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An Overview of Qualitative Research and Focus Group Discussion

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Abstract

Recently, qualitative studies have been widespread in various areas such as psychology, business, and sociology. In this review, the process of qualitative study has been clarified to offer a description of its general process. Basically, the qualitative investigation is exploratory, which indicates an understanding of the results made by the researcher(s). Likewise, designing research is a process or guideline utilized to prepare, implement, and evaluate an idea that the researchers want to reveal about an issue. It is also a plan to answer the problems or concepts of an investigated study. Since qualitative studies help researchers to examine opinions, attitudes, and perspectives of human beings, so it has gained more attention in many fields and especially in the area of social sciences. Accordingly, the qualitative study focuses on how individuals perceive and give meaning to different social behaviors in order to explore people's social observations. This study aims to reveal the qualitative research process and how the data would be collected via this approach. The researchers attempt to announce the significance of the qualitative study and focus group discussion tool (advantages and limitations as well) to propose a better understanding for the academics who want to utilize a qualitative study in social sciences.

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INTRODUCTION

In the last few decades, the utilization of the qualitative approach has grown in several fields. It may be utilized to investigate a variety of aspects of social interaction for the progress of society. Qualitative research provides descriptive or literary explanations of the hypothesis under the study. When a researcher wants a much more descriptive interpretation, then a qualitative technique could be chosen. It offers a richer and better understanding of society under investigation (Mohajan, 2018). Each study needs to demand a specific, organized, structured method to discover more effective outcomes. Qualitative research is related to nature, and the researcher typically investigates the interpretations and perspectives of a particular environment (Corbin & Strauss, 2014; Levitt et al., 2017). It is also a kind of study that emphasizes the way people interpret and create meaning of their perception in recognizing the social context (Zohrabi, 2013). Similarly, Creswell (2009) claimed a qualitative study as a successful model that exists in a realistic context and allows the investigator to establish a degree of depth information from a group of participants in a specific profession (Creswell, 2009). It applies to a variety of data processing and interpretation methods that are used for a purpose of interviewing, semi-structured, and open-ended group discussions (Dudwick et al., 2006). The discussion interviews are one of the advanced forms of interpersonal interaction for a particular objective, referring to any accepted chosen topic (Anderson et al., 1998). So, the research interview aims to achieve the interviewee's study-related facts, it focuses on the obtained documentation for the research purposes of expecting, clarifying or describing, the specific issues (Cohen, 2007). In qualitative studies, the interview approach is very valuable and significant as they illustrate comprehensive as well as a systematic analysis of the event or condition through nature. (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003).

A crucial step for conducting a qualitative study is that the researchers should think about a tool for collecting data and analyzing techniques. There are various methods for collecting data in qualitative research, but choosing which method is related to what the researcher exactly wants to achieve. This study aimed to announce the significance of the qualitative study, and focus group discussion tool (advantages and limitations) to suggest a better understanding for researchers who want to utilize a qualitative study in the field of social sciences.

1. Qualitative research

Qualitative research is an investigation into how members of the discussion perceive a particular social issue. Typically, it includes interviews or discussions that generate non-numeric results. If a researcher tries to realize an individual's views or opinions, statistics (quantitative research) does not provide a complete view. Conversations or discussions with individuals (qualitative research) sometimes enable investigators to achieve more understanding about why and what are the individuals' perceptions about the research topic (Manu, 2018). Similarly, Lauri 2019 claimed that qualitative research is a fundamental factor for understanding certain hypotheses. Although quantitative data help explain the prevalence of attitudes and behavior, qualitative data also may seek to clarify and describe the causes that influencing behavioral perspectives. (Lauri, 2019). Likewise, the qualitative study aims to advance and improve the perception of how issues are handled in a social circumstance (Hancock et al., 2001).

Recently qualitative research has developed and gained interest in the social fields because it attempts to create a detailed explanation of human attitudes, feelings, and perceptions (Tong et al., 2012). Qualitative research is known as an umbrella that is utilized for applying scientific frameworks such as phenomenology, narrative, action research, grounded theory, case study, content analysis, historical study, and ethnography (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Hancock et al., 2001).

Scholars have suggested different definitions for qualitative research studies, e.g., Strauss and Corbin (1990) defined qualitative research as, any kind of study that produces results not based on quantitative approaches or different forms of measurements. This can contribute to work on an individual's life, personal observations, attitudes, perceptions, and opinions (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Also, Flick (2018) defined it as the understanding and formulation of textual or verbal content to create claims about the clear and ambiguous aspects. The processes of creating meaning in the content and what is represented inside it (Flick, 2018, p 420). On the other hand, Mohajan (2018) claimed it as a successful design that exists in a natural context and allows the investigator to acquire information from a high level of involvement in specific professions. It is commonly used in social sciences for non-numerical statistics and tries to explain the significance of these data to help researchers analyze social activity through the sample of specific populations or areas (Mohajan, 2018). Furthermore, Van Maanen (1979) has well-defined qualitative research as an umbrella term for incorporating a variety of interpretational techniques that seek to describe, interpret, decode the issues in the social sciences. So, according to the aforementioned definitions by different scholars, qualitative research is recognized as a significant aspect for revealing problems and issues in social sciences.

In qualitative research, researchers try to reveal the conditions in that behaviors occur. Unlike quantitative one, qualitative research focuses on understanding complex human issues rather than generalize the results to large populations (Vanderstoep & Johnston, 2009). Selecting the proper sample has an important effect on the quality of the research (Joyne, 1997). Therefore, qualitative sampling needs to be addressed to ensure trustworthiness. There are two general ways of sampling in qualitative research namely: random and non-random. Random sampling is meant to select participants from a group having equal chance to attend a study (Vanderstoep & Johnston, 2009). Researchers usually utilize three non-random sampling models in qualitative research. They are convenience, purposeful and theoretical samples (Oppong, 2013). Convenience samples involve people available for study. It is an easy way to recruit participants although the results obtained may not be generalizable to the larger population (Vanderstoep & Johnston, 2009). Marshall (1996) also indicated that research using convenience sampling is less credible due to its being less demanding and the possibility of acquiring poor data. Purposeful samples are selected people having knowledge and experience about the research interest (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Theoretical samples, on the other hand, are the people selected to examine a theory and then a new sample group to test the theory's validity (Marshall, 1996). Besides selecting proper sample methods there are other issues to contribute to the trustworthiness of qualitative research. Guba (1981) defined four criteria to meet the trustworthiness of qualitative research namely: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Researchers should try to find the answer of 'how congruent are the findings with reality?' to meet the credibility criterion (Merriam, 1998). Shenton (2004) declared that triangulation of data, background of the researcher, willingness of participants, and giving direct quotations are the ways to ensure credibility. Transferability is a kind of external validity which means the results of a study are applicable to others (Merriam, 1998). Dependability is reliability which means in case the research question is re-examined under the same conditions, the similar findings will be achieved (Shenton, 2004). Confirmability is the last criterion of trustworthiness which can be met by triangulation of data and necessary to reduce the researcher's bias (Shenton, 2004).

Commonly in qualitative studies, the researchers use codes and interpretations which are utilized by researchers' brain but currently, the progressive of computer software for analyzing data makes the work easier than before. Especially when the data are big for the researcher to manage very well. Although some computer software such as SPSS and SAS have been programmed for quantitative data, other computer programs can be handled for analyzing non-numerical data, such as survey questions, focus group discussion interviews, interview transcripts, and online interviews. The most common programs for qualitative research in social sciences, including NVivo (Hilal & Alabri, 2013), QDA Miner, and QDA Miner Lite, MAXQDA, and ATLAS.ti (Crossman, 2020).

1.1. The advantages of qualitative research

1.1.1. Realizing a detailed description of an issue

For complex problems, common numbers can indicate what happens to that problem, but not why it happens. In this case, qualitative studies are valuable for examining and describing social dynamics in detail. As an example, quantitative facts can examine how lots of females drop out from school, but qualitative facts can help investigators to understand the obstacles that make their parents drop them out of school. So, this would be more powerful to investigate the detailed barriers behind the issue. (Manu, 2018).

1.1.2. To improve research questions

When a researcher decides to conduct a study, s/he may just have an idea of how and what needs to collect the data, and by using qualitative research may realize the problem and enable the investigator to make a design for future studies (Manu, 2018). In other words, qualitative research attempts to have relevant and deeper explanations of the questions that the investigator asks the participants. Therefore, it tends to obtain an efficient understanding that might be potentially neglected in another method (Hossain, 2011). Moreover, qualitative studies are formed to investigate “how” and “why” not just “when”, “what”, and “where” issues happen, in this regard qualitative need a small number of participants but more focused compared to large randomly selected participants (Hossain, 2011; Murphy et al., 1998).

1.1.3. To know a group of participant’s perspectives

To explain the study question or subject from the perspective of a specific group of participants. Likewise, it is particularly useful for gathering specific knowledge on the beliefs, views, attitudes, perspectives, and social contextual factors of particular groups of people (Med & AFMS, 1997). Thus, it allows the researcher to examine the inner perception of participants, and find out how concepts are formed in society (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

1.1.4. To simplify complicated issues

The qualitative study designs have a variable structure as the framework can be created and reproduced to a better range (Maxwell, 2012). For this purpose, a detailed and effective study of the problem may be conducted by using qualitative study approaches and thus the members would have enough confidence to decide the appropriate and inappropriate things. Consequently, complicated problems or issues could be more efficiently interpreted (Flick, 2011).

1.1.5. To achieve more subjective and detailed data

Investigators communicate openly with the members involved via interviews. The most common methods that are used for collecting data in qualitative research such as focus group discussions, participant-observation, direct observation, unstructured interviews, and describing records throughout collecting the data. So, the outcomes of the data would be subjective and informative (Rahman, 2020).

2. Qualitative research process

Researching whether qualitative or quantitative needs a well-developed plan and some essential steps to reveal what the researcher wishes to investigate of an issue and collecting data. So, writing a study is just like going on a trip if one doesn't know the path s/he has to use a map, yet if one knows the path there is no need to access a map. Accordingly investigating an issue or a problem requires some significant steps to write more efficiently. Likewise, the research process needs to be clear about what the researcher wants to realize and what questions s/he wants to discover their answer. Therefore, some essential steps should be emphasized in order to make the work easier. Figure 1. shows the research process steps (Kumar, 2018).

At the beginning of the research process, the researcher should think of choosing a topic and then conducts a public search on the topic to find out more in literature review and what is in the field that the researcher plans to write about. Then, finding a certain class of people is a significant step to get knowledge about their perceptions and opinions related to the topic issue. Thus, the researcher seeks to focus on collecting knowledge and understand the participant's perspectives about the issue (Creswell et al., 2016). In the next step, a number of questions are prepared for the discussion (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). Research questions play a vital role in conducting a qualitative study. Therefore, the questions require some necessities like clear, easy to search, and understandable (Bryman, 2016; Morse, 1994; Pole & Lampard, 2002). Similarly, Maxwell (2012) argued that a common problem will arise if there is not a relationship between the research questions and the research goals. So, the questions of the research should be designed very carefully (Maxwell, 2012). Then s/he has to choose a method for the research via interviews, questionnaires, focus group discussion, or in-depth interviews. After collecting data, the investigator starts to collect and analyze the obtained data, and analyzing the data is also considered as another significant step in a qualitative study. So, determining appropriate methods and techniques should be planned carefully (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007). Accordingly, the researcher may interpret and compare his or her work with earlier works in the field. Finally, the conclusion should be based on the outcomes of the study, as well as some recommendations for future studies can be added at the end of the study (Lincoln, 2005).

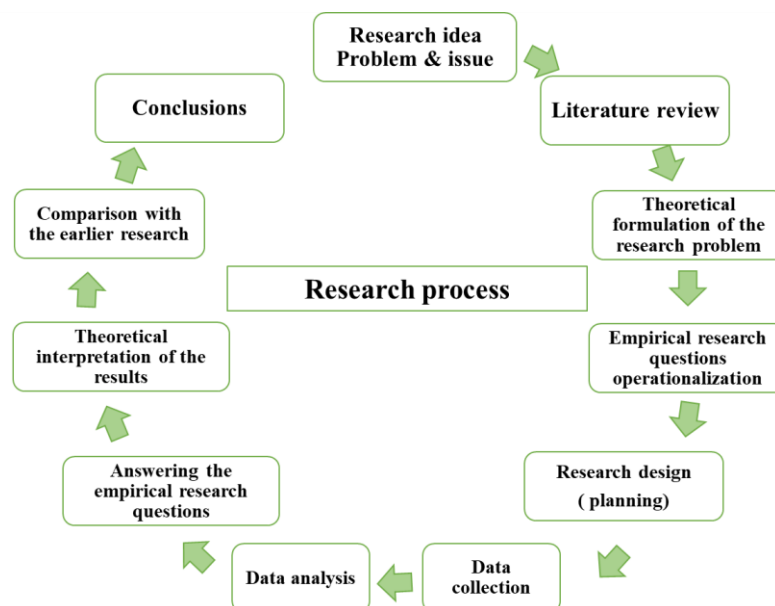


Figure 1. Research process from Shah (2017) and Kumar (2018).

3. The Methods of Collecting data in Qualitative Studies

There are various methods for gathering data in a qualitative study, but choosing which one is related to what the researcher exactly wants to achieve. The most common tools used for qualitative research are focus group discussions, interviews, and participant observation (Vanderstoep & Johnston, 2009). Recently focus group discussion as a tool for collecting data in qualitative studies has been expanded in many fields (Krueger & Casey, 2000; Madriz, 2000; Morgan, 1996). In this study, as the qualitative research method focus group discussion has been highlighted.

Social science investigators in general and qualitative investigators especially depend on focus groups to obtain data from several people at the same time. Focus groups might be more confident in certain study subjects, and this kind of discussion is beneficial for participants to reveal beliefs, opinions, perspectives, and experiences (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009).

3.1. Focus group discussion

Interviews as very popular tools of qualitative research are believed to provide a deeper insight of a phenomenon when very little is known about it. They are very proper especially when the participants do not want to talk about some sensitive issues in a group environment (Gill, Stewart, Treasure & Chadwick, 2008). FGDs on the other hand, are more advantageous providing more authentic environments in which participants influence one another and are influenced (Casey & Crueger, 2000). Group interaction is the other advantage creating synergy effect on participants (Stewart & Shamdasani, (2014). Moreover, when there is limited opportunity for data collection focus groups are preferably compared to individual interviews (Vanderstoep & Johnston, 2009). Therefore, they are utilized to collect high-quality data in the social context as Patton (2002) emphasized. Then FGDs should be defined and understood well to conduct them properly.

Initially, the focus groups were used and clarified by Bogadus in 1926 in the field of social sciences (Rice & Ezzy, 1999). It is also known as the most commonly widespread technique in social sciences. It has appeared as a recognizable element of the qualitative research group of cognitive and scientific research for a specific purpose (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2014). FGDs are recognized as not limited interviews facilitated by a professional moderator. The moderator raises open-ended questions to achieve answers and stimulates debate among the members involved. The objective of the moderator in a focus group discussion is to produce the greatest number of arguments and perspectives within a limited duration. This method might be used as the researcher wants to explain a problem or issue at a deeper understanding than a questionnaire method. (Prasad & Garcia, 2017).

Dilshad & Latif (2013) claimed that a focus group interview has been one of the significant gathering techniques in qualitative research (Dilshad & Latif, 2013). Also, to conduct a number of a particular discussion, focus groups would be a reasonable one for collecting data. Choosing participants for a focus group is not random, thus for achieving good group conformation some tips should be planned very well. However, if the subject is not simple, Krueger (1994) acclaimed that the researcher should not have more than 7 members in the focus group (Casey& Krueger, 1994; Vanderstoep & Johnson, 2008). Furthermore, as explained by Casey & Krueger (2000), the focus group offers a more ordinary environment to compare with individual interviews. The participants are affected by peers much as if they are in reality (Krueger & Casey, 2000). Moreover, required participants often enjoy communicating with each other, and the discussion will create different ideas and perspectives for both participants and the researcher as well (Cameron, 2005). So a focus group discussion would be a useful attempt to have participants with common experiences together to examine a particular subject of interest, and it is known as an effective

way to gather knowledge from all kinds of people (i.e. young age children & teens, and elderly adults as well) (Lune & Berg, 2017)

Compared with other collecting data techniques such as questionnaires, observations, and so on, group discussions can be a valuable source to explore the internal views and emotions of individuals, interviewing with participants is highly suitable for knowing because it focused on feelings, thoughts, perceptions, sensitive matters, experiences, and knowledge of the members (Wisker, 2001).

Some dos and don'ts need to be done when a researcher tries to conduct an FGDs, for example, the moderator should listen to all participants and, s/he has to ask general and open-ended questions to get the participant warmed up; as the discussion gets started s/he must tell all the discussion rules and make them feel confident enough; and the moderator should be sympathetic about the arise subject (Adelmund, 2007). Besides, some don'ts should be mentioned such as the moderator should not ask yes-no questions; do not tell any of the participants that you are wrong; and the moderator should not dismiss any comments or opinions by the participants even if it doesn't similar to moderator's opinion (Adelmund, 2007). Accordingly, the moderator and the members should be respectful to each other to make sure that everyone expresses their perspectives. Furthermore, shaking the head or raising eyebrows, accepting or rejecting suggestions, as well, are not allowed in focus group discussion (Smithson, 2008).

Currently using the internet has extended everyone's life. There are 679.7 million people in the world who are accessing internet technology. This development has led to an intense educational interest in the social implications of the use of computers, specifically in the use of computers by individuals and groups to have meetings and make decisions without the need for face-to-face meetings such as online focus group discussions (Reid & Reid, 2005; Reid et al., 1996).

3.2. Some significant steps for conducting focus group discussion

Figure 2 shows a schematic diagram that provides the steps of conducting focus group discussion. In the qualitative research method (focus group discussion), a researcher gathers some participants for discussing a selected topic that has a common interest to both the researcher and the participants (Morgan, 1997). In performing the analysis, the researcher should plan the purpose of the focus group in his mind. The results will be achieved quickly after the closing of the group meeting. Verifying audio records, examining written letters, gathering, labeling auxiliary resources, the great concepts and ideas are required in focus group data collection (Anderson et al., 1998).

Krueger 2014 indicated that the focus group must have a moderator for presiding the focus group meeting. The responsibilities of the moderator are initiating the debate, as well as inspiring participants to respond for expressing their perceptions and opinions confidently. Another, crucial role of the moderator is to make members assure and comfortable to be engaged with the discussion effectively. Furthermore, everyone should be able to speak and interact (Krueger, 2014). The technique for recruiting participants would depend on the kind of participants that the researcher needs.

A significant point to conduct a focus group is the creation of the basic rules. One of the basic rules includes privacy, and this requires planning for a proposal carefully, and the implementation stage of the ethics committee. For implementing focus groups, the researcher should think about a topic and an issue. Indeed, FGDs need to obtain a group of specific members who should have experience with the target topic for the interview discussions. Thus, the chosen respondents must have enough information to debate the subject of the discussion (Richardson & Rabiee, 2001). The number of the participants of the focus groups may differ, commonly focus group members consists of 10-12 people (Baumgartner et al., 2002) between six to ten (Powell & Single, 1996) and between six to eight (Krueger & Casey, 2000), together in a discussion which they will guide by a moderator. The variety of focus group sizes comes

from the target that focus groups can involve appropriate members to produce various information offered. Accordingly, focus groups should not be involved with too many participants as large groups otherwise it doesn't construct a confident environment for the participants for expressing their views, viewpoints, values, and skills (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009). The research issue and the research layouts have essentially controlled how the focus group is developed. Well-organized focus groups usually run from one to two hours (Morgan, 1996).

On the other hand, Dawson et al. emphasized some management for collecting focus group discussion data and they insist on writing notes by pen and paper carefully which makes the study more trustworthy. Accordingly, they recommended some key points to collect data such as recording the discussion to do not miss any comments or opinions by the participants; preparing the information for analysis; and storing the information for the time if the researcher needs them to review (Dawson et al., 1993). At the end of the discussion, the researcher(s) analyze the session and collect the data for the study (Cameron, 2010; Focus Groups, 2017).



Figure 2. Steps to conduct a focus group retrieved from (Focus Groups, 2017).

Besides, Anderson et al. (1998) also recommended some tips for data collection in the focus group discussion.

- The researcher should type and record the name of participants and their comments as well, and s/he should be careful about the arrangement of seating of the members.
- In the content analysis, the researcher should cut significant comments and paste the remarks into subjects.
- All the comments and grammatical mistakes should be arranged and edited when needed.
- For all statements separately a summary statement should be written (Anderson et al., 1998).

3.3 Advantages and limitations of the focus group in qualitative research

3.3.1 Advantages of conducting focus groups

As compared to other techniques focus group discussion has some advantages and limitations that need to be addressed as follows:

1. Focus groups are a fast, effective, and economic method for gathering information with a group of well-organized participants in a socially-oriented environment (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009).
2. Interaction is a fundamental characteristic in the focus groups interaction among stakeholders reveals everyone's perspective, the language discussion, their beliefs, and values about the topic. Regularly, interaction allows individuals to discuss issues with each other and re-examine their understandings about their experiences (Kitzinger, 1994, 1995).
3. The focus group discussion tool has a variety of interesting properties that are useful for distance learning (Tümen Akyıldız, 2020).
4. A large amount of information can be achieved much rapidly and at fewer costs with the focus group compared to the other conventional interviews.
5. They are extremely good at accessing data from social groups.
6. When the focus group is being applied to discuss comparatively small problems, individuals who are not qualified in observational analysis techniques can quickly handle it.
7. Since the open-ended questions are flexible, it assumes that the researcher can reveal perceptions and beliefs which may not be discovered in the questionnaire.
8. The investigator is in the session at such discussions can pursue answers when needed.
9. It's also accepted, and enjoyable by the participants (Dawson et al., 1993).

3.3.2 Limitations of the focus group discussions

Above and beyond the benefits and significance of using a focus group, some limitations need to be emphasized in conducting a focus group.

1. Focus group findings may not commonly be used to create assumptions about the larger population, in other words, but results also may reflect a variety of views and beliefs, nevertheless not their distributions.
2. Group members often accept the answers of the discussion participants', as well as caution is always necessary for evaluating the findings.
3. An untrained moderator may simply force the members to respond to issues in a specific way that he wants not the participant's opinion (Dawson et al., 1993) Similarly, Gibbs (1997) claimed that the moderator should let the participants negotiate with each other, express and ask about different opinions or doubts, whereas unknowledgeable moderator may not control the discussion in a proper way (Gibbs, 1997).

4. There is a limitation to explore the complex ideas of individuals, so in-depth, discussions are a more suitable approach for this aim.

5. It may create a picture of what is commonly in natural culture rather than what happens or is accepted. The researcher has to be aware of choosing what kind of participants and must have good skills to moderate the discussion (Dawson et al., 1993; Dilshad et al., 2013; Gorman et al., 2005).

3.4. Analyzing focus group data

Onwuegbuzie et al. (2009) and Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2007, 2008) recommended a helpful framework that contains several qualitative analyzing techniques for researchers. The analytical techniques that are effective to analyze focus group data such as; constant comparison method, content analysis, keywords-in-context, and discourse analysis.

3.4.1. Constant comparison analysis

Although this method first advanced by Glaser and Strauss 1967 which was used in grounded theory research (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), then Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2007, 2008) had discovered that constant comparison may be helpful to analyze other types of data such as focus group discussion (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2008; Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009). It may include a comparison of subjects occurring in diverse focus groups. In order to establish more complete features of the categories for the individual codes, the researcher should constantly compare the categories and codes of new texts with current categories and codes. This is an ongoing process before quantity is attained (Barnett, 2002).

Generally, the data can be interpreted via constant comparison once the researchers would have decided to have more than one focus group. This technique helps the researcher to measure saturation and especially saturation across groups (Charmaz, 2000).

3.4.2. Content analysis

Content analysis is a research technique utilized to assess the meaning of given patterns, words, or perceptions in a certain obtained data. The data can be gained via interviews, focus groups, open-ended questions, and conversations. This technique is most commonly used in the qualitative study which aims to divide the content of the discussion into an appropriate number of categories that express the same meaning (Moretti et al., 2011). Accordingly, creating content codes of the discussion and taking care of the repeated codes are crucial points. Although the content analysis in some ways is similar to constant comparison. The constant comparison makes a theme with the codes while content analysis tries to count and place the codes into equal groupings (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009). The current content analysis applications display three distinctive approaches which it is directed, conventional, or it is summative. These approaches are needed to interpret the meaning of the content of the text data; therefore, they observe the natural paradigm. The origin of the codes, coding structures, and challenges to reliability are the main variations among the approaches (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). In addition, Weber (1990) claimed that qualitative content analysis is going from purely counting words to systematically analyzing vocabulary to categorize large amounts of the document into an effective number of categories for describing related concepts (Weber, 1990). Concerning the analysis of the data, researchers may use quantitative data analysis to present statistical or mathematical results using tools, while a qualitative researcher can use content analysis to analyze meaning or to evaluate their results based on description or written outcomes (Zakaria & Zakaria, 2016).

3.4.3. Keywords-in-context

Keywords-in-context is a kind of analysis used in numerous fields. Researchers using the keywords-in-context, utilize words differently by analyzing the meaning of the word in their expression (Leech et al., 2008). This technique requires a detailed examination of the meaning of language and words as a context in both individual and group discussions. It is clearly reflecting an interpretation of the context in using the word. This technique aims to evaluate the utilization of words in context with other words (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009). Although several software applications such as (QSR International Pty Ltd., 2006, and NVIVO, version 7.0) are available and can be used to facilitate with keywords-in-context analyzing technique, they can be also carried out manually (Leech et al., 2008; Richards, 1999).

3.4.4. Discourse analysis

Discourse analysis is a scientific research technique for analyzing spoken or written language about its social meaning. Its objective is to explain how languages are used in practical life settings. Commonly it is used qualitative studies in the field of social sciences. Accordingly, it is a conceptual way to analyze documents, depending on both essentials of the content given as well as on conceptual experience, that the researcher creates interpretations. It focused on the objectives and impacts of various language types, and how the use of language refers to its historical, social, and political meaning (Luo, 2020).

In Britain, a group of social psychologists leading by Potter and Wetherall formed a method of discourse analysis which is also recognized as discursive psychology. They proposed that in addition to recognizing human behavior and perception, it was important to investigate how individuals interacted in everyday conditions (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). This qualitative research technique requires the selection of specific, unique sections or language usage elements like numerous lines of focus group discussion texts. After that, it will be analyzed to observe how forms of elements like community, skills, procedures, and society develop in discourse (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002). Ultimately, this concept corresponds to well-established approaches for explaining and recognizing things (Leech et al., 2008).

4. Views of researchers about the importance of focus group discussion in social science studies

If focus group discussion has been recognized as a beneficial method for researchers of other fields in general, it has multiple advantages for social science researchers (Krueger, R. A. et al., 2000). This part shows the view of researchers whom they conducted their study via focus group discussions. González & Quinchía, (2003) researched EFL teachers' perceptions to analyze the testimony of private and public-school teachers, owing to the importance of group discussion for such a kind of studies they used four focus sessions to reveal how participants believe and feel about the project (González & Quinchía, 2003).

Consequently, Tümen Akyıldız, (2020) conducted research to know college students' views on the pandemic distance education. She conducted the study via the focus group discussion technique and she mentioned it as a significant method because it is unlike personal interviews. The participants could think openly in focus group conversations and feeling confident to express what they believe, share arguments with others, and modify their personal views as the conversation continues in informal life situations. She also claimed that the focus group discussion tool has a variety of interesting properties that are useful for distance learning. Similarly, Toland et al., (2014) conducted a qualitative study and focus group session to collect data due to the significant role of this method for understanding opinions and ideas of several stakeholders, including faculty members, administrators, and students, at private Japanese university concerning their usage and perceptions of the LMS Manaba. They realized that the focus group is more suitable for collecting their data. Accordingly, they claimed that there are many advantages that led them to use a focus group as a collecting tool and stated it as a powerful tool for collecting data (Toland et al., 2014). Furthermore, Lobe et al., claimed that qualitative researchers face new prospects and obstacles in the period of COVID19 (a pandemic period of coronavirus disease which raised in 2019), and the remote

learning situation, they highlighted the significance of qualitative research and focus group for this pandemic situation. They also revealed several alternative tools for collecting data during the socially distant process which is instead of collecting data via face to face the researchers can collect their data via online focus group discussion (Lobe et al., 2020). Likewise, collecting data via online platforms has become increasing in the field of social sciences, so to enhance and perhaps a replacement of face-to-face interactions online focus groups are utilized progressively (Lobe, 2017). In addition to the important focus group in qualitative and social science Tercanlioglu (2008) examined an investigation of pre-service English as a foreign language (EFL) teacher opinions which the researcher used focus group discussion through the significance of focus groups and aims at gathering the widest variety of knowledge (Tercanlioglu, 2008).

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to highlight the importance of qualitative research and as a tool focus group discussion in social sciences. The investigation revealed that qualitative studies can help the investigators to examine and achieve the explanation of complex concepts. As qualitative research deals with human behaviors and thoughts, it can be seen as an easier method for conducting than quantitative research. The process of conducting qualitative research and focus group discussion can be more collaborative compared to other types of research because focus group discussion inspires a framework for stakeholders and give them a chance to express their feelings and opinions as well thanks to the group synergy. Furthermore, the researchers should have a well-planned purpose and some key steps should be mentioned to implement this method for being more effective and successful study.

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Justifying academic dishonesty: A survey of Canadian university students

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Abstract

Academic dishonesty is a growing problem in the higher education sector. Using a sample of 321 undergraduate students at a medium-sized Canadian university, this paper explores the respondents' acceptability of the various reasons for engagement in academically dishonest behaviour. The findings revealed that respondents displayed moderately negative attitudes toward academic dishonesty and that the top three circumstances under which academically dishonest behavior would be considered acceptable were pressure to maintain a scholarship, pressure from parents to perform well, and heavy academic work load.

Multiple ordinary least-squares regression analysis revealed that male respondents and those who reported a higher family income, enrolled in more classes, witnessed academic misconduct more frequently, expressed dissatisfaction with academic performance, indicated dissatisfaction with school life, placed less emphasis on intrinsic motivation to pursue higher education, and adopted a surface approach to learning were found to be associated with a greater likelihood of accepting the various justifications for academic dishonesty.

The results of this investigation may be utilized by university administrators, academic advisors, and academic counselors to aid in the design of support services and interventions (e.g., explicit guidelines and practical teaching/learning resources) that will serve to prevent academic misconduct and to promote academic integrity.

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INTRODUCTION

Academic dishonesty can be defined as “any deceitful or unfair act intended to produce a more desirable outcome on an exam, paper, homework assignment, or other assessment of learning” (Miller, Murdock, & Grotewiel, 2017: 121) and is undeniably a formidable challenge facing all institutions of higher education. Academic dishonesty can take different forms, such as cheating, plagiarism, and falsification. Notably, contract cheating (i.e., academic work being outsourced to a third party) has become a growing concern. Harper et al. (2018) have stressed that contract cheating takes place when a student submits academic work that has been completed by a third party, regardless of the involvement of monetary transaction and the student-third party relationship. Asking someone to write an assignment, purchasing a research paper from a website, or paying someone to sit an exam are examples of contract cheating.

As noted by Moore (2014), a survey of 54 Canadian universities revealed that 7,086 students were disciplined for cheating during the academic year of 2011-12. In fact, Eaton (2020a) has pointed out that cheating may be under-reported across Canada’s institutions of higher learning and estimated that over 70,000 post-secondary students may engage in contract cheating each academic year. This estimation was relied on findings from a meta-analysis revealing that about 3.5% of students engage in contract cheating annually. As well, Eaton (2020b) has also noted that cases of alleged unethical behaviour including rather unconventional cheating strategies (e.g., grade hacking, bribery, and theft of exams from offices) at universities across the nation have been widely publicized in the media (Eaton, 2020a, 2020b). Needless to say, these unfortunate incidents might tarnish the reputation of the institutions concerned and diminish the worth of the academic credentials that were granted.

Without a doubt, academic dishonesty is a critical issue that can seriously undermine the integrity of the education process. It may have detrimental consequences for the individuals who engage in such behaviour, the higher education sector, as well as the broader society. Previous studies have shown that academic dishonesty is associated with unethical behaviour in professional practice and in the workplace (Guerrero-Dib et al., 2020; Harding et al., 2004; Johnstone, 2016; LaDuke, 2013; Mulisa & Ebessa, 2021; Nonis & Swift, 2001) and engagement in other rule-violating behaviour (Blankenship & Whitley, 2000; Kerkvliet, 1994; Korn & Davidovitch, 2016; Lovett-Hooper et al., 2007).

In light of the fact that cheating on exams and written assignments has become rampant as a result of the burgeoning online paper and exam writing service sector, it is worth noting that some countries, such as Australia and New Zealand, have already resorted to legal means to tackle this problem, making it an offence to advertise or offer cheating services in higher education (Cosenza, 2020; Draper & Newton, 2017).

A growing body of literature has explored the correlates of academic dishonesty and revealed that a number of socio-demographic and contextual variables, including male students (Brunell et al., 2011; Eret & Ok, 2014; Eriksson, & McGee, 2015; Hensley et al., 2013), younger age (Rakovski & Levy, 2007; Vandehey et al., 2007), low self-esteem (David, 2015; Williamson & Assadi, 2005), aversive personality (Bacon et al., 2020; Esteves et al., 2021; Giluk, & Postlethwaite, 2015; Williams et al., 2010; Wilks et al., 2016), lack of language proficiency (Chien, 2017; Goh, 2015; McCabe et al., 2008; Yukhymenko-Lescroart, 2014; Yoshimura, 2018), low academic performance and scholastic attitudes (Park, et al., 2013; Pino & Smith, 2003; Smith et al., 2004; Whitley & Keith-Spiegel, 2002), fields of study such as business, science, and engineering (Khalid, 2015; Marsden et al., 2005; McCabe et al., 2006), participation in extra-curricular activities and intercollegiate/intramural sports (Ma et al., 2013; Jewett, 2006; Mustaine & Tewksbury, 2005), membership in fraternities or sororities (Storch & Storch 2002; Williams & Janosik, 2007), poor instructor-student relationships (Beasley, 2014; Coren, 2011; MacGregor & Stuebs, 2012; Maeda, 2021; Simkin & McLeod, 2010), perceived low risk of getting caught (Buckley et al., 1998; Lester & Diekhoff, 2002), lenient attitudes toward cheating (Park et al., 2013), and inconsistent enforcement of academic

integrity policy (Malesky et al., 2021; Schwartz et al., 2013) were significantly associated with an increased likelihood of engagement in academic cheating. As well, there is considerable evidence showing a steady rise in student acceptability of academic dishonesty (Anderman & Won, 2019; Kukolja, et al., 2012; McCabe & Trevino, 1993; Muñoz-García & Aviles-Herrera, 2014).

Purpose of the study

Based on a thorough literature review on studies exploring academic dishonesty within the Canadian context, Eaton & Edino (2018) have concluded that despite a recent increase in the number of academic publications, only very limited research has been undertaken to address this important subject. This paper contributes to the literature by investigating Canadian university students' views on acceptability of academically dishonest practices. The major determinants of students' justifications for engagement in academically dishonest behaviour will also be disentangled.

METHOD

Sample

Data for this study were drawn from a larger investigation that was undertaken to examine academic honesty, campus life, and views on justice issues among university students in a western Canadian city (see Chow et al., 2010; Jurdi et al., 2012, 2011). Using a convenience sampling method, a total of 321 undergraduate students took part in a self-administered questionnaire survey. With the assistance of the Sociology and Social Studies faculty members, questionnaires were distributed to their classes. Each prospective participant was provided with a cover letter specifying the primary purposes of the survey. The letter also emphasized that participation would be strictly on a voluntary basis, submission of a completed questionnaire would serve as consent to participate, and all information provided would remain anonymous and confidential. The participants, who received no compensation, filled out the survey during lecture time that took about 15-20 minutes to complete. Although the participants were recruited from Sociology and Social Studies classes, they were officially registered with various schools and faculties, including Administration, Arts, Education, Engineering, Fine Arts, Human Justice, Journalism, Kinesiology, Science, and Social Work. Ethical clearance for the research project was obtained from the Research Ethics Board of the University of Regina.

The sample consisted of 101 (31.9%) male and 216 (68.1%) female students, ranging in age from 17 to 57 years ($M = 21.16$; $SD = 4.45$). Canadian-born ($n = 307$, 96.8%) and Caucasian students ($n = 270$, 85.4%) constituted an overwhelming majority of the sample. Regarding marital status, over four-fifths were single or never married ($n = 267$, 84.2%). About half of the sample ($n = 181$, 52.8%) reported an annual family income between \$60,000 and \$100,000 ($n = 110$, 37.7%) or over \$100,000 ($n = 97$, 29.8%). Nearly three-fifths indicated Protestantism ($n = 55$, 17.67%) or Catholicism ($n = 121$, 38.8%) as their religious affiliation. Most respondents belonged to the Faculties of Arts ($n = 177$, 55.3%), Social Work ($n = 42$, 13.1%), Administration ($n = 36$, 11.3%), Education ($n = 21$, 6.6%), and Science ($n = 19$, 5.9%).

Measures of Key Variables

Dependent Variable

Acceptability of academically dishonest behaviour (i.e., cheating, plagiarism, and falsification) was a summated score ($M = 10.44$, $SD = 4.45$) based on the extent to which respondents considered the following five reasons acceptable or unacceptable: (1) The heavy academic work load at this university (M

= 2.21, SD = 1.12), (2) Pressure to maintain a scholarship (M = 2.35, SD = 1.17), (3) Pressure from parents to perform well (M = 2.28, SD = 1.19), (4) Knowing that the chance of getting caught is minimal (M = 1.88, SD = .996), and (5) Other students are cheating without getting caught (M = 1.73, SD = 1.03). Response categories ranged from 1 (acceptable) to 5 (unacceptable). This additive scale has possible scores ranging from 5.0 to 25.0. It should be noted that the coding for these five items has been reversed for the subsequent multivariate analysis so that a higher score would reflect a more lenient attitude toward academic dishonesty.

Predictor Variables

To explore the major determinants of respondents' acceptability of academic dishonesty, a multiple OLS regression model was estimated using the following fifteen predictor variables:

Class enrollment was based on number of classes students were taking at the time of the survey (M = 4.08, SD = .94).

Frequency of witnessing academic cheating (M = 1.65, SD = .76) was based on the number of times respondents have witnessed someone cheating on exams since starting university (1 = 0 times; 2 = 1 to 3 times; 3 = 4 to 6 times; 4 = 7 or more times).

Satisfaction with school life (M = 3.60, SD = .91) was measured on a five-point scale (1 = very dissatisfied to 5 = very satisfied).

Satisfaction with academic performance (M = 3.28, SD = .99) was measured on a five-point scale (1 = very dissatisfied to 5 = very satisfied).

Satisfaction with quality of teaching (M = 3.73, SD = .83) was measured on a five-point scale (1 = very dissatisfied to 5 = very satisfied).

Grade point average (M = 3.79, SD = .87) was measured on a six-point scale (1 = under 50%; 2 = 50-59%; 3 = 60-69%; 4 = 70-79%; 5 = 80-89%; 6 = 90-100%).

Intrinsic (intellectual) motivation to pursue higher education was a summated score (M = 11.82, SD = 2.30) based on the importance of various factors that motivated the respondents to pursue university studies, including (1) The will to expand my knowledge (M = 4.00, SD = .86), (2) Intellectual challenge and interest (M = 3.82, SD = .90), and (3) The desire for self-fulfillment (M = 4.00, SD = .90). The response categories ranged from 1 (very unimportant) to 5 (very important). This three-item scale has a Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of .828.

Extrinsic (instrumental) motivation to pursue higher education was a summated score (M = 12.92, SD = 2.27) based on the importance of various factors that motivated the respondents to pursue university studies: (1) The desire to acquire a profession (M = 4.52, SD = .81), (2) The desire to earn a university degree (M = 4.20, SD = .93), and (3) The desire to achieve a high-status and well-paid job (M = 4.20, SD = 1.07). Response categories ranged from 1 (very unimportant) to 5 (very important). This three-item scale has Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of .731.

Deep approach to learning was a composite score (M = 10.87, SD = 2.17) based on the respondents' degree of agreement or disagreement with the following three statements dealing with deep learning approach measured on a five-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree): (1) I try to relate what I have learned in one subject to that in another (M = 3.84, SD = .91), (2) I find that I have to do enough work on a topic so that I can form my own point of view before I am satisfied (M = 3.44, SD = .92), and (3) While I am studying, I often think of real life situations to which the material that I am

learning would be useful ($M = 3.59$, $SD = 1.05$). This three-item scale has a Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of .619.

Surface approach to learning was a composite score ($M = 5.73$, $SD = 1.94$) based on the respondents' degree of agreement or disagreement with the following two statements measured on a five-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree): (1) I think browsing around is a waste of time, so I only study seriously what is given out in class ($M = 2.97$, $SD = 1.11$) and (2) I generally restrict my study to what is specially set out as I think it is unnecessary to do anything extra ($M = 2.76$, $SD = 1.05$). This two-item scale has a Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of .761.

Regarding socio-demographic variables, sex was a dichotomous variable (1 = male; 0 = female). Age was measured in years ($M = 21.16$, $SD = 4.45$). Religious affiliation was dummy coded (1 = Protestant or Catholic; 0 = other). Family income ($M = 4.21$, $SD = 1.54$) was a continuous variable measured on a six-point scale (1 = \$ 20,000 or less; 2 = \$ 20,001 to 40,000; 3 = \$ 40,001 to 60,000; 4 = \$ 60,001 to 80,000; 5 = \$ 80,001 to 100,000; 6 = \$ 100,001 or more). Parents' education was a composite score ($M = 7.85$, $SD = 2.24$) based on the educational attainment of respondents' father ($M = 3.91$, $SD = 1.34$) and mother ($M = 3.96$, $SD = 1.25$) using a six-point scale (1 = no formal education to 6 = graduate school).

Data Analysis

Statistical analyses were performed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (IBM SPSS Statistics 26). The Cronbach's alpha reliability test was employed to assess the internal consistency of all scales used. Multiple ordinary least-squares (OLS) regression analysis was used to disentangle the key determinants of respondents' acceptability of academic dishonesty. This particular technique is commonly used to explore the relationship between a continuous variable and a set of independent variables which can be either continuous or dichotomous (Pallant, 2020). It generates several coefficients, including the correlation coefficient (R), R-square (R^2), adjusted R-square (adjusted R^2), and unstandardized (b) and standardized (β) regression coefficients, in which each provides valuable information (Abu-Bader, 2016).

FINDINGS

Justifications for Academic Dishonesty

Respondents were asked to express their views on the acceptability of various reasons for engagement in academic misconduct (i.e., cheating, plagiarism, or falsification) on a five-point scale ranging from 1 (acceptable) to 5 (unacceptable). As shown in Table 1, the mean scores ranged between 3.65 and 4.27, demonstrating respondents' moderately negative attitudes toward academic dishonesty. The results revealed that the top three circumstances under which respondents considered academic dishonesty to be justifiable included "pressure to maintain a scholarship" ($M = 3.65$, $SD = 1.17$), "pressure from parents to perform well" ($M = 3.72$, $SD = 1.19$), and "heavy academic work load at this university" ($M = 3.79$, $SD = 1.12$).

Table 1. *Justifications for academically dishonest behaviour*

Items	1	2	3	4	5	M (SD)
	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	
1. The heavy academic workload at this university	10 (3.1)	36 (11.2)	72 (22.5)	96 (30.0)	106 (33.1)	3.79 (1.116)
2. Pressure to maintain a scholarship	13 (4.1)	50 (15.7)	65 (20.4)	99 (31.0)	92 (28.8)	3.65 (1.169)
3. Pressure from parents to perform well	14 (4.4)	46 (14.4)	59 (18.4)	96 (30.0)	105 (32.8)	3.72 (1.187)
4. Knowing that the chance of getting caught is minimal	6 (1.9)	19 (5.9)	49 (15.3)	104 (32.5)	142 (44.4)	4.12 (.996)
5. Other students are cheating without getting caught	7 (2.2)	19 (5.9)	39 (12.2)	72 (22.5)	183 (57.2)	4.27 (1.030)

(1 = Acceptable; 2 = Somewhat acceptable; 3 = Uncertain/Not applicable; 4 = Somewhat unacceptable; 5 = Unacceptable)

Major Determinants of Students' Justifications for Academically Dishonest Behaviour

The multiple OLS regression model predicting justifications for academic dishonesty, as displayed in Table 2, was found to be significant ($F(15, 305) = 7.212, p < .001$), accounting for 22.6% of the variation. Eight predictor variables, including sex ($\beta = .103, p < .05$), family income, ($\beta = .112, p < .05$), class enrollment ($\beta = .107, p < .05$), frequency of witnessing academic misconduct ($\beta = .178, p < .001$), satisfaction with school performance ($\beta = -.160, p < .01$), satisfaction with school life ($\beta = -.131, p < .05$), intrinsic motivation to pursue higher education ($\beta = -.164, p < .01$), and surface approach to learning ($\beta = .192, p < .001$) were significantly related to respondents' views on acceptability of academic dishonesty.

More specifically, male respondents and those who reported a higher family income, enrolled in more classes, witnessed academic misconduct more frequently, expressed dissatisfaction with academic performance, indicated dissatisfaction with school life, placed less emphasis on intrinsic motivation to pursue higher education, and adopted a surface approach to learning were found to be associated with a greater likelihood of accepting the various justifications for academic dishonesty. It is worth mentioning that two additional variables came close as significant predictors at the $p < .05$ level. If the $p < .10$ level of significance was used, the results would suggest that respondents who were less satisfied with the quality of teaching and placed greater emphasis on extrinsic motivation to pursue university education would be more likely to accept academically dishonest behaviour.

Table 2. Multiple OLS regression model predicting justifications for academic dishonesty

Predictor variables	b	β
1. Sex	.985	.103 *
2. Age	-.070	-.070
3. Religious affiliation	.589	.066
4. Family income	.339	.112 *
5. Parents' education	-.099	-.049
6. Class enrollment	.503	.107 *
7. Frequency of witnessing cheating	1.051	.178 ***
8. Grade point average	-.496	-.044
9. Satisfaction with academic performance	-.713	-.160 **
10. Satisfaction with school life	-.641	-.131 *
11. Satisfaction with quality of teaching	-.527	-.098 +
12. Motivation to pursue higher education		
Intrinsic motivation	-.316	-.164 **
Extrinsic motivation	.179	.091 +
13. Learning style		
Deep learning approach	.104	.051
Surface learning approach	.439	.192 ***
(Constant)	11.343 ***	
F	(15, 305) = 7.212 ***	
R ²	.262	
Adjusted R ²	.226	
N	320	

+ $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

Discussion

Drawing on data obtained from a questionnaire survey of Canadian undergraduate students, this paper examines respondents' acceptability of academically dishonest behaviour and factors that contributed to the variations in their endorsement. The results revealed that respondents displayed moderately negative attitudes toward academic dishonesty. The multiple regression analysis ascertained the significance earlier studies have attributed to a range of socio-demographic and contextual variables in shaping students' views.

Among the socio-demographic variables, sex and family income emerged to be significant predictors. With respect to sex, male respondents were found to display more accepting attitudes toward academically dishonest behaviour. This is not unexpected as Whitley et al.'s (1999) meta-analysis of studies focusing on sex differences showed that males admitted to having cheated more, viewed cheating more positively than females, and cheated more frequently as assessed in classroom observations. It should, however, be noted that conflicting results have been reported in the literature. Specifically, studies have also shown that either males (Eriksson & McGee, 2015; Hadjar, 2019; Hensley et al., 2013; McCabe & Trevino, 1997; Yang et al., 2017) or females (DePalma et al., 1995; Graham et al., 1994) could be more likely to engage in academically dishonest behaviour, depending on the specific circumstances and forms of cheating. Regarding family income, respondents who reported a higher family income were found to have a greater likelihood of endorsing academically dishonest behaviour. In fact, there is empirical evidence showing the strong connection between high social class and unethical behaviour (Balakrishnan et al., 2017; Dubois et al., 2015; Piff et al., 2012).

In line with previous studies which have identified not only the linkage between academic dishonesty and psychological well-being, but also the association between satisfaction with life and learning (Muñoz-García & Aviles-Herrera, 2014; Pulvers & Diekhoff, 1999), this analysis has shown that students who were less satisfied with school life tended to be more likely to endorse academically dishonest behaviour. Respondents who reported a higher frequency of witnessing academic misconduct were also found to be associated with a greater likelihood of accepting academic dishonesty. This finding corroborates earlier studies showing the strong effects of witnessing others' cheating on engagement in academically dishonest behaviour (Bernardi et al., 2012; Carrell et al., 2008; O'Rourke et al., 2010; Yang et al., 2017). Consistent with findings from past research (Hadjar, 2019; Kristin & Frone, 2004; Hensley et al., 2013; Ma et al., 2013; McCabe & Trevino, 1997; Teodorescu & Andrei, 2009), this study has demonstrated an inverse relationship between school performance and endorsement of academically dishonest behaviour.

In addition, course enrollment emerged as another significant predictor. Respondents who enrolled in more courses were more likely to justify academically dishonest practices. Those who had to deal with a heavier workload would undeniably face a higher level of stress (Miller et al., 2017; Okoye et al., 2018). Congruent with prior studies (Bacon et al., 2020; Ballantine et al., 2018; Delgado et al., 2018; Xin, 2011), this research has provided further evidence that students who adopted a surface approach to learning, as compared to those who used a deep approach, were revealed to be more likely to accept academic dishonesty. A final significant finding is that students who placed greater emphasis on intrinsic motivation to attend university were found to have a lesser likelihood of accepting academic dishonesty. Indeed, it has been well-documented that students who adopted intrinsic goals such as understanding the course material because of personal interest were less likely to cheat than those who set extrinsic goals such as academic standing, grades, or admission to a high-ranking graduate schools (Alt & Geiger, 2012; Orosz et al., 2013; Anderman et al., 1998; Pulvers & Diekhoff, 1999; Jordan, 2001).

Conclusion

This study explored the acceptability of academically dishonest behaviour using a sample of undergraduate students at a medium-sized Canadian university. The results revealed that respondents held moderately negative attitudes toward academic dishonesty and identified the circumstances under which academically dishonest behaviour would be considered acceptable. As well, multiple OLS regression analysis has disentangled the various socio-demographic and contextual variables that were significantly associated with a greater likelihood of justifying academic dishonesty. Understanding these factors can surely support efforts by educational institutions to combat the problem. The findings underscore the vitality of helping students to cultivate intrinsic motivation and supporting the

development of deep learning approaches. Strenuous efforts must also be made to educate students that “the end justifies the means” attitude toward academic cheating is unacceptable and to elevate the perceived risk of being caught. It is worth noting that the strong interaction effect between deterrence (i.e., perceived certainty) and morality (i.e., levels of integrity) in the explanation of rule-violating behaviour has received empirical support (e.g., Svensson, 2015; Wikström, 2011).

Given the growing popularity of on-line learning in this digital age, it is anticipated that academic dishonesty would be a more challenging issue facing the higher education sector. A growing body of work has explored the extent to which academic cheating might have been facilitated by the Internet and the association between online learning and academically dishonest behaviour (e.g., Pell, 2018; Stogner et al., 2013; Young, 2013).

The findings from the present investigation have policy and practical implications for university administrators, instructors, and academic counsellors who are concerned about the widespread problem of academic dishonesty. As academic integrity is essential to teaching, learning, and knowledge creation in institutions of higher learning, the results can be used as basic information for the development of intervention policies and support services (e.g., explicit academic integrity guidelines and practical teaching & learning resources) that will serve to promote academic integrity and prevent academic misconduct.

Despite its strengths, this research is not without limitations. As this study was carried out on a limited group of undergraduate students at a single university in a western Canadian city utilizing a cross-sectional design, caution should be exercised in interpreting the results. The reliance on cross-sectional data precludes direct interpretation of causal relationships. Additional research is needed with post-secondary student populations in other geographical locations. Variation across types of both students (e.g., full-time vs. part-time) and institutions (e.g., universities vs. colleges and public vs. private) would be informative. A qualitative study with in-depth interviews could also shed more light on students’ views on academic dishonesty.

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Examining the Resiliency of Preschool Children in the COVID-19 Pandemic Period Based on Age and Gender

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Abstract

Since the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic, various measures have been taken in Turkey to protect community health. All schools in Turkey have been closed since 16 March 2020. The normalization process started along with the decrease in the number of cases in summer, and children's lockdown was abolished on 10 June 2020. Rearing of cases as from August delayed the planned opening of the 2020-2021 academic year fall term. Thus, the Ministry of National Education, which is among the institutions taking new measures related to the process, created a stage-by-stage transition plan, in which face-to-face education and distance education are carried out in cooperation, for the opening of schools. Main goal of the study was to examine the ego-resiliency levels of the children between the ages of five and six years according to age and gender variables during the COVID-19 period. The study group consisted of 223 children from the age group of five and six years. As a result of the study, it was found that girls had higher resiliency levels than their boys peers. Another finding was that there was no significant difference in the resiliency levels of the children between the ages of five and six years.

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INTRODUCTION

One could say that entire world is currently under the influence of the pandemic. According to the data on 31 December 2021 global cases have surpassed 285 million (BBC NEWS, 2021). The coronavirus causing the pandemic causes pneumonia-like symptoms in people who contact the virus, such as high fever, dry cough and fatigue. The disease caused by the virus has been named as COVID-19 (Budak and Korkmaz, 2020). COVID-19 has had many negative impacts on people not only physiologically, but also psychologically. The pandemic may lead to anxiety, stress and behavioral disorders for people. Besides the fear of getting sick and losing the loved ones to the disease; the lockdowns in the pandemic period have altered people's routine life fluency and restricted their freedom, which has affected their psychological health negatively (Aslan, 2020).

Since the beginning of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, various measures have been taken in Turkey to protect community health. All schools in Turkey have been closed since 16 March 2020. A circular letter which was sent to all provincial governorships by command of the President on 3 April 2020, imposed a temporary lockdown on those under the age of 20 years. People who were between the ages of 18 and 20 years, civil servants, contracted staff or workers working in state institutions and organizations, those who had a regular job in the private sector and were able to document their social security register and seasonal agricultural workers having an important function in the continuity of agricultural production, were exempt from the lockdown.

The normalization process started along with the decrease in the number of cases in summer, and children's lockdown was abolished on 10 June 2020. Rearising of cases as from August delayed the planned opening of the 2020-2021 academic year fall term. Thus, the Ministry of National Education, which is among the institutions taking new measures related to the process, created a stage-by-stage transition plan, in which face-to-face education and distance education are carried out in cooperation, for the opening of schools. According to this plan, preschool educational institutions and first graders started school and conducted face-to-face part-time education two days a week. In line with the stage-by-stage plan, the second stage started on 12 October 2020. In this stage, the classes were grouped according to social distancing based on the number of students and it was determined that the course time was 30 minutes, and the recess time was 10 minutes. Since that date, it has been decided to conduct face-to-face education in preschool educational institutions as six activity hours five days a week. In this process, some parents have refused to send their children to school for face-to-face education due to anxiety and as a precaution. Therefore, the provincial directorates of national education have received written consent from these parents and declared that their children will not be considered absent from school. These children continue their lessons via distance education in primary school and upper levels. There has been no online preschool education program applied synchronously for preschool children who were unable to go to school across Turkey in March, April and May, 2020. In official preschool educational institutions, the Ministry of National Education has given initiative to teachers concerning online education for young children. Private preschool educational institutions have conducted online education applications showing different properties (every day or in different hours on certain days).

Together with the increase in the number of cases, the stage-by-stage face-to-face education process was evaluated again and distance education restarted in all official, private, formal and informal educational activities after an explanation made by the Ministry of National Education on 17 November 2020 until 31 December 2020. Suspension of face-to-face education until 31 December 2020 due to COVID-19 has aroused reactions especially among working mothers. Due to these reactions, the General Directorate for Basic Education declared the continuation of face-to-face education five days a week in preschool

educational institutions, which were evaluated again by the Ministry of National Education, via a letter dated 20 November 2020 and numbered 16988740 (The Ministry of National Education, 2020). As a result of the feedback received from the relevant governorships concerning face-to-face preschool education conducted in this process, the resolution for official kindergartens and nursery classes to start distance education until 4 January 2021 depending on the course of the COVID-19 pandemic in residential areas as from 23 November 2020, was relinquished to the opinions of provincial/district sanitation committees. In the context of this resolution, sanitation committees of twelve provinces in Turkey (Sivas, Kayseri, Yozgat, Samsun, Gaziantep, Erzurum, Edirne, Balıkesir, Ankara, Zonguldak, Kırklareli and Tokat) enacted that educational activities in official kindergartens, nursery classes and practice classes across the province would be maintained via distance education between 30 November 2020 and 4 January 2021.

In order to take the pandemic under control, new measures were taken across Turkey on 30 November 2020. After an explanation made by the Presidency on 30 November 2020, face-to-face education of all official and private preschool educational institutions and nursing homes was resuspended as from 1 December 2020 until 4 January 2021 and activities in official kindergartens, nursery classes and practice classes in affiliation with the Ministry of National Education were to be maintained via distance education.

With the announcement of Ministry of National Education (MEB) (2021a), it was stated that the second semester of the 2020-2021 academic year will start on Monday, February 15th. In the announcement, it was stated that village schools and kindergartens across Turkey would be opened face-to-face on Monday, February 15, 2021, and as of March 1, 2021, face-to-face education would be offered in diluted form in all public and private primary schools and in kindergartens and special education classes within these primary schools. With the statement made by the MEB (2021b) on March 1, 2021, it was stated that as of Tuesday, March 2, full-time face-to-face education would begin in all pre-school education institutions in all low, medium and high-risk provinces by taking COVID 19 precautions. With this announcement, on March 2, 2021, preschool education institutions across Turkey started full-time face-to-face education. In this process, while paying attention to mask, distance and hygiene among the COVID-19 measures taken, common classroom materials in preschool education were not used in classes to reduce contact. No changes were made in pre-school education institutions in the 2020-2021 spring term. The fall semester of the 2021-2022 academic year started with integration training for pre-school and first grade students between 1-3 September 2021. On September 6, 2021, full-time face-to-face education began at all levels. In this process, masks and hygiene rules continue to be valid in pre-school education institutions, and educational materials have started to be used in the classroom again.

This process has brought the need for studies on the resiliency of children. Resiliency expresses the adaptation ability in the face of negative and traumatic conditions (Masten and Coatsworth, 1998; Mihaela, 2015). In challenging processes, the most important factors for preschool children to develop social and emotional well-being are mother-father-child relationship, teacher-child communication and skills of expressing emotions and coping with emotional and social problems (Mihaela, 2015). The person's resiliency depends on his/her adaptation to the present situation as a result of the interaction between the risk factors he/she has in the face of negative conditions and protective factors (Önder and Gülay, 2008).

In our world where challenging conditions gradually increase and a stress-free life seems to be impossible, it is becoming more and more important to increase the resiliency of children. Resiliency includes the person's adaptation to changes in his/her life in the face of negative events during the interaction process of protective factors and risk factors. Risk factors can be expressed as individual, familial and environmental disasters and negative experiences that may be faced by the person in life. These situations may be encountered as chronic illnesses, parents' divorce or a pandemic. Protective

factors can be examined as internal factors (such as self-confidence, intelligence, optimistic viewpoint) and external factors (such as close relationship with the environment, parental relationship, consistent care, supportive relationships, having good socio-economic conditions). It is thought that protective factors reduce the negative impacts of risk factors in the face of negative experiences (Afifi and MacMillan, 2011; Gizir, 2007; Karairmak, 2006).

Through resiliency, children are able to overcome the traumas with less damage. Parents play a key role in increasing the resiliency skills of children. Young children are not able to cope with challenging conditions alone. In such situations the support that children receive from their families and actually the resiliency status of families affect the resiliency of children (Grotberg,1995; Masten and Gewirtz, 2006). When children experience challenging conditions in situations where they receive adequate support, this may contribute to the increase of their resiliency (Beyond Blue Ltd., 2017).

Exceptional circumstances, which have been faced in the pandemic period, have affected children substantially. Many conditions during this period such as being physically less active, being isolated from social life, and fearing the disease create a risk factor for children and consequently affect their psychology (Çalışkan, 2020; Turan and Hacimustafaoğlu, 2020).

In this period where risk factors are unavoidable, examining the resiliency levels of children is crucial for determining and enhancing the protective factors and giving support to children.

Purpose of the study

The study was conducted to determine the resiliency levels of preschool children during the lockdown imposed on young children in the COVID-19 pandemic period. Within the context of this purpose, answers were sought to the following questions:

1. What are the resiliency levels of preschool children during the COVID-19 period?
2. Do the resiliency levels of preschool children vary based on gender during the COVID-19 period?
3. Do the resiliency levels of preschool children vary based on age during the COVID-19 period?

METHOD

The study is a descriptive study conducted in the survey model to examine the resiliency levels of children between the ages of five and six years in terms of some variables.

Participants

The study group consisted of 223 children from the age group of five and six years living in different provinces in Turkey.

Table 1. *Demographic Data Related to the Study Group*

Personal Information		n	%
Gender	Girl	104	46.6
	Boy	119	53.4
	Total	223	100
Age	5 year	118	52.9
	6 year	105	47.1
	Total	223	100

When examining Table 1, it was seen that 104 of the participants were girl (46.6%) and 119 were boys (53.4%). Also in Table 1, 118 (52.9%) of the children in the study were five years old and 105 (47.1%) were six years old.

Measurements

Personal information form

In the study, the Personal Information Form, prepared by the researchers, was used to determine the gender and age information of children.

Children's Ego-Resiliency Scale (Mother-Father Form)

The Children's Ego-Resiliency Scale (Mother-Father Form) was used to determine the data concerning the resiliency of children. Eisenberg and colleagues to develop the Children's Ego-Resiliency Scale in 1996 by adapting Block's Q-Sort method (Önder & Gülay Ogelman, 2011). The scale has mother-father and teacher forms. Adapted into Turkish by Önder & Gülay Ogelman (2011), the Children's Ego-Resiliency Scale is a nine-point likert scale comprising twelve items and one subscale. It is accepted that high scores signify the increased ego-resiliency levels of children and lower scores signify their decreased levels of ego-resiliency. The Cronbach's α coefficient of the Children's Ego-Resiliency Scale was found to be 0.86. In the study, the Cronbach's α coefficient of the Children's Ego-Resiliency Scale was found to be 0.64.

Procedure

In the data collection process, the Google Form programme was used. The Personal Information Form which was prepared via the Google Form programme and the Children's Ego-Resiliency Scale were sent to children's parents in the electronic media to be completed.

Data Analysis

The data of the study were analysed in the SPSS 22.0 statistical package programme. Since the Normality Tests for variables were required to determine which tests to use for the study data (Özdamar, 2004), the One Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test was primarily used to analyse the data acquired in the study. At the end of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test analysis, it was found that the scores ($K-S(Z)=.052$) obtained by children from the Ego-Resiliency Scale, which was the dependent variable in the study, were normally distributed ($p>0.05$). Whether or not the resiliency levels of the children varied based on gender and age in the Covid-19 process was analysed via the t-test.

FINDING

Table 2. *Mean and Standard Deviation Values of the Ego-Resiliency Scale Scores of the Children*

Variable	n	\bar{X}	ss
Ego-resiliency level	223	76.26	12.49

When examining Table 2, it was seen that the resiliency mean score of the children who participated in the study was 76.26 ($\bar{X}=76.26$).

Table 3. *The t-Test Results of the Ego-Resiliency Scale Scores of the Children Based on Gender*

Child Gender	n	\bar{X}	ss	t	p
Girl	104	77.45	13.6	1.330	.008*
Boy	119	75.22	11.4		

* $p<0.05$

According to Table 3, girls had higher resiliency levels ($\bar{x}=77.45$) than boys ($\bar{x}=75.22$). When examining Table 3, it was seen that this difference between the mean scores was statistically significant ($t= 1.330$, $p<0.05$).

Table 4. *The t-Test Results of the Ego-Resiliency Scale Scores of the Children Based on Age*

Child's Age	n	\bar{X}	ss	t	p
Five Years	118	75.40	11.9	-1.088	.235
Six Years	105	77.22	13.0		

According to Table 4, six-year-old children had higher resiliency levels ($\bar{x}=77.22$) compared to five-year-old children ($\bar{x}=75.40$). When examining Table 4, it was determined that the difference obtained was not significant at the level of 0.05 ($t=-1.088$, $p>0.05$).

DISCUSSION and CONCLUSIONS

Main goal of the study was to examine the ego-resiliency levels of the children between the ages of five and six years according to age and gender variables during the COVID-19 period. As a result of the study, it was found that girls had higher resiliency levels than their boys peers. Another finding was that there was no significant difference in the resiliency levels of the children between the ages of five and six years. In the literature, there are studies supporting and not supporting this finding. For example, 288 children between the ages of 60 and 72 months and their mothers participated in a study conducted in Turkey (Bayındır, Balaban Dağal & Önder, 2018). According to the findings of the study it was determined that emotion regulation skills in preschool children varied according to the ego-resiliency level. It was found that age and gender variables had no effect on the ego-resiliency and emotion regulation skills of children. In addition, when considering the combined effect of gender, age and emotion regulation skill on ego-resiliency, it was determined that these three variables were not effective on the ego-resiliency level. Also in some studies it has been stated that as the age of children increases, their ego-resiliency may increase (Block & Block, 2006; Miljević-Riđički, Plantak, & Bouillet, 2017). In a study conducted by Adagideli and Sahan Aktan (2018) with children between the ages of 48 and 72 months, they found that age was effective on ego-resiliency, but gender was not. Although a finding was obtained on behalf of girls in terms of gender in this study, some studies suggest that there is no difference between genders (Adagideli & Şahan Aktan, 2018; Bayındır, Balaban Dağal & Önder, 2018), while some studies state that there may be a gender difference (Block & Block, 2006; Sun & Stewart, 2007). In the present study girls had higher ego-resiliency scores than boys, which can be explained with the attitudes of parents towards girls. It can be asserted that Turkish families may have a viewpoint expecting girls to obey the rules more and be stronger, skilful and talented and boys to be more confident and free. In a study conducted by Yağan Guder (2014) to examine the gender perceptions of preschool children, it was found that mothers had greater expectations from girls and their primary expectation from girls was assistance in housework. It was concluded that their expectations from girls and boys were in agreement with the traditional role sharing. In a study conducted by Binbaşıoğlu (1998), it was determined that Turkish families were more attentive about the needs of boys than the needs of girls and appreciated the misbehaviours of boys more than the misbehaviours of girls.

In addition, some studies suggest that there may be a gender difference in skills related to social and emotional development areas in the preschool period in Turkey. For example, in their study Gültekin Akduman, Gunindi and Türkoğlu (2015) found that girls had higher social skill levels than their boys peers. In their study, Corapçı, Aksan, Arslan-Yalçın and Yağmurlu (2010) determined that girls were considered more socially competent than boys and they displayed angry and furious behaviours less. In a study

conducted by Gülay Ogelman and Çiftçi Topaloğlu (2014) with 227 children between the ages of four and five years and their parents, they found that girls had higher social competence scores than boys. When examining the aggression and anxiety scores of children between the ages of four and five according to gender, it was observed that there was no significant difference between them. As is seen, the literature may have findings supporting and not supporting the gender difference related to emotional and social variables.

The fact that the ego-resiliency level did not vary according to age in the present study was thought to be likely associated with the effect of different variables. Besides variables like age and gender; factors like temperament, serotonin-specific genetic variability, lower socio-economic level, parent's illness, unemployment, divorce, loss of a parent and negative parental behaviours may harm and/or reduce ego-resiliency (Eisenberg et al., 2004; Reed Victor & Stronge, 2002; Taylor et al., 2014; Um, 2018). In general terms it is indicated that ego-resiliency in the first years of life is associated with popularity and social competence in peer relationships in the childhood and adolescence (Cumberland-Li, Eisenberg and Reiser, 2004; Swanson, Valiente, Lemery-Chalfant and O'Brien, 2011). In line with the findings obtained from the studies, it is possible to state that it is important to support ego-resiliency as from early ages for a healthy development.

The psychological resilience of the children within the scope of the study was limited to the scores obtained with the "Children's Ego Resilience Scale". Children's Ego Resilience Scale is limited to one sub-dimension. The results of the study are limited to the parental views of 223 children. The independent variables of the study were considered to the age and the gender. Considering the limitations of the study and the social effects of the coronavirus, it would be appropriate to make some suggestions for future studies. Subsequent studies which reach larger study groups and represent different socio-economic levels, will be important for the richness of the findings. Different age groups and larger sample groups may also be considered in future studies. The opinions of teachers and children can be consulted in determining the psychological resilience of children. Families should be informed about psychological resilience in the preschool period and should be encouraged to guide their children. In addition, studies should be conducted to address the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic process on the behavior and competences of young children. As this study was conducted during the curfew period for young children, it may be interesting to compare the results of the repeated study during the period when children continue face-to-face education in continuing the pandemic period. In addition, it is important that preschool teachers are informed about the psychological resilience of children to enhance their decisions regarding the ongoing education process and interactions with the children.

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