specific behaviours. Describing his views on the correlation between attitudes and cheating, Curtis (2023) similarly contends that the more cheating is acceptable by students, the more they are involved in it. He further claims that students' positive attitudes towards cheating predict their intentions to engage in such misbehaviours.

Empirical research has provided evidence that attitudes can predict students' cheating behaviour. Whitley (1998) found that American and Canadian college students who favoured cheating were more inclined to cheat than those who perceived it negatively. Similar findings were reported by Storch and Storch (2003), who investigated the attitudes of American college students towards cheating. Employing a self-reported method to explore the frequency of students' cheating and the extent to which they approve of specific acts of academic dishonesty, the researchers found a strong correlation between cheating and endorsement of such misbehaviour. Costley (2019) reported a similar correlation. Looking at the interview responses of a group of South Korean college students to gain insights into their attitudes and motivations for cheating, Costley (2019) observed that the students perceived cheating as a natural aspect of their learning experience. They expressed an accepting and permissive attitude towards cheating, presenting different justifications for their engagement in cheating, for example, insufficient time to study, course difficulties, and widespread cheating among students. The researcher concluded that attitudes were the most powerful predictors of students engaging in cheating. Similarly, Ahmadi (2012) surveyed one hundred thirty-two Iranian EFL students. The results revealed that cheating was quite common among the students who perceived it as normal behaviour. The students indicated that they enjoyed practising it and considered it an achievement. These studies support the argument that students' attitudes towards cheating determine their behaviour.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods research design to inspect the attitudes and opinions of Kuwaiti EFL students regarding exam cheating. According to Creswell and Creswell (2023), this design combines the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative approaches. By integrating these approaches in data collection and analysis, the study design is fortified, the findings are enriched, and the analysis is enhanced. As Creswell and Creswell (2023) highlight, this approach provides a deeper understanding of the research problem. In this study, a quantitative approach was used

to gauge the participants' attitudes towards cheating and to explore their opinions about the reasons behind their cheating behaviour. While a quantitative approach derived findings from statistics, a qualitative approach clarified these findings, allowing the participants to express their views and providing more insights into their opinions about the underlying reasons for their cheating behaviour. A survey containing both closed- and open-ended questions was used to collect quantitative and qualitative data from the informants, thereby capturing a comprehensive view of their attitudes and opinions of cheating on exams.

B. Participants

A convenience sampling approach was adopted to select the sample of the students. The researchers sent a link to the survey to academics teaching EFL courses in different colleges in Kuwait, asking them to share it with their students. While this approach may limit the generalisability of our findings, it allowed the participation of a diverse range of EFL students from different colleges with different characteristics, such as different EFL instructors and textbooks, teaching methods and pedagogical styles. A total of 182 Kuwaiti college students answered the survey: 65% were female, and 35% were male. 47.8% of the participants were in social science disciplines, followed by 33% from management disciplines and 19.2% from health and medicine sciences. The participants took an average of two EFL courses during their studies.

C. Data Collection Instrument and Procedure

The survey questions are widely used in the literature (e.g., Noorbehhani et al., 2022). They reflect the most common cheating methods among students and the different personal and contextual factors underlying their cheating behaviour. However, based on the study's aims, some items were modified to fit the EFL context. The survey began with an introductory paragraph outlining the study's purpose, the intended use of the provided data, and the procedures taken to protect the participants' privacy. This procedure ensured that students were making an informed decision to partake in this study. No personal information, such as names and contact details, was collected. However, certain information, such as gender, the field of study, and the number of EFL courses completed, was collected. The name of the academic institution was also collected to ensure that participants studied at different colleges in Kuwait. This, however, was not used in any way that would reveal the identity of the institutions or students.

Two sections followed the introductory part. The first section answered research question 1 and collected quantitative data to explore the informants' attitudes towards cheating. It included eight closed-ended items reflecting various cheating methods. The participants' attitudes were measured according to their approval of these methods, that is, whether they found them appropriate to use. A 5-point Likert semantic scale (Very Inappropriate, Somewhat Inappropriate, Neutral, Somewhat Appropriate, Very Appropriate) was the response format used. High scores indicated accepting attitudes of academic misbehaviour, whereas low scores indicated unaccepting attitudes. It is worth noting that the survey did not directly ask the students about their own experiences or involvement in cheating. Instead, it sought to explore their (dis)approval of the cheating methods. This method avoids demand characteristics whereby participants might feel threatened or uncomfortable conveying their practices. They, therefore, might provide desirable responses instead of honest answers. As Leustek (2017) highlights, demand characteristics can potentially bias the results, invalidating the study's outcomes.

The second section answered research question 2. It explored the informants' opinions regarding the reasons underlying students' cheating behaviour and included two subsections. The first subsection asked them to rate the reasons influencing students' cheating behaviour. It included 11 closed-ended items that collected quantitative data. The informants' responses were measured using a 5-point Likert scale (Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, Strongly Agree). High scores indicated approval of the suggested reason, while low scores indicated disapproval. The second subsection included one open-ended question that elicited qualitative data. It allowed the informants greater freedom to express their opinions. The question was as follows:

- What other reasons could lead students to cheat on English exams?

To establish its content validity, 20 EFL students (11 females, nine males) were randomly selected to pilot-test the survey. Necessary corrections were made according to their feedback. Content validity ensures that survey items are clear, comprehensive, and relevant to their intended purpose (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). The pilot test established confidence in proceeding with the survey regarding whether students would grasp the questions well. Google Forms was used to create the final version. A link to the survey was sent to academics through WhatsApp, asking them to forward it to their EFL students. The Cronbach's alpha for the attitude subscale (8 items) was $\alpha=0.85$, and for the factors subscale (11 items), it was $\alpha=0.89$, which suggests that the internal consistency reliabilities were high.

D. Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics such as frequency counting, percentages, mean, and standard deviation. Qualitative data were thematically analysed, and recurring patterns and themes were identified. Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework guided the themes' identification and analysis process. Their approach is arguably the most delineated method in the social sciences for conducting thematic analysis (Al-Abdullah & Almutairi, 2023). It is flexible and facilitates identifying and analysing themes in qualitative data. Thematic analysis was inductive, i.e., driven by the data itself.

IV. FINDINGS

A. Attitudes Towards Cheating

This section concerns the closed-ended survey questions meant to explore the informants' attitudes towards cheating, thereby answering research question 1. Table 1 demonstrates the results of their attitudes towards using different cheating methods.

TABLE 1
ATTITUDES TOWARDS CHEATING

	Very Inappropriate	Somewhat Inappropriate	Neutral	Somewhat Appropriate	Very Appropriate	Mean	SD
	%	%	%	%	%		
1. Opening the coursebook during exams.	44.5	28.6	18.1	4.9	3.8	1.95	2.22
2. Using cheat sheets.	47.8	34.1	8.2	8.8	1.1	1.81	2.02
3. Writing in the palms of the hands.	52.2	30.2	10.4	4.9	2.2	1.74	1.94
4. Using a hidden earpiece.	57.1	23.1	6.	5.5	8.2	1.84	2.19
5. Using the cell phone (e.g., WhatsApp or text messaging).	46.2	26.9	8.8	10.4	7.7	2.06	2.44
6. Peeking at classmates' exam papers.	35.7	26.9	18.7	12.6	6.	2.26	2.61
7. Learning the exam from other students who previously took it.	24.2	21.4	23.1	13.2	18.1	2.79	3.21
8. Using leaked exams.	34.6	19.8	17.	12.6	15.9	2.55	3.02
Overall Attitude						2.12	

As Table 1 shows, the overall mean score for the participants' attitudes towards cheating is 2.12, which reflects an unfavourable attitude. 73.1% of the participants found it inappropriate to open the coursebook during exams ($M=1.95$, $SD=2.22$), 81.9% expressed a negative attitude towards using cheat sheets ($M=1.81$, $SD=2.02$), and 82.4% had a negative attitude towards writing in the palm ($M=1.74$, $SD=1.94$). Furthermore, 80.2% of the participants found it inappropriate to use a hidden earpiece ($M=1.84$, $SD=2.19$), 73.1% expressed a negative attitude towards using a cell phone ($M=2.06$, $SD=2.44$), and 62.6% had a negative attitude towards peeking at other students' exam papers ($M=2.26$, $SD=2.61$). The participants' negative attitude towards cheating does not provide empirical support to the work of Ahmadi (2012) and Salehi and Gholampour (2021), who found that their Iranian EFL students held a positive attitude towards cheating. This finding also does not support the work of Saleh and Meccawy (2021), whereby Saudi EFL participants demonstrated a favourable attitude towards cheating.

The results also show that nearly half of the participants did not entertain a negative attitude towards some cheating behaviours: 31.3% displayed a positive attitude towards learning the exam from other students, and 23.1% demonstrated a neutral position ($M=2.79$, $SD=3.21$). Furthermore, 28.5% of the participants had a positive attitude towards using leaked exams, and 17% were neutral ($M=2.55$, $SD=3.02$). These rather lax attitudes towards some cheating behaviours raise ethical issues and reflect the stance that some cheating practices are tolerated. Such attitudes could imply that some participants are likely to exhibit the intention to engage in such practices. It could also be that they might have been involved in these practices. The participants' favouring of leaked exams echoes Choi's (2019) findings, in which he also reported that Korean college students take advantage of leaked exams.

B. Students' Opinions About the Factors Influencing Students' Cheating Behaviour

This section concerns the closed- and open-ended survey questions meant to explore the informants' opinions about the reasons underlying students' cheating behaviour, thereby addressing research question 2. Quantitative analysis of the closed-ended items is presented first, followed by qualitative analysis of the open-ended question.

(a). Reasons for Cheating: Quantitative Analysis

Results of the closed-ended items exploring the reasons for students' cheating behaviour are presented in Table 2.

TABLE 2
REASONS FOR CHEATING

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	SD
	%	%	%	%	%		
1. Insufficient time to study.	22.5	13.7	14.3	22.	27.5	3.18	3.64
2. Desire to get a higher grade.	4.4	3.3	10.4	15.9	65.9	4.35	4.53
3. Frequent absence from English classes.	22.	25.8	17.	17.6	17.6	2.82	3.24
4. Students' low English proficiency level.	13.2	17.6	22.5	14.3	32.4	3.35	3.72
5. Short time of the exam.	15.4	21.4	32.4	14.3	16.5	2.95	3.28
6. English teachers' poor pedagogical style.	15.9	19.8	29.1	20.9	14.3	2.97	3.3
7. Lack of connection between course materials and exam questions.	33.	19.8	19.8	12.1	15.4	2.57	3.02
8. Lack of proctoring.	19.8	23.6	29.1	14.3	13.2	2.77	3.12
9. Rules and policies on cheating are tolerant.	23.1	24.2	26.4	11.	15.4	2.71	3.1
10. Other students are cheating as well.	17.	29.1	25.3	11.	17.6	2.82	3.18
11. Parents demand high grades.	10.4	13.2	23.1	24.7	28.6	3.47	3.78
Overall Mean						3.08	

As Table 2 illustrates, the participants approved all the different personal and contextual factors as reasons that lead students to cheat, with an overall mean approval score of 3.08. However, several factors were rated higher than others. Students' desire to get a higher grade was the highest-rated factor ($M=4.35$, $SD=4.53$), followed by parents demanding high grades ($M=3.47$, $SD=3.78$), students' low English proficiency level ($M=3.35$, $SD=3.72$), and students' lack of exam preparation ($M=3.18$, $SD=3.64$). These findings are consistent with those reported in the academic dishonesty literature (e.g., Ahmadi, 2012; Salehi & Gholampour, 2021), whereby EFL students highly rated those reasons to justify their cheating. The other factors in the survey were less approved by the participants. The lack of connection between course materials and exam questions was the least approved factor ($M=2.57$, $SD=3.02$), followed by tolerance of cheating rules and policies ($M=2.71$, $SD=3.1$), lack of proctoring ($M=2.77$, $SD=3.12$), students' frequent absence ($M=2.82$, $SD=3.24$), and other students cheating ($M=2.82$, $SD=3.18$). However, nearly half of the participants were neutral regarding the short time of the tests ($M=2.95$, $SD=3.28$) and English teachers' poor pedagogical style ($M=2.97$, $SD=3.3$). Thus, according to these results, the most common reasons for students' cheating behaviour from the participants' points of view are students' desire for high grades and parents' demand for high grades. These two factors were approved by 81.8% and 53.3% of the participants, respectively.

(b). *Factors Contributing to Students' Cheating: Thematic Analysis*

Thematic analysis of the open-ended question revealed three major personal and contextual factors: language instructors' corrupt practices, societal pressure, and students' poor language proficiency.

1. *Language Instructors' Corrupt Practices*

Students' motives for cheating are also due to language teachers' unethical and corrupt behaviours, which make students mistrust and disrespect their teachers. Some participants referred to teachers favouring their relatives over the other students, giving them credit and good grades while 'threatening' the other students from the beginning of the semester to provide them with an F grade. Such 'unfair' and 'unethical' treatment affects students' motivation to learn and study. One participant revealed that such mistreatment creates a sense of injustice among the students, encouraging them to cheat because they are afraid to fail the course or have lower grades than those students favoured by the teacher. The participants also referred to language instructors' lack of commitment, insincerity about their profession, and low interest in students' depth of learning. They are regularly absent from their classes and do not give students proper instructions and explanations of course content. One participant referred to some 'irresponsible' teachers who 'tell stories during class time rather than concentrating on course content'. In this case, students will not grasp the course well and lack the acquisition of content knowledge and language skills, thereby resorting to cheating on exams to pass the course. The unethical practices of teachers reported in this study echo some of the findings reported in the literature. This is precisely the case in Cambodia, where Maeda (2021) reported that teachers' unfair treatment of students, absenteeism, and indifference towards student learning influenced students' cheating decisions.

2. *Societal Pressure*

Many participants highlighted that students aspire to have prestigious and high-salary jobs that bestow a superior social status, a value deeply ingrained in society. These jobs often require a college degree with a high GPA. However, some students are not interested in education but are eager to have such jobs. Cheating is the way to achieve a high GPA. The situation was described as follows:

Some students lack interest in higher education but are under immense societal pressure to pursue a college degree with a high GPA. This pressure is not just a mere expectation but a compelling force driven by the belief that such achievements are the key to excellent jobs with high salaries, which, in turn, bestow a superior social status.

A college degree is also considered prestigious and enhances an individual's social image. One participant stated that some students value their social impression more than they attribute to maintaining academic integrity. Therefore, incompetent students rely on cheating to secure their degrees because they desire to portray a sound social image of themselves as 'university graduates'. Another participant pointed out that Kuwait is generally a materialistic society in which individuals are judged according to their social status and how they present themselves to others. A college degree provides such a prestigious image and social position:

Surviving in such a materialistic society without a superior social position is daunting. Social pressure demands that individuals maintain their social status and present a high social image. A college degree and a prestigious job ensure the acquisition of such a social position. Without a college degree, individuals are stigmatised as 'losers' and face social stigma.

Thus, for less academically inclined students, cheating becomes a means to obtain a college degree with a high GPA, perceived as a gateway to social approval. Our findings on societal pressure influencing students' cheating behaviour in our specific context based in Kuwait are consistent with other studies of several different cultures. Aljurf et al. (2020), for example, have demonstrated how the cheating behaviour of Emirate college students is due to social pressure demanding them to meet family expectations for a college degree and high grades, which indicates the academic standing of the student and reflects on the social status of the family. Razek (2014) has also shown that social shame burdens Saudi college students, demanding they be successful and demonstrate a high social status by acquiring a university degree.

3. *Students' Poor Language Proficiency*

Another theme that emerged in our data is students' poor English language proficiency. It is worth noting that this was suggested in the closed-ended question and highly rated by the participants. Nevertheless, many participants referred to it in their response to the open-ended question. They stated that students face difficulties mastering the language due to their poor English background, which presents serious challenges as they try to keep up with college-level coursework. They further blamed the education system for their poor EFL learning outcomes. One participant added:

Kuwaiti students learn the English language for 12 years, from primary school to high school. Nevertheless, they graduate with limited English skills. Their temptation to cheat on college exams would not have emerged if they had been given a strong foundation in the English language at school.

The participants' responses raise concerns regarding EFL teaching and learning in Kuwait. Success in English language learning at the college level relies not only on the college's input to students. Other variables, such as previous educational knowledge, affect their language proficiency. English in Kuwait is a foreign language learnt through classroom instruction at an early age in school, wherein learners have limited exposure to the target language. Their access to the language is restricted to the classroom, and their opportunities to use it outside the classroom are limited because their native language is more dominant than the foreign language. Therefore, the type of classroom learning context contributes to their final attainment and language proficiency, affecting their performance at the college level. As Gotseva (2015) argues, the amount and quality of input in a foreign language learning classroom, where EFL learners start learning the language in school, significantly affects their language proficiency and their academic performance at a later stage. This finding resonates with the work of Arab and Ofran (2021), who reported that Afghan students cheated in their EFL courses because they lacked sufficient English skills.

V. DISCUSSION

Research into students' cheating behaviour provides evidence that students' positive attitudes predict their intention to cheat (e.g., Costley, 2019). Our findings suggest that the students in the sample are less likely to cheat, given their negative attitude towards such behaviour. Their negative attitude implies that they possibly have a sense of moral obligation, which causes them to perceive cheating negatively. However, attention must be devoted to the percentage of students who endorsed some cheating methods, namely, using leaked exams and learning the exam from other students who previously took it. While it can be argued that such a liberal attitude may indicate their intention or involvement in such methods, another look at the data may suggest otherwise. Their lax stance towards specific methods contradicts their negative attitude towards cheating. Notably, these endorsed methods are related to practices committed outside the classroom. Therefore, it can be argued that the students might be unaware that these practices are considered cheating. Waltzer et al. (2023) caution that if students do not realise their actions constitute cheating, they have little reason to avoid those actions. The researchers refer to cases of unintentional cheating whereby students lack deliberate intent to cheat. Barnhardt (2016) similarly warns that some cheating practices are conducted unintentionally when students misunderstand the code of conduct or have insufficient knowledge concerning what constitutes cheating, which could also be the case with the Kuwaiti EFL participants. Therefore, if cheating is committed unintentionally, students cannot

be judged to have acted unethically because, in being ignorant in the first place that their behaviour was wrong, they could not have adequately judged its morality. Nevertheless, ignorance of rules cannot excuse unethical behaviour, and students should be informed by their academic institutions of potential disciplinary actions for violating integrity policies. Barnhardt (2016) argues that while unintentional cheating can be described as an 'honest mistake', students should not be absolved from blame for cheating by claiming ignorance. He emphasises that cheating, intentional or unintentional, harms the educational program, maintaining that the responsibility to conform to the rules includes the responsibility to know them, so even when they are violated due to ignorance, failing to realise them is equally blameworthy.

The participants revealed different reasons that motivate students to cheat. The most significant ones are students' desire to get high grades, parental pressure for high grades, and students' poor English proficiency. We argue that students' poor English proficiency is the main reason for the other reasons. Students with poor English proficiency are expected to have low grades, which is unsatisfactory for themselves or their parents. The participants blamed the education system for students' poor English proficiency. Although the Ministry of Education has made tremendous efforts to improve English teaching and learning in schools, devoting an annual budget to enhancing the education system, students' English proficiency remains unsatisfactory (Mohamed, 2021). Students learn English for 12 years, starting from primary school and continuing until they are admitted to college. One would assume they have reaped the benefits of a younger age for foreign language learning. Nevertheless, they face difficulties coping with their college courses, thereby resorting to cheating to pass these courses. This finding offers a clear implication for policymakers to consider this issue. Research on the Kuwaiti EFL context has referred to some variables that impact the quality of students' classroom education, including the lack of teacher training, limited use of technology in EFL classrooms, and inadequate EFL teaching practicum programme (e.g., Al-Adwani & Al-Shammari, 2022; Mohamed, 2021). However, it is crucial to acknowledge that students' poor English proficiency might not be a simple issue with a single cause. Researchers (e.g., Gotseva, 2015; Tai & Zhao, 2022) have identified a complex web of interrelated factors that set the foundation for successful classroom language learning that contribute to students' English proficiency and enable them to cope with college-level learning. These include institutional aspects (e.g., the language of instruction, the curriculum, teaching methods, and teachers' attitudes and behaviours), learner-related variables (e.g., previous educational attainment, anxiety, and motivation), and sociocultural influences (e.g., society and L1 influence). Kuwaiti learners' poor English proficiency can be a multidimensional problem, and its resolution requires a comprehensive understanding of these factors.

Language instructors' corrupt practices have also been identified as influencing students' cheating behaviour. Studies on learner-related variables show that poor proficiency in foreign language learning results from a complex interaction of external and internal factors. For instance, a corrupt teacher is an external factor negatively impacting students' motivation. The sense of injustice that such teachers instil in their students is an internal factor that negatively impacts their language proficiency. Emphasising teachers' role in stimulating students' motivation to learn, Motevalli et al. (2020) indicate that learners usually attend their classes with enthusiasm and motivation. However, when they face external practices, such as teachers' corrupt practices, learners may come under pressure that can undermine their learning motivation, affecting their language proficiency. Motivation and language proficiency are correlated. Dunn and Iwaniec (2022) highlight that learners with higher learning motivation have higher language proficiency, whereas learners with lower motivation are less proficient. In this study, teachers' corrupt practices can be seen as an external factor contributing to reducing students' motivation, affecting their language proficiency, and eventually leading them to cheat to pass their courses. It is deplorable to find out that teachers, with their irresponsible behaviour, could be the reason for students' cheating behaviour.

The professor-student relationship is inherently one of power due to professors' authority, professional skills, knowledge, and students' dependence. Within this relationship, power and position asymmetry could create the opportunity for mistreating students, which could affect the effectiveness of their education. Therefore, teachers should not abuse their power over their students and engage in corrupt practices. Emphasising students' right to quality education, Thornberg et al. (2022) argue that teachers should exhibit ethical principles and virtues built into their professional ethics by fostering a favourable learning environment, showing fairness, commitment, and care, and establishing supportive teacher-student relationships. Students who perceive their teachers as more supportive have better achievement outcomes. The role of language instructors is not merely to pass on knowledge to students or develop their skills; they must also achieve high standards of behaviour and professionalism to avoid ethical infringements by creating a just classroom environment and maintaining professional relationships with all students. Violating ethical standards will affect students' education quality and moral attitudes. Favouring some students, as reported by the participants, is a clear case of language instructors' unprofessional relationship with students.

Kuwaiti society operates according to specific highly appreciated social values. Individuals must adhere to these values to gain social approval. Since childhood, individuals are expected and encouraged to preserve and maintain the family's social status and enhance its image. According to Al-Ghanim (2012), family members in Kuwait are responsible for building and maintaining the family's social status. They, therefore, take great care in presenting themselves in a way that promotes a positive social impression. A college degree and the prestigious job it facilitates reflect positively on the social status of individuals and their families and enhance their social image. Some students

might be incompetent or do not have the desire to attend college. However, the idea of not attending college is not even thinkable, given the shame individuals would bring to the family and the pressure imposed on its members to obtain a college degree. Therefore, the primary aim of attending college for those students is to have a degree that will serve as a gateway to social acceptance. Being under social pressure, such students cheat to meet social requirements. As Holden et al. (2021) highlight, the social pressure students feel to maintain good grades and the need to be viewed as successful can create the motivation to cheat. Kuwaiti EFL students exemplify a case whereby social values burden students, leading them to cheat. However, while society pressures individuals to meet social expectations, this does not necessarily mean it approves of cheating or is socially accepted. Therefore, parents should stress to their children that cheating is unethical and emphasise the importance of education and knowledge-gaining. They should also provide them with emotional and motivational support and reinforcement of discipline and responsibility, which is essential to the success of any educational system. As stated by Jeynes (2024), parents' role in education is crucial for building a collaborative and successful educational system that prepares students for a better future.

Given the different personal and contextual factors underlying students' cheating behaviour identified in this study, we argue that the responsibility for the cheating behaviour of Kuwaiti EFL college students does not primarily lie with the student. When cheating occurs, the responsibility for maintaining and upholding academic integrity is usually placed upon the student. However, this study provides evidence that students' social and educational environment affect their academic behaviour. Therefore, conceptions of cheating as merely a student's responsibility must be reconsidered.

VI. CONCLUSION

This research has uniquely contributed to the literature on the cheating practices of EFL college students by providing data from the Kuwaiti context. The study casts light on the cheating methods used by Kuwaiti EFL students and the perceived factors influencing their cheating behaviour. Our findings regarding the factors accord with the existing literature on college cheating behaviour. However, the contextualised specificities causing these factors were identified, such as social values, corrupt practices of EFL instructors, and students' poor language proficiency, which are related to the Kuwaiti context.

The results imply that comprehensive measures and collaborative efforts must be made to reduce students' temptation to cheat. An educational reform plan is crucial to managing the factors leading students to cheat. Academic institutions should promote a code of ethics clearly defining what constitutes cheating to be readily available to students at the commencement of each semester. Students resorting to leaked exams could be due to insufficient knowledge that such behaviour is considered cheating. Sanctions that have significant educational and deterrence values should be implemented. To curb malpractices, academic institutions must also consider implementing and reinforcing professional codes of conduct, including recognised ethical standards and self-disciplinary guidelines, to enhance the dedication, commitment, and efficiency of teaching among language instructors. Students' poor language proficiency requires policymakers to identify and treat the contributing factors affecting their learning outcomes. Attention must be paid to improving their performance at the school level and before college admission. Academic institutions might also arrange extensive English foundation programs for their first-year students to help them overcome any learning difficulties they might face during their college studies.

Future research can build on the findings demonstrated in this study. It can specifically investigate EFL learning and teaching in Kuwait, exploring institutional, sociocultural, and learner-related factors that contribute to students' poor proficiency in EFL classrooms. Education policymakers should also consider the results of such investigations, make considerable efforts to deal with emerging factors, and lay the groundwork for necessary improvements in the educational system.

This study has some limitations. It involved more females than males (65% females; 35% males). Several studies have found that male students have more positive attitudes towards cheating than females (e.g., Arab & Ofran, 2023; Whitley, 1998). Therefore, the results could be biased by the disproportionate percentage of the female participants. Another limitation is the small sample size (182 participants), which limits the generalizability of the findings.

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