

Research Article

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Undergraduate Students' Perception Towards Cheating in Online Learning Programs: A Case Study at Ajman University, UAE

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Abstract

Background/purpose. This study aims to better understand undergraduate students' perceptions of cheating in online learning programs at Ajman University, one of the higher education institutions in the United Arab Emirates.

Materials/methods. The study used a descriptive method, employing a questionnaire instrument to collect data from faculty members (n = 201). The questionnaire consists of 35 items distributed over six areas: students (8 items), course content (4), teaching methods (4), conducting electronic tests, cheating methods (6), and attitudes (5).

Results. The overall mean and standard deviation for the six areas of the questionnaire were 3.40 and 0.99, indicating a moderate level. The results showed that undergraduate students' perceptions of cheating in online learning depended on the gender variable category (in favor of male students). However, there was no statistical significance depending on the college and academic year variables.

Conclusion. The study recommends conducting more research on the use of cheating in online learning programs in higher education institutions.

1. Introduction

1.1. Background and Rationale

Academic dishonesty is a significant concern in education, as some students seek unfair advantages to attain specific academic outcomes. The issue has been exacerbated by the shift to online learning, which many universities adopted in response to the COVID-19 pandemic (Gamage et al., 2020; Holden et al., 2021; Hosseini et al., 2021). Despite the decline of the pandemic, numerous institutions continue to offer online courses. Universities that previously provided only in-person degree programs have either introduced or are in the process of implementing online education initiatives. With the anticipated expansion of online education, there is a growing concern about increased electronic assessments, which facilitate easier access to exam answers and unauthorized assistance (Bilen & Matros, 2021; Elsalem et al., 2021; Adzima, 2020; Alotaibi, 2021). Consequently, cheating is expected to remain a prominent issue in online education (Holden et al., 2021).

There was already a shift away from face-to-face learning, and now they have moved to online learning; all of this poses its own challenges with respect to how students engage with examinations and academic content, which means that the process of deterrence and detection of dishonest behavior is that much harder. Online environments are often not monitored as though teachers are at the front of traditional classes, and students have had easier access to unapproved materials, cheating and contract cheating (Lancaster & Cotarlan, 2021). The absence of direct contact with teachers and colleagues might exacerbate students' lack of accountability, which eventually leads to cheating becoming customary in online learning (Krou et al., 2021). In addition, heightened stress, technological challenges, and unfamiliarity with how digital examination systems work may knowingly lead students to inordinate advantages (Dawson, 2021). To alleviate these challenges, universities have turned to proctoring technologies and plagiarism detection software, generating questions of privacy, accessibility, and effectiveness (Eaton, 2020). As such, academic dishonesty in online education is a complex issue that requires vigilant research and institutional response as these challenges continue to evolve.

The rapid transition to online learning provided little time to establish robust strategies to uphold academic integrity. Traditional assessment methods such as exams and research papers remain essential in evaluating students' competencies and knowledge (Clark et al., 2020). However, the shift to digital learning environments has posed new challenges to maintaining fairness in assessments. The consequences of academic dishonesty extend beyond education, influencing students' future careers, economic stability, and societal standing (Fontaine et al., 2020).

1.2. Literature Review: Academic Dishonesty in Online Learning

The rise of technology has facilitated new methods of cheating, offering students more opportunities to engage in academic dishonesty than in previous generations (Watson & Sottile, 2010). While online education offers advantages such as flexibility, affordability, and accessibility (Indira & Sakshi, 2017), it also presents challenges, including limited face-to-face interaction with instructors, unreliable internet access, and increased opportunities for dishonest behavior (Dumford & Miller, 2018; Sadeghi, 2019). Many studies suggest that students perceive cheating in online exams as easier than in traditional exams (King et al., 2009). However, findings remain inconsistent, with some research indicating that online cheating is more prevalent (Bilen & Matros, 2020), while others argue that it occurs at similar or lower rates than in-person exams.

One major factor contributing to online cheating is the lack of supervision during assessments, making it challenging to verify students' identities (Kraglund-Gauthier & Young, 2012). Additionally, the absence of close relationships and direct interactions with instructors in online settings may encourage group-based cheating (McGee, 2013; Hearn Moore et al., 2017). In response, institutions

have implemented various proctoring technologies, such as Respondus, Proctorio, and ProctorU (Crawford et al., 2020; Goff et al., 2020). However, concerns remain regarding students' access to high-speed internet, essential technology, and the psychological impact of proctoring tools, including increased anxiety and reduced test performance (Woldeab et al., 2017; Turnbull et al., 2021).

Several factors have been suggested as contributors to dishonest behaviour within an academic setting; rationalisations such as lack of preparation, pressure to perform, misunderstandings of and ignorance regarding, academic policies, as well as the belief that peers are complicit in the act (Burrus et al., 2007; Jones, 2011; Yang et al., 2013). Further studies emphasize internal factors like lethargy, negligence regarding academic rules, and weak self-efficacy as predictors of dishonesty (Baran & Jonason, 2020). As mentioned by Diego (2017), social influences have an impact, too, as some students see cheating as something that brings them closer to their peers, normalizing the behaviour. Furthermore, external forces such as the desire for parental approval and societal focus on high academic performance often create pressures on students that can lead to dishonest behaviors, especially in a competitive academic climate (Teixeira & Rocha, 2010; Jurdi et al., 2012). The proliferation of online resources, such as undeterred academic support services, has contributed to the rise of cheating behaviours (Bretag et al., 2019). Additionally, research (Henning et al., 2018; Karim et al., 2022) suggests that high stress levels, burnout, and test anxiety among students increase the likelihood of students resorting to academic dishonesty to cope with it. Limited instructor oversight during digital learning and vague policies for academic integrity may exacerbate these behaviours and highlight the need for proactive interventions from institutions (Ma et al., 2021).

From an institutional perspective, vague academic integrity policies and weak enforcement mechanisms contribute to dishonesty (Finchilescu & Cooper, 2018; Peled et al., 2019). Pedagogical approaches prioritizing mastery over performance-based learning may reduce cheating incentives (Day et al., 2011; Pulfrey et al., 2019). Faculty and institutional efforts to promote academic integrity have been shown to increase awareness and decrease incidents of misconduct (McCabe et al., 2013; Tatum & Schwartz, 2017).

1.3. Research Gap and Objectives

While academic dishonesty in online learning has been widely studied, research findings regarding its prevalence and causes remain inconsistent. Furthermore, existing studies primarily focus on Western educational contexts, leaving a gap in understanding how online academic integrity is managed in other regions, such as the Middle East. Additionally, limited research has examined the institutional responses to academic dishonesty in online learning environments, particularly regarding proactive policy development and faculty involvement.

Before COVID-19, higher education institutions in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) had little experience with online education. The rapid shift to online learning required faculty and students to adapt to new technologies quickly. This transition also necessitated the development of academic integrity policies tailored to digital education. Understanding how institutions in the UAE have addressed academic dishonesty in this new environment provides valuable insights into best practices for academic integrity management.

This study aims to bridge these gaps by examining students' perceptions of cheating during online classes, their views on the effectiveness of online learning, and the relationship between academic dishonesty and academic performance. By identifying common cheating behaviors, underlying causes, and potential solutions, this research will contribute to the broader discussion on academic integrity in higher education.

1.4. Study Question

The study seeks to answer the following questions:

Q1. What are the perceptions of cheating in online learning among Ajman University students?

Q2. Does the degree of Ajman University students' perceptions of cheating in online learning differ according to gender, college, and academic year?

1.5 Significance of Study

The significance of the study is demonstrated as follows:

- The study will highlight students' perceptions of cheating in online exams.
- This study aligns with the UAE Ministry of Higher Education's goals to ensure the achievement of academic integrity standards.
- It may provide a clear picture of the reasons for cheating in online learning to reach solutions.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Research Approach and Design

The current investigation takes a quantitative research method, employing a descriptive survey design to investigate students' perceptions of academic dishonesty in online learning. The descriptive design was chosen because it allows for systematic data collection and analysis to identify trends, attitudes, and opinions among the target population (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The primary data collection instrument for the study is a structured questionnaire, which allows the researchers to collect measurable responses from participants and statistically evaluate patterns.

2.2. Study Participants and Sampling Technique

The present investigation targets undergraduate students from Ajman University's three colleges: Humanities and Sciences, Mass Communication, and Law. Data were collected in the second semester of the 2021-2022 academic year. The sampling strategy was a stratified random sample, ensuring representation of students from each college and academic year. Academic fields included Humanities and Sciences, Mass Communication, and Law, and the sample participants were selected randomly from each stratum. This approach was used to minimize bias and ensure the inclusion of diverse academic viewpoints in the investigation (Etikan & Bala, 2017).

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The following criteria were used to keep the study relevant and valid:

Inclusion Criteria:

- They must be registered as students in Ajman University (Undergraduate)
- Students must belong to one of the three selected colleges (Humanities and Sciences, Mass Communication, and Law).
- To guarantee that participants have experienced the same online learning experiences, participants need to be in the second semester of the 2021–2022 academic year.

Exclusion Criteria:

- Students beyond the undergraduate level were excluded because their experiences with online education could differ greatly from those of undergraduate students.
- Participation in this pilot study (30 students) was not in the final data set to control for response bias.

- The data were screened for incompleteness, and data with missing information were also removed to ensure their accuracy and reliability.

Justification for Selection of Participants

Several factors informed the selection of study participants:

- **Relevance to Research Goals:** As this study focuses on online learning and academic dishonesty, the undergraduate group was selected as the most relevant because of their direct experiences with online education and performing assessments.

- **Academic Background Diversity:** The study chooses students from three different colleges, which allows for a more diverse range of perspectives and helps improve the generalizability of the collected data.

- **Data Collection Phase:** The participants of this study are students who actively engaged in online learning at the height of the 2021-2022 academic calendar year, during which the online learning experience may be said to remain accurately current in line with the near home period of the evolving digital learning environment.

- **Stratified Random Sampling for Representative Distribution:** You want to ensure you are getting proportional representation from each college to prevent overrepresentation of one academic discipline relative to another.

Afterward, 30 students were recruited for a pilot assessment of the questionnaire's reliability, leaving 201 students with usable data who formed the primary dataset for analysis. The Demographic Information is shown in Table 1 and Figure 1.

Table 1. Participants' demographic information

Study Variables	Variables levels	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	106	53%
	Male	95	47%
	Total	201	100%
College	Humanities and sciences	106	53%
	Mass communication	60	30%
	LAW	35	17%
	Total	201	100%
Academic year	First-year	67	33%
	Second year	34	17%
	Third year	52	26%
	Fourth-year	20	10%
	Fifth year	28	14%
	Total	201	100%

2.3. Testing Statistical Assumptions

Assumption checks were conducted before performing statistical analyses to ensure the appropriateness of parametric tests. The Shapiro-Wilk test was utilized to assess normality as it is more suitable for small to medium sample sizes (Ghasemi & Zahediasl, 2012). Additionally, skewness

and kurtosis values were examined, with values ranging between -2 and +2 considered acceptable indicators of normality (George & Mallery, 2019). Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variance was performed to evaluate the assumption of homogeneity of variance for ANOVA. The results indicated that the assumption was not violated ($p > .05$), confirming that variances were equal across groups (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2019). These results validated the use of parametric statistical methods for further analysis.

2.4. Study Tools

The survey was used to collect data from the participants, and it was distributed to the students during the second term of the 2021/2022 academic year. The questionnaire consisted of two parts. The first part was accumulated the essential information for students, and the second part was (35) items; it designed and divided into three sections to understand more about the causes of cheating in online learning; these sections are (reasons related to the student, reasons related to the teacher, reasons related to technology management).

2.5. The Validity and Reliability of the Instrument

A group of adjudicators (10 academic staff from UAE universities) with extensive experience in the geographical area of learning were asked to write their opinions regarding the adequacy of questionnaires' items to the study aims and the academic experts' modifications and recommended improvements have been taken and, in order to accomplish the study objectives, deletions, revisions, and additions, were enacted and, as a consequence, the questionnaire after modification consisted from (35) items. Cronbach's alpha was used to verify the study tool's internal reliability coefficient. It was implemented in a pilot study that included 30 students from outside of the study sample, and the Cronbach alpha coefficient was computed (0.871).

2.6. Data analysis

The researchers used the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) program for data analysis to compute the percentage, mean, standard deviation SD, independent t-test tests, one-way ANOVA, and the Scheffe test. Moreover, in this analysis, a five-dimensional Likert scale is implemented as follows: (Very high (5): intervals (4.21–5.00), high (4): intervals (3.41–4.20), moderate (3): intervals (2.61–3.40), low (2): intervals (1.81–2.60), and very low (1): intervals (1.00–1.80).

3. Methodology

3.1. Findings of the study attributed to Question 1: What is the degree of perception towards cheating in online learning among Ajman University students?

Average scores and standard deviations have been computed to address the first research question responses of participants and students to every item of the questionnaire (1–36) relevant to the degree of Ajman University students' perceptions towards cheating in online learning.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for the students' responses to domain 1: Students

No.	Paragraphs	Mean	SD
1	The student is not well prepared for the electronic test	2.92	0.95
2	Decreased student motivation to study	2.79	0.93
3	The students' desire to obtain high grades	3.30	0.58
4	The poor academic level of the students in some courses	3.13	0.80
5	The student's fear of failing and failure	2.95	0.86
6	Some students enjoy the cheating process itself	3.21	1.05
7	The student feels nervous as soon as he is in front of the computer screen at the time of the electronic exam	3.01	1.11
8	Weakness of some students' abilities to deal with distance education	2.73	0.95
Total		3.00	0.90

The findings shown in Table 2 show that the mean for responses for all items (1-8) was 3.00 and the standard deviation (SD) 0.90, indicating that the student's point of view about cheating in online learning according to factors that related to the student himself came at a moderate degree. It is also evident from Table 2 that the students answering Item-3 (The student's desire to obtain high grades) gave the highest mean value (3.30) with a moderate degree, and Item-6 (Some students enjoy the cheating process itself) came in second, also at a moderate level with a mean value of (3.21). Moreover, Item 4 (Poor academic level of the student in some courses) came in third at a moderate level with a mean of 3.13. Similarly, a moderate degree was also found for items 7, 5, and 1, with the respective mean values of 3.01, 2.95, and 2.92. On the other hand, the table shows that Item 2 came in the lowest degree with a mean of 2.79, and Item 8 came in the lowest degree with a mean of 2.73.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics for the students' responses to domain 2: *Course contents*

No.	Paragraphs	Mean	SD
Q9	Difficulty of some subjects	3.67	1.33
Q10	Lack of appropriate electronic educational content that helps the student study	3.86	1.25
Q11	The weak link of content with the needs and interests of students in the current era	3.29	1.36
Q12	Lack of understanding of the wording of the questions, which the students are required to answer	3.36	1.36
Total		3.54	1.33

The findings shown in Table 3 show that the mean for responses for all items (9-12) was 3.54 and SD 1.33, indicating that the students' point of view on cheating in online learning according to factors related to course contents came at a high degree. It is also evident from Table 3 that the students answering Item-10 ("Lack of appropriate electronic educational content that helps the student to study") came with the highest mean value (3.86) with a high degree, and Item-9 ("Difficulty of some

subjects”) came in second level, also at a high. Similarly, a high degree was also found for items 12 and 11, with the respective mean values of 3.36 and 3.29.

Table 4. Descriptive statistics for the students' responses to domain 3: Teaching Methods

No.	Paragraphs	Mean	SD
I-13	Weakness of the scientific level of the instructor teaching the course	2.46	0.57
I-14	The course instructor did not consider the individual differences between students	2.36	0.66
I-15	The course instructor repeats the exam questions	2.76	0.54
I-16	Weakness of the instructor's skill in dealing with the technology in general (recurring technical problems/problems in using multiple technologies for displaying course contents)	2.77	0.97
Total		2.59	0.68

The findings shown in Table 4 show that the mean for responses for all items (13-16) was 2.59 and (SD) 0.68, indicating that the students' point of view on cheating in online learning according to factors related to the teaching methods came at a low degree. It is also evident from Table 4 that the students answering Item-16 (Weakness of the instructor's skill in dealing with the technology in general (recurring technical problems/problems in using multiple technologies for displaying course contents) came to the mean value 2.77 with a low degree, and Item-15 (‘The course instructor repeats the exam questions’) also came with a low degree with a mean value of 2.67. Similarly, a low degree was also found for items 13 and 14, with the respective mean values of 2.46 and 2.36.

Table 5. Descriptive statistics for the students' responses to Domain 4: Conducting Electronic Exams

No.	Paragraphs	Mean	SD
I-17	Insufficient exam time for the student to answer satisfactorily	3.70	1.16
I-18	Failure to observe basic controls in constructing questions	4.14	0.97
I-19	Many objective questions in the electronic test	3.41	1.34
I-20	Weak management and organization of the electronic test	3.71	1.09
I-21	The difficulty of the programs that the instructor uses in electronic exams	3.56	1.15
I-22	Unavailability of immediate technical support during the electronic test	3.56	1.36
I-23	The unfairness of the evaluation system in electronic exams	4.06	1.03
I-24	Negligence in the application of the penalty for cheating	3.41	1.34
Total		3.69	1.18

The findings shown in Table 5 show that the mean for responses for all items (17-24) was 3.69 and SD 1.18, indicating that the students' point of view about cheating in online learning according to factors related to Conducting Electronic exams came at a high degree. It is also evident from Table 5 that the students answering Item-18 (Failure to observe basic controls in constructing questions) gave the highest mean value 4.14 with a high degree, and Item-23 (The unfairness of the evaluation system in electronic exams) came in second, also at a high level with a mean value of 4.06. Item 20

(Weak management and organization of the electronic test) came in third at a high level with a mean of 3.71. Item -17 (Insufficient exam time for the student to answer satisfactorily) came in fourth at a high level with a mean of 3.70. Furthermore, it is also evident from the students' responses to item-21 (The difficulty of the programs that the instructor uses in electronic exams) and item-22, which were rated as having the fifth highest degree, with a mean of (3.56), and at a high degree. Similarly, a high degree was also found for items 19 and 24, with mean values of 3.41.

Table 6. Descriptive statistics for the students' responses to Domain 5: Methods of cheating

No.	Paragraphs	Mean	SD
I-25	Using notes written on paper during the electronic exam	3.93	1.05
I-26	Cheating using other conductive devices (computer, cell phone, watch, etc.)	3.26	1.31
I-27	Information exchange between students during the electronic exam via social media (WhatsApp, Telegram, etc).	4.33	0.94
I-28	Use the Google browser to copy the answers during the exam	2.77	0.54
I-29	Another person taking the electronic exam instead of the student	3.76	1.19
I-30	Get more time in the electronic exam when some technical problems occur to extend the test time	3.68	1.16
Total		3.62	1.03

The findings shown in Table 6 show that the mean for responses for all items (25-30) was 3.62 and SD 1.03, indicating that the students' point of view about cheating in online learning according to factors related to the Method of Cheating came at a high degree. It is also evident from Table 6 that the students answering Item-27 (Exchange of information between students during the electronic exam via social media (WhatsApp - Telegram - ... etc.)) came at the highest mean value (4.33) with a high degree, and Item-25 (Using notes written on paper during the electronic exam) came in second, also at a high level with a mean value of (3.93). Item 29 (Another person taking the electronic exam instead of the student) came in third at a high level with a mean of 3.76. Item -30 (Get more time in the electronic exam when technical problems occur to extend the test time) came in fourth at a high level with a mean of 3.68. Moreover, it is also evident from the students' responses to item-26 (Cheating by using other conductive devices (computer - phone - cell phone - watch...)) was rated as having the fifth degree, with a mean of (3.26), and at a moderate degree. Similarly, a low degree was found for item 28 (Use the Google browser to copy the answers during the exam) with a mean value of 2.77.

Table 7. Descriptive statistics for the students' responses to Domain 6: Attitude

No.	Paragraphs	Mean	SD
I-31	I do not accept Cheating, even if the exam is difficult	1.52	0.50
I-32	I do not agree with cheating, even if there is a chance I might fail	3.41	1.34
I-33	Cheating is not right, even if it does not affect other students' scores	3.26	1.31
I-34	I do not agree with cheating, even if I have the chance to cheat	4.00	1.00
I-35	I may accept cheating only if the professor It is not fair to correct papers	4.44	0.60
Total		3.57	0.94

The findings in Table 7 show that the mean for responses for all items (31-35) was 3.57 and SD 0.94, indicating that the students' attitude towards cheating in online learning came to a high degree. It is also evident from Table 7 that the students answering Item-35 (I may accept cheating only if the professor is not fair in correcting papers) came at the highest mean value 4.44 with a high degree, and Item-34 (I do not agree to cheat, even if I have the chance to cheat) came in second order, at a high level with a mean value of 4.00. Item 32 (I do not agree to cheat, even if there is a chance I might fail) came in third at a high level with a mean of 3.41. Additionally, it is evident from the students' responses to item 33 (Cheating is not correct, even if it does not affect other students' scores) that they were rated as having the fifth degree, with a mean of 3.26, and at a moderate degree. At the same time, item 31 (I do not accept Cheating, even if the exam is difficult) came at the lowest degree with a mean of 1.52.

Table 8. Mean and SD for the six domains.

No.	Domain	Mean	SD
1	Students	3.00	0.90
3	Course contents	3.54	1.33
3	Teaching Methods	2.59	0.68
4	Conducting Electronic Exams	4.06	1.03
5	Methods of cheating	3.62	1.03
6	Attitude	3.57	0.94
Total		3.40	0.99

Table 8. The overall mean and standard deviation for the six questionnaire areas were, respectively, (3.40) and (0.99) and came at a moderate level, meaning that undergraduate students' perceptions toward cheating in online learning programs at Ajman University were moderate.

3.2. Findings of the study attributed to Question 2: Does the degree of Ajman University students' perceptions of cheating in online learning differ according to gender, college, and academic year?

Mean score and SD were calculated for questions, t-testing, one-way ANOVA testing, and Scheffe's post-hoc comparison test was also conducted to determine the significance of the variations between Averages. The findings of the answers to the study subjects are listed below according to the study variables.

First: Gender variable among students

A T-test was utilized to determine the significance of the differences between averages of Ajman University students' perceptions of cheating in online learning according to gender, as shown in Table 9.

Table 9. Independent Samples T-Test Results for Gender Differences

Gender	N	Mean	SD	Mean Difference	t	df	p
Male	96	3.82	0.37	0.41	7.57	199	< .001
Female	105	3.41	0.39				

p < .05 (statistically significant)

As presented in Table 9, the findings clearly illustrated that the computed t value was 7.573, which is less than the (t) table, indicating that there are significant differences between the mean values for males and females at the significance level of 0.00, which is less than the required statistical significance level (0.05). The finding means that the degree of Ajman University students' perceptions of cheating in online learning differs according to gender in favor of Male gender students.

Second: College variable among students

A one-way ANOVA test was utilized to find out the significance of the differences between averages of the degree of Ajman University students' perceptions regarding cheating in online learning according to various college variables, as appearing in Table 10. The findings of this variable's one-way ANOVA test appear in Table 10.

Table 10. ANOVA Test Results for Differences in Perceptions of Cheating Across Colleges

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Between Groups (<i>Humanities & Sciences, Mass Communication, Law</i>)	0.49	2	0.25	1.74	.18
Within Groups	27.95	198	0.14		
Total	28.44	200			

p < .05 (statistically significant)

Third: Academic year variable

A one-way ANOVA test was conducted to examine whether there were significant differences in the perceptions of cheating among Ajman University students in online learning based on their academic year (i.e., first year, second year, third year, fourth year). As presented in Table 11, the analysis revealed no statistically significant differences in students' perceptions across academic years, $F(2, 198) = 1.740$, $p = .246$. Since the p-value is greater than the significance threshold of 0.05, it can be concluded that students' perceptions of cheating in online learning do not vary significantly across their academic years.

Table 10. ANOVA Test Results for Differences in Perceptions of Cheating Across Colleges

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Between Groups	.491	2	.246	.246	1.740
Within Groups	27.949	198	.141		
Total	28.440	200			

p < .05 (statistically significant)

4. Discussion

This study, conducted at Ajman University (UAE) during the 2021-2022 academic year, examined student perceptions of online cheating across various factors, including student attitudes, course content, teaching methods, online exam administration, and specific cheating methods. The study also explored demographic variations in cheating perceptions based on gender, college affiliation, and academic year.

4.1. Perceptions of Cheating in Online Learning

The first research question focused on students' overall perceptions of cheating in online learning. The findings indicate that students moderately perceive cheating when considering personal factors, with a mean score of 3.00 (SD = 0.90) (Table 2).

4.2. Personal Factors and Cheating Motivations

Students identified academic pressure as a significant motivator for cheating, particularly the desire to achieve high grades and avoid failure. A significant correlation emerged between weak academic performance and a higher likelihood of cheating, reinforcing prior research that links academic stress to dishonest behavior (Salehi & Gholampour, 2021). Interestingly, a subset of students admitted that they enjoy cheating (mean = 3.21), suggesting that for some, cheating is not solely a necessity but a source of enjoyment. This aligns with previous studies indicating that some students perceive cheating as an intellectual challenge or social activity rather than an ethical breach (Makrides & Englander, 2020). Akbulut et al. (2008) further emphasize that psychological influences play a substantial role in shaping e-dishonesty. Holden et al. (2021) identified additional psychological factors contributing to cheating, including a lack of self-confidence, time management anxiety, a busy lifestyle, and the urge to obtain higher scores. These findings reinforce the complexity of academic dishonesty and the need for institutional policies that address both external pressures and internal motivations.

4.3. Course Content and Cheating Behavior

As shown in Table 3, students' perceptions of cheating related to course content were significantly high (mean = 3.54). Many students expressed that challenging course materials, difficult exams, and unfair assessments were key reasons for cheating. This supports Ahmadi's (2012) findings that students are likelier to cheat when exams are perceived as unfair or overly complicated. Additionally, poorly designed online learning systems were cited as a contributing factor, as they hinder students' ability to study course materials effectively (Noorbehbahani, Mohammadi, & Aminazadeh, 2022). Some students blamed instructors for complex and challenging course content, though it is unclear whether course difficulty or students' lack of persistence significantly influences dishonest behavior (Amigud & Lancaster, 2019).

4.4. Impact of Teaching Methods on Cheating

Perceptions of cheating related to teaching methods were relatively low (mean = 2.59, SD = 0.68), suggesting that students do not view teaching strategies as a significant cheating driver (Table 4). However, one notable exception was instructor proficiency with technology, which received the highest mean score (2.77). This implies that technological competency among instructors may influence students' perceptions of online integrity. While previous research suggests that poorly designed assessments facilitate cheating (Noorbehbahani et al., 2022), Ajman University students did not express significant concerns about the structure of online exams, possibly due to practical faculty training and well-designed assessments.

4.5. Concerns Regarding Online Exams

The findings in Table 5 indicate a relatively high level of concern regarding the integrity of electronic exams (mean = 3.69, SD = 1.18). Students perceived that certain online exam features facilitate cheating, ultimately reducing trust in the assessment process. This aligns with Dawson's (2016) research, which highlights that e-tests introduce new risks of cheating beyond those found in traditional exams. Lee-Post and Hapke (2017) found similar results, with over 45% of online students stating that cheating was easier in digital classrooms and 30% admitting they would cheat if given the opportunity. Additionally, Naidu & Sevnarayan (2023) emphasized that technical challenges, test

anxiety, and the ease of dishonest behavior make online assessments vulnerable to academic misconduct.

4.6. Cheating Methods in Online Learning

Students reported high engagement in online cheating, mainly through information sharing on social media (mean = 3.62, SD = 1.03, Table 6). The most common cheating methods included:

- Sharing answers via social media platforms
- Taking unauthorized notes in exams
- Impersonation (having someone else take the exam)

Interestingly, students rated external devices and browser-based answer retrieval as less common cheating methods, contrasting with Parks et al. (2018), who found that students frequently use hidden notes and online resources for cheating. Technology has also introduced sophisticated cheating methods, as seen in the case of Thai medical students using spyglasses and smartwatches to transmit exam questions in exchange for answers (ABC Online, 2016). Naidu & Sevnarayan (2023) and Valizadeh (2022) reinforce that academic dishonesty is not unique to online education, but the digital environment has amplified certain forms of misconduct.

4.7. Gender Differences in Cheating Perceptions

The t-test results (Table 9) revealed significant gender-based differences in cheating perceptions, favoring male students. Males exhibited a higher tendency to cheat than females, aligning with previous studies that suggest men are generally more prone to risk-taking and ethical rule-breaking (Lento et al., 2018; Mensah, Azila-Gbette, & Appietu, 2016). Becker and Ulstad (2007) refer to this phenomenon as "risk aversion," explaining that females are more likely to avoid the negative consequences of cheating, while males are less concerned with ethical considerations. However, this contradicts Watson & Sottile (2010), who found that female students admitted to cheating more frequently than males in online courses. Similarly, Ahmadi (2012) and Salehi & Gholampour (2021) found no significant gender-based differences in academic dishonesty.

4.8. College Affiliation and Academic Year Influence

The one-way ANOVA results (Tables 10 & 11) indicated no significant differences in cheating perceptions based on college affiliation or academic year. This suggests that students across different disciplines at Ajman University share similar views on academic dishonesty. These findings align with Kayışoğlu & Temel (2017), who found no significant relationship between college type and cheating perceptions. However, other studies suggest that engineering students report higher levels of academic dishonesty than other disciplines (Mensah et al., 2016). Similarly, Ahmadi (2012) reported that field of study, academic level, and career position significantly influence academic dishonesty.

5. Limitation

From the perspective of the students, the study offers valuable information on online learning cheating in one of the esteemed UAE higher education institutions. It contributes to bringing clarity to how students perceive cheating on online examinations. Nevertheless, there are certain limitations in the study. One shortcoming of the study is that it was limited to a single university in the United Arab Emirates and used non-probability sampling. Therefore, it is impossible to generalize the findings to all Emirati higher education institutions. Thus, future research might broaden the sample to include additional institutions in the United Arab Emirates in order to generalize the results and perform university-specific comparisons in terms of subjects of study, and the institutions' previous experience in cheating in online learning, as well as the existence of techniques adopted by other universities for preventing cheating. Furthermore, longitudinal research would help determine how

universities have adapted to cheating in online learning, whether students and instructors are adapting to the prevention of cheating in online learning, how students are developing, and how well students' perspectives towards cheating in online learning have changed. Finally, this study relied solely on self-report surveys, which could result in biases in the students' perceptions. To address this, future studies might employ various research methodologies, such as observations or interviews, to investigate cheating in online learning more in-depth.

6. Conclusion

The study examines a perspective on the reality of cheating in online learning in higher education institutions at Ajman University, an established university in the UAE. Except for teaching methods, students' perspectives came at a high level in most cases. As a result, this suggests that cheating is rampant among students, which will negatively affect educational quality. It was discovered that the majority of the students consider cheating as a typical issue and engage in at least one form of cheating behavior for many different reasons. Students cited various reasons for cheating, including not being prepared for the exam, not having enough time to study, and the difficulty of the examination. The survey also found that the most popular means of cheating were passing on information between students via social media during the electronic test and using paper notes throughout the exam. Cheating was also shown to be impacted by the student's gender in favor of males, but not significantly influenced by the type of college or academic level. The findings of our study have educational implications and suggestions for prospective studies regarding cheating in online learning in higher education.

- Academic dishonesty is a serious issue in online learning, and all educational institutions should implement and enforce an academic integrity policy. Students must be conscious and realize the rules and regulations and the penalties of cheating.
- Because having easier access to numerous cheating techniques encourages cheating, we advocate increasing the monitoring of students during exam sessions. In large groups, more staff members may support the instructor.
- To effectively prevent cheating in online learning, instructors, invigilators, and proctors must be well-trained in conducting invigilation, particularly during online exams.
- Attention must be devoted to organizing workshops and awareness-raising initiatives for all members of the institution, particularly students, to increase their awareness of the crucial role of academic integrity and emphasize everyone's involvement in establishing an academic integrity mindset.
- Higher education institutions in the UAE and other nations worldwide must prepare to establish the infrastructure necessary to significantly and solidly influence how cheating is detected, such as surveillance cameras in classes and electronic device detectors.

7. Suggestion

- A comparative analysis with other UAE or global universities would provide context for the findings and emphasize cultural or institutional differences in attitudes toward cheating.
- Examine students' awareness of Ajman University's academic integrity policies and evaluate the effect of ethics education on their behavior. This investigation could help establish whether specific instruction on academic integrity reduces cheating tendencies and promotes ethical decision-making in online learning environments.
- Implemented effective mitigation strategies, such as redesigning assessments, promoting project-based learning, and utilizing AI to detect plagiarism.

8. Delimitations of Study

- Subject limits: The study focused on cheating in online learning at Ajman University, a higher education institution in the UAE.
- Human limits: Having a particular group of students from the University of Ajman in UAE limited the research article.
- Spatial limits: Ajman University, United Arab Emirates.
- Time limits: Second semester of the academic year (2021/2022)

Declarations

Author Contributions. (R. Abdelrahman.: Literature review, conceptualization. N. Alsalhi: methodology, A. El-Mneizel.: data analysis, A. Alzoubi: review-editing and writing, A. Benlahcene: original manuscript preparation, M. Ahmed. All authors have read and approved the published article's final version.

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