

Students' Perceptions of Academic Integrity in Online Learning Environments.

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ABSTRACT

Academic integrity has become a critical concern in higher education due to the rapid expansion of online learning environments. The increasing use of digital technologies, artificial intelligence, online assessments, and remote learning platforms has transformed educational practices while simultaneously creating new ethical challenges related to plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, contract cheating, and misuse of digital resources. Students' perceptions of academic integrity significantly influence their ethical decision-making, learning attitudes, and academic behavior in virtual classrooms. Understanding these perceptions is essential for designing effective institutional policies, technological safeguards, and educational interventions that promote honesty and accountability. The study aims to explore students' perceptions of academic integrity in online learning environments, identify factors influencing ethical and unethical academic behavior, examine the role of institutional support and technological tools in promoting integrity, and suggest strategies for strengthening ethical practices in digital education. The respondents were selected using the simple random sampling technique, which provided every student in the target population an equal chance of being selected. This sampling method helped minimize selection bias and improved the representativeness of the sample. The study contributes to the growing literature on academic ethics by emphasizing the importance of cultivating integrity through awareness, policy implementation, and ethical digital learning cultures. The findings are expected to assist educators, administrators, and policymakers in developing comprehensive approaches that enhance trust, fairness, and responsible academic conduct while improving the quality and credibility of online education.

Keywords: Academic Integrity, Online Learning, Student Perceptions, Digital Education, Plagiarism, Academic Ethics, Online Assessment, Higher Education, Artificial Intelligence and Ethical Learning...

INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of information and communication technologies has fundamentally transformed higher education across the world. Online learning environments have become an integral component of academic institutions, offering flexibility, accessibility, and personalized learning opportunities to

students from diverse backgrounds. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated this transition, compelling universities and colleges to adopt virtual classrooms, online assessments, learning management systems, and digital collaboration tools. While these innovations have enhanced educational accessibility, they have also introduced significant challenges related to academic integrity. Academic integrity represents the foundation of

quality education, emphasizing honesty, fairness, trust, responsibility, respect, and ethical conduct in all academic activities. Maintaining these principles is essential for ensuring the credibility of educational qualifications and fostering genuine learning experiences.

Online learning environments present unique circumstances that influence students' perceptions and behaviors regarding academic integrity. Unlike traditional classroom settings, online education often relies on remote assessments, limited direct supervision, open-book examinations, digital submissions, and extensive internet access. These characteristics may increase opportunities for plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, contract cheating, impersonation during examinations, and inappropriate use of artificial intelligence tools. Consequently, educational institutions are increasingly concerned about preserving academic honesty while adapting to rapidly evolving technological landscapes.

Students' perceptions play a crucial role in determining whether they adhere to ethical academic practices. Their understanding of institutional policies, awareness of ethical standards, confidence in digital assessment systems, peer influence, academic pressure, technological competence, and perceptions of fairness significantly affect their academic behavior. When students perceive academic integrity policies as transparent, consistent, and educational rather than punitive, they are more likely to demonstrate ethical conduct. Conversely, ambiguity in institutional guidelines or inadequate awareness may encourage dishonest practices.

The emergence of artificial intelligence applications, automated writing tools, and easily accessible online information has further complicated academic integrity issues. While these technologies support learning and research, their misuse creates ethical dilemmas that challenge conventional definitions of originality and authorship. Educational institutions must therefore balance technological innovation with responsible academic practices by establishing clear ethical guidelines and promoting digital literacy among students.

Researchers have increasingly emphasized that fostering academic integrity requires more than surveillance and disciplinary measures. It involves developing an institutional culture that encourages ethical decision-making, self-regulation, mutual trust, and academic responsibility. Faculty members, administrators, and students must collaborate to establish learning environments where integrity is valued as an essential component of academic excellence.

Understanding students' perceptions of academic integrity in online learning environments is therefore essential for improving educational quality, strengthening institutional credibility, and ensuring fair assessment practices. By examining the factors that shape ethical attitudes and behaviors, educational institutions can implement targeted interventions that promote honesty, accountability, and responsible digital citizenship. This study contributes to the ongoing discussion on academic ethics by exploring students' perspectives and identifying strategies to strengthen integrity in contemporary online education.

Theoretical Background

The concept of academic integrity is grounded in several educational, ethical, and behavioral theories that explain how students develop ethical decision-making and responsible academic conduct. One of the most influential frameworks is the Theory of Planned Behavior, which suggests that an individual's behavior is determined by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. In online learning environments, students' intentions to maintain academic integrity are shaped by their beliefs regarding ethical behavior, peer expectations, institutional culture, and their confidence in complying with academic regulations. Positive attitudes toward honesty and strong institutional support encourage ethical academic practices, whereas permissive peer norms and perceived opportunities for cheating may increase academic misconduct.

Social Learning Theory also provides valuable insights into students' academic behavior. According to this theory, individuals learn ethical or unethical practices by observing others within their social environment. In online education, students interact through virtual classrooms, discussion forums, social media platforms, and collaborative learning spaces. Exposure to peers who normalize plagiarism or unauthorized collaboration may influence students to adopt similar behaviors. Conversely, positive role models among faculty members and classmates can reinforce ethical academic conduct.

Moral Development Theory further explains differences in students' perceptions of academic integrity. Students at higher levels of moral reasoning are more likely to value honesty because they recognize its broader ethical significance rather than simply fearing institutional punishment. Educational institutions therefore have a responsibility to cultivate moral reasoning through ethics education, reflective learning, and continuous awareness programs.

The Technology Acceptance Model contributes to understanding how students interact with digital learning technologies while maintaining academic integrity. Students who perceive learning management systems, plagiarism detection software, secure online assessment platforms, and digital monitoring tools as useful and fair are more likely to accept institutional integrity measures. However, excessive surveillance may reduce trust and negatively affect students' learning experiences if implemented without transparency.

The Academic Integrity Framework developed by international educational organizations emphasizes six fundamental values: honesty, trust, fairness, respect, responsibility, and courage. These values serve as guiding principles for ethical learning environments and highlight that academic integrity extends beyond merely preventing cheating. Instead, it promotes a culture where students develop lifelong ethical values applicable to both academic and professional contexts.

Recent developments in artificial intelligence have expanded theoretical discussions surrounding academic integrity. AI-powered writing assistants, automated content generators, and intelligent tutoring systems

provide legitimate educational support but also create ethical challenges regarding originality, authorship, and responsible technology use. Contemporary theoretical perspectives therefore emphasize responsible AI literacy, transparent disclosure of AI assistance, and ethical technology governance within educational institutions.

Collectively, these theoretical perspectives suggest that academic integrity in online learning environments is influenced by individual attitudes, institutional culture, technological design, social interactions, and ethical education. Understanding these interconnected factors provides a comprehensive foundation for examining students' perceptions and developing evidence-based strategies that strengthen integrity in digital higher education.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

INDEPENDENT VARIABLES	DEPENDENT VARIABLE
1. Awareness of Academic Integrity 2. Technology and Online Learning Environment 3. Faculty Support and Monitoring 4. Peer Influence 5. Personal Ethics and Moral Values 6. Assessment Design 7. Academic Pressure 8. Digital Literacy 9. Institutional Policies and Support 10. Student Motivation	Students' Perception towards Academic Integrity in Online Learning Environments

Nature of Relationship: All the independent variables are expected to influence students' perception towards academic integrity in online learning environments.

RESEARCH GAP

The majority of existing research looks at cheating behaviours, how to spot them, and institutional punishment policies. It doesn't look into how students understand, interpret, and internalise academic integrity principles. Academic dishonesty and plagiarism have been the subject of many studies in higher education. However, not many studies have looked at how students feel about academic honesty in fully online learning environments, especially when it comes to new digital technologies and artificial intelligence. Also, a lot of studies have only looked at developed countries, so there isn't enough information from emerging countries' school systems, where technology, rules, and digital skills are all very different. The quick spread of AI-powered writing tools, remote assessment platforms, and virtual learning settings has created new ethical problems that are still not fully handled by current research on academic integrity. Also, not many studies look at how institutional support, technological design, peer behaviour, and students' awareness of right and wrong all affect each other. Also, not much research has been done on using preventative teaching methods instead of harsh punishments. Because of this, there is a big gap in study about how students think about academic integrity in changing online learning settings and how schools can encourage moral digital learning through education, technology, policy development, and academic cultures that support students.

IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

The study is important because academic integrity is a key part of a good education, the trustworthiness of a school, and professional competence. As more colleges and universities use online learning platforms, it's important to know how students feel about academic honesty in order to keep up with ethical standards in education. The results will help colleges figure out what makes students behave honestly in school and what problems make students behave dishonestly. The study is helpful for teachers who want to make assessments more fair, raise students' awareness of ethical issues, and make digital learning better. The results can be used by school officials to make complete policies about academic integrity that balance new technologies with ethical teaching. It might also be good for policymakers to make national rules that encourage sensible digital learning. Furthermore, the study adds to academic literature by discussing new problems associated with artificial intelligence, online exams, and virtual learning settings. Students themselves will gain through greater knowledge of ethical responsibilities and better understanding of academic honesty. In the end, the study supports the creation of reliable, open, and welcoming online school systems that promote responsible learning, boost the image of institutions, and teach grads how to uphold ethical standards throughout their academic and professional lives.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Students often have different levels of knowledge about the rules for academic honesty at their schools, which makes them act in unethical ways. Additionally, it can be hard for teachers to create real tests that correctly measure students' personal learning while reducing the chances of cheating. AI-assisted learning may come with new technological challenges that aren't fully covered by current institutional policies. As a result, we need to look at how students think about academic ethics in online classrooms to figure out what makes people make moral choices. Finding out what people think about these ideas will help schools make better rules, educational help, safety features for technology, and moral education programs that boost academic honesty and make online learning more reliable, fair, and of high quality overall.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a quantitative research approach using a descriptive research design to examine students' perceptions of academic integrity in online learning environments. The study was conducted among students enrolled in higher educational institutions. A total of 100 students participated in the research.

The respondents were selected using the simple random sampling technique, which provided every student in the target population an equal chance of being selected. This sampling method helped minimize selection bias and improved the representativeness of the sample.

Data were collected through a structured questionnaire consisting of items measuring various dimensions of academic integrity in online learning environments, including awareness of academic integrity, technology and online learning environment, faculty support and

monitoring, peer influence, personal ethics and moral values, assessment design, academic pressure, digital literacy, institutional policies and support, and student motivation. The collected data were coded and analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation were used to summarize the respondents' perceptions. In addition, one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was employed to determine whether significant differences existed among the dimensions of institutional policies and support. Statistical significance was assessed at the 5% level ($p < 0.05$).

The study adhered to ethical research principles by ensuring voluntary participation, obtaining informed consent from the respondents, maintaining confidentiality, and using the collected data solely for academic research purposes.

Findings, Results and Conclusion

The widespread adoption of online learning environments has created unprecedented opportunities for flexible education while simultaneously increasing concerns regarding academic integrity. Students now have easier access to digital information, artificial intelligence applications, online collaboration platforms, and remote assessment systems that may facilitate unethical academic practices if not appropriately regulated. Many educational institutions continue to experience challenges in preventing plagiarism, contract cheating, unauthorized collaboration, and misuse of AI-generated content despite implementing technological monitoring systems.

Table: 1

Mean, and Std. Deviation of the Students' Perception towards of Academic Integrity in Online Learning Environments

Items	Mean	Standard Deviation
Availability of plagiarism detection tools	2.39	.942
Awareness of academic ethics	2.10	1.040
Ease of accessing online resources	2.23	.941
Effectiveness of Learning Management Systems	2.39	1.100
Familiarity with citation and referencing practices	2.38	1.042
Knowledge of institutional policies	3.10	.895
Security of online examinations	2.63	1.103
Understanding plagiarism and cheating	3.81	1.062

The descriptive statistics indicate varying levels of students' perceptions regarding academic integrity in online learning environments. Among the eight items, "Understanding plagiarism and cheating" recorded the highest mean score (Mean = 3.81, SD = 1.062), suggesting that students have a relatively strong understanding of what constitutes plagiarism and academic misconduct. Similarly, "Knowledge of institutional policies" obtained a moderate mean score (Mean = 3.10, SD = 0.895), indicating that many students are aware of their institution's academic integrity policies.

The remaining items received comparatively lower mean scores, reflecting weaker perceptions or limited awareness. "Security of online examinations" (Mean = 2.63, SD = 1.103) and "Availability of plagiarism detection tools" (Mean = 2.39, SD = 0.942) suggest that students perceive moderate support in maintaining academic integrity through technological measures. "Effectiveness of Learning Management Systems" (Mean = 2.39, SD = 1.100) and "Familiarity with citation and referencing practices" (Mean = 2.38, SD = 1.042) also indicate relatively low levels of confidence.

Furthermore, "Ease of accessing online resources" (Mean = 2.23, SD = 0.941) and "Awareness of academic ethics" (Mean = 2.10, SD = 1.040) recorded low mean values, suggesting that students require greater awareness and guidance in these areas. The standard deviation values, ranging from 0.895 to 1.103, indicate a moderate variation in students' responses, implying that perceptions differ among respondents but are not highly dispersed.

Overall, the findings reveal that while students demonstrate a good understanding of plagiarism and institutional policies, improvements are needed in enhancing awareness of academic ethics, citation practices, plagiarism detection tools, and the effectiveness of online learning systems to strengthen academic integrity in online learning environments.

Table 2- Institutional Policies and Support

Institutional Policies and Support	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
Availability of academic integrity guidelines	50	70.400	8.53229	3.81576
Training programs and workshops	57	69.6667	12.58590	1.66704
Disciplinary procedures	33	68.5758	16.43554	2.86106
Institutional commitment to ethical learning	50	56.0000	20.33470	9.09395

Total	100	68.660	14.331	1.43317
		0	73	

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics for the Institutional Policies and Support dimension related to students' perceptions of academic integrity in online learning environments. The results show that Availability of academic integrity guidelines recorded the highest mean score (Mean = 70.40, SD = 8.53), indicating that respondents perceived the availability of academic integrity guidelines as the strongest aspect of institutional support. The relatively low standard deviation suggests that respondents' opinions were fairly consistent.

The Training programs and workshops dimension obtained the second-highest mean (Mean = 69.67, SD = 12.59), implying that institutions provide a moderate level of training and awareness programs related to academic integrity. However, the higher standard deviation indicates greater variation in respondents' perceptions.

Similarly, Disciplinary procedures achieved a mean score of 68.58 (SD = 16.44), suggesting that respondents moderately agreed that disciplinary measures are implemented to uphold academic integrity. The comparatively larger standard deviation reflects differing views regarding the effectiveness or consistency of these procedures.

In contrast, Institutional commitment to ethical learning recorded the lowest mean score (Mean = 56.00, SD = 20.33), indicating that respondents perceived institutional commitment to fostering ethical learning as relatively weak. The high standard deviation further suggests considerable variation in students' opinions on this aspect.

Overall, the Institutional Policies and Support dimension obtained a grand mean of 68.66 (SD = 14.33), indicating a moderately positive perception of institutional efforts to promote academic integrity in online learning environments. The findings suggest that while institutions have established guidelines, training initiatives, and disciplinary mechanisms, greater emphasis should be placed on strengthening institutional commitment to ethical learning to create a more comprehensive culture of academic integrity.

Table 3: ANOVA

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	874.513	3	291.504	1.438	.237
Within Groups	19459.927	96	202.708		
Total	20334.440	99			

Table 3 presents the results of the one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) conducted to examine whether there are significant differences among the four dimensions of Institutional Policies and Support regarding students'

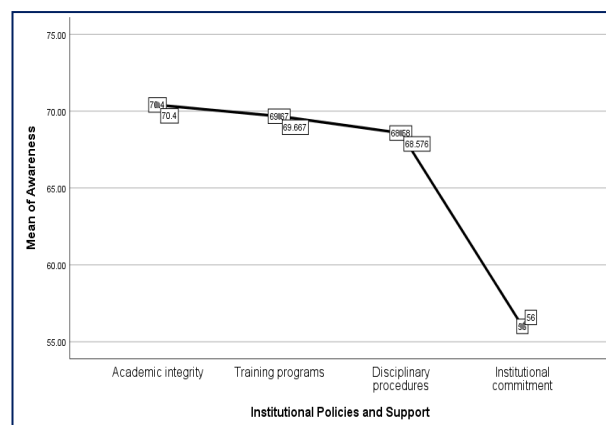
perceptions of academic integrity in online learning environments.

The ANOVA results show that the between-group sum of squares is 874.513, while the within-group sum of squares is 19,459.927, indicating that most of the variation exists within the groups rather than between them. The calculated F-value is 1.438 with degrees of freedom (3, 96) and a significance value (p) of 0.237.

Since the p-value (0.237) is greater than the 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis is accepted. This indicates that there is no statistically significant difference among the mean scores of the four dimensions of institutional policies and support. In other words, respondents perceived the dimensions—availability of academic integrity guidelines, training programs and workshops, disciplinary procedures, and institutional commitment to ethical learning—in a relatively similar manner.

Overall, the findings suggest that although the mean scores vary across the four dimensions, these differences are not statistically significant, implying that students hold comparable perceptions of the various institutional policy and support measures related to academic integrity in online learning environments.

Figure: 2



The study emphasizes that maintaining academic integrity requires a comprehensive approach combining institutional commitment, ethical education, technological innovation, transparent policies, and supportive learning cultures. Rather than relying solely on surveillance and disciplinary measures, universities should promote ethical awareness through continuous education, authentic assessment practices, responsible use of digital technologies, and collaborative engagement among students, faculty, and administrators. The integration of digital literacy and AI ethics into higher education curricula will become increasingly important as emerging technologies continue to reshape academic practices.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE STUDY

The findings of this study have significant implications for educational institutions, faculty members, students, policymakers, and technology developers involved in

online education. Universities can utilize the results to strengthen academic integrity policies, improve assessment strategies, and establish transparent ethical guidelines suitable for digital learning environments. Faculty members may gain insights into designing authentic assessments that encourage critical thinking while reducing opportunities for academic misconduct. The study also emphasizes the importance of integrating ethics education and digital literacy into academic curricula to promote responsible technology use. Policymakers can develop comprehensive national frameworks supporting academic integrity in higher education while addressing challenges associated with artificial intelligence and online assessment systems. Technology developers may incorporate ethical design principles into learning management systems and plagiarism detection software to support fair and transparent educational practices. Furthermore, the study encourages institutions to adopt preventive educational approaches instead of relying solely on disciplinary actions. By fostering collaborative partnerships among educators, students, administrators, and technology providers, the study contributes to developing trustworthy online learning environments that strengthen educational quality, institutional reputation, student accountability, and lifelong ethical values in an increasingly digital academic landscape.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Educational institutions should establish comprehensive academic integrity policies that clearly define acceptable academic practices, plagiarism, responsible use of artificial intelligence, and consequences of academic misconduct. Regular awareness programs, workshops, and orientation sessions should be conducted to improve students' understanding of ethical academic behavior. Faculty members should adopt authentic assessment methods, including project-based learning, reflective assignments, oral presentations, and continuous assessment, to reduce opportunities for cheating. Institutions should integrate ethics education and digital literacy into academic curricula, enabling students to develop responsible technology usage skills. Learning management systems should incorporate plagiarism detection software and secure online assessment tools while maintaining transparency and protecting student privacy. Universities should encourage open communication between faculty and students regarding academic expectations and ethical challenges associated with online learning. Institutional leaders should promote a positive culture of honesty by recognizing ethical academic behavior rather than focusing exclusively on punishment. Collaboration among educators, policymakers, technology developers, and students is essential for creating effective academic integrity frameworks. Continuous evaluation of institutional policies and emerging technologies should be undertaken to ensure that academic integrity practices remain relevant, effective, and aligned with evolving digital education environments and international best practices.

CONCLUSION

Academic integrity remains one of the most fundamental principles supporting educational excellence, institutional credibility, and professional ethics in contemporary higher education. The rapid expansion of online learning environments has transformed teaching and learning processes while introducing new ethical challenges associated with plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, artificial intelligence, digital assessments, and academic misconduct. Students' perceptions of academic integrity significantly influence their academic decisions, making it essential for educational institutions to understand and address the factors shaping ethical behavior within virtual learning environments.

Furthermore, strengthening academic integrity contributes not only to improving educational quality but also to preparing students for ethical professional conduct in their future careers. Institutions that cultivate cultures of honesty, fairness, responsibility, respect, and accountability are better positioned to produce competent graduates capable of making ethical decisions in complex digital societies.

In conclusion, understanding students' perceptions provides valuable insights for designing effective academic integrity strategies that balance technological advancement with ethical responsibility. By adopting comprehensive institutional policies, promoting ethical awareness, encouraging responsible technology use, and continuously adapting to emerging digital challenges, higher education institutions can ensure that online learning environments remain trustworthy, equitable, and academically rigorous. Sustained commitment to academic integrity will ultimately strengthen public confidence in higher education, enhance learning outcomes, and foster responsible global citizens capable of contributing ethically to knowledge creation and professional practice. The findings indicate that students have a moderately positive perception of institutional policies and support related to academic integrity in online learning environments. Although the availability of academic integrity guidelines received the highest mean score and institutional commitment to ethical learning recorded the lowest mean score, the ANOVA results revealed no statistically significant differences among the four dimensions of institutional policies and support ($F = 1.438, p = 0.237 > 0.05$). Therefore, it can be concluded that students perceive the various institutional support mechanisms in a relatively similar manner. The results suggest that educational institutions should continue strengthening academic integrity initiatives by enhancing ethical learning practices, expanding training programs, reinforcing disciplinary procedures, and ensuring consistent implementation of academic integrity policies across all aspects of online learning..

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