# Perceptions of and attitudes toward the issue of ethical behavior in academic work in higher education and factors contributing to it: A review of studies

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## Abstract

**Relevance.** Today, the topic of academic integrity is quite relevant among the scientific and educational communities, and it is based on the fact that ethical behavior in academic work in higher educational institutions is an effective tool that ensures the quality of higher education from the point of view of international standards. The issue of academic cheating in higher education institutions has become globalized, which has forced researchers to focus on the study of academic ethics from different perspectives.

**Purpose.** The main purpose of this study is to investigate the perception and attitude of teachers and students toward the issue of ethical behavior in academic work, as well as factors that contribute to solving the problem of plagiarism.

**Methodology.** The following scientific methods were used during the research: structural-functional method, method of synthesis, logical and comparative analysis, and method of generalization.

**Results.** The study showed that students' attitudes toward the issue of ethical behavior in academic work are similar due to various institutional, socio-cultural, and personal factors, as well as the fact that some individuals have no idea about plagiarism. It has been shown that a number of factors can lead to a problem of ethical behavior in academic work, and no taxonomy can explain either all these factors, how they affect the problem, or how it manifests itself. The study shows that students do not feel guilty for missing classes and using other people's work on their own. Most people demand a tolerant attitude towards plagiarism and accept the practice of passing off other people's tasks and Internet sources as their own.

**Conclusions.** The practical significance of the work is that all theoretical provisions, conclusions, and recommendations can be used in educational institutions by teachers and students to increase their level of knowledge about ethical behavior in academic work.

**Keywords:** plagiarism; fraud; dishonesty; misconduct; higher education; issues of perception and attitude; academic integrity.

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## Introduction

According to studies by A. Alajami [1], issues of perception and attitude toward ethical behavior in academic work are crucial because they influence students' behavior and judgment. The relevance of this topic is due to the fact that perception is the process of identification, interpretation, and organization of sensory information, and the analysis of factors that affect the issue of academic integrity will provide certain guidelines for future research, which will likely be focused on various related topics, such as the issue of ethical behavior in academic work.

According to theoretical research, the rapid internationalization of higher education in recent years has brought new opportunities and challenges to colleges and universities, one of which is the problem of students' academic integrity in their academic work. According to studies, the problem of academic integrity in institutions of higher education is a global issue. Thus, according to the scientist's conclusions, plagiarism has significantly spread at the international level in recent decades [2; 3; 4]. This trend is concerning in higher education, especially universities, where the reputation of educational institutions and students' educational experience have been threatened by rampant plagiarism.

According to J. Á. de Lima et al. [5] research, most students, unfortunately, do not consider plagiarism to be cheating. In their opinion, placing the text on the Internet makes it common and accessible to everyone; besides, the texts are repeated many times, which also, in their opinion, makes them "nobody's". Thus, according to students, partial or complete copying of other people's works allows them to reduce the time and intellectual costs of performing scientific work. Academic dishonesty and plagiarism in the student environment are perceived by the majority of students as the norm. To combat plagiarism, it is necessary to carry out a set of measures that should include clarification, prevention, warning, strict control, and inevitable punishment [6; 7].

According to the research, the main forms of academic dishonesty in education and science are plagiarism, fabrication of data and falsification, imitation of scientific activity, dissertation "factories", lack of review of materials in scientific journals (peer review, double-blind), corruption in the activities of specialized scientific councils, inactivity of heads of state institutions, conflicts of interests of interested parties, etc. [8; 9].

Academic dishonesty can be defined as deliberate unethical behavior and the use of deception in academic work. Virtue and dishonesty are two sides of the same academic ethics coin [10]. Therefore, unethical behavior in academic work, academic ethics, academic dishonesty, academic integrity, and academic misconduct are expressions of the problem of ethical behavior in academic work. Activities in the realm of academia, such as research, critiquing, and grading, all contribute to the expansion and refinement of one's academic knowledge [11].

Therefore, the main goal of this study is to investigate the issue of perception and attitude toward the problem of academic dishonesty in higher education institutions. Achieving the goal is expected by solving the following research tasks: studying the issue of ethical behavior in academic work and attitudes towards it, analyzing the main factors contributing to the emergence of the problem of ethical behavior in academic activity, and highlighting factors that educational institutions can pay attention to in order to limit the problem of ethical behavior in academic activity.

## Materials and Methods

Over the past ten years, a number of periodicals have published publications on the results of research into ethical behavior in academic work. The three topics that have attracted the most attention from researchers, even though these publications covered a wide range of issues, are perceptions of ethical behavior in academic work, attitudes toward ethical behavior in academic work, and the factors that influence it. The studies reviewed in this article span different geographic regions, learning environments, and academic disciplines.

The literature search on the topic of ethical behavior in academic work was conducted using the Scopus and Google Scholar search engines. In the selection process, three key factors were taken into account: keywords, period of publication, and type of document. Keywords included academic unethical conduct, academic ethics, academic dishonesty, academic integrity, academic misconduct, plagiarism, forgery, fraud, duplicate, higher education, university, and college, based on the standards of ethical conduct in academic work mentioned in the previous paragraph. The publication period is from 2018 to 2023. For the purposes of this review, a "scholarly article" refers to an article that includes primary sources and original research.

The following theoretical research methods were used in the research process: analysis, generalization, and synthesis, as well as dialectical, structural, and functional methods. The structural-functional method of research is fundamental, which made it possible to form the purpose of the work and define the tasks, as well as to develop a plan for conducting research work. Using the hermeneutic method, the basis of the work was determined, namely: the concepts of "ethical behavior", "academic work", "academic dishonesty", "academic dishonesty", and "academic dishonesty" were investigated, defined, and revealed. The next method is dialectical. With the help of this method, the opinions of various experts were analyzed, and the truth about this issue was found.

An important place during the research is occupied by logical methods, namely methods of analysis and synthesis. In order to fully investigate the issue of academic dishonesty, the object of this study was divided into several parts. Thus, the perception of students was separately investigated, the issue of the attitude of teachers and students towards academic dishonesty was analyzed, and the factors that encourage students to plagiarize in academic work were also studied. The research was conducted on the basis of educational institutions in China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Israel, Korea, Germany, Slovenia, Iran, the United Arab Emirates, Great Britain, Pakistan, and Finland, Canada, Malaysia.

## Results and Discussion
### Perceptions of the issue of ethical behavior in academic work

The study was divided into several segments to analyze in more detail the topic of perceptions of academic dishonesty

in higher education institutions. As a result, the work consists of research conducted in various countries, including Pakistan, China, and Great Britain.

Thus, S. Mahmud et al. [12] conducted a study among students in Great Britain, the Czech Republic, Poland, and Romania regarding views on anti-plagiarism policies in the following aspects: variations in availability, help, and features. As a result of this study, the scientist concluded that from 83 to 93% of students in the UK believe that they have access to the laws, procedures, and penalties related to plagiarism. In Poland and Romania, less than half of the students reported such access. The majority of students (52–71%) in the Czech Republic, the third-largest country in Eastern Europe, report having access, but this is still much lower than in the UK. Most students in these four countries claim to have a fairly good understanding of the relationship between plagiarism, copyright, and intellectual property. However, they would like more instruction on how to avoid academic dishonesty, namely plagiarism. In order to examine detailed consistency in policy application, the study surveyed students regarding four statements about the nature of the university's plagiarism policy. These four principles have a high level of agreement among UK students, indicating that the policy is being followed consistently. A small number of students from Eastern Europe agreed that their institution consistently follows these principles. The majority of students in Romania disagreed with all statements except that teachers should follow established procedures [13].

Speaking of research in Asia, nearly two-thirds of both high- and low-achieving students in Taiwanese colleges were able to accurately identify only the basic definition of plagiarism, according to Y. C. Cheng et al. [14]. However, they failed to properly cite their own sources. Taking into account the opinions of other scientists, it can be concluded that the seriousness of the perception of academic dishonesty is influenced by one's own views on this issue as well as a fundamental misunderstanding of the essence of academic integrity.

A study held by A. Javaeed et al. [15] included senior students at two medical colleges in Rawalpindi, Pakistan. An impressive 86.09% (n = 956) of the surveyed respondents did not know what plagiarism was. G. Hu and J. Lei [16] conducted a study on undergraduate students' perceptions of academic dishonesty in a higher education institution in China. As a result, most students realize that appropriating or stealing another student's work is unacceptable and unethical. However, most students continue to plagiarize, copy other students' work, cheat on tests, change or falsify the results of experiments, and do other things out of impatience.

## Attitudes toward the issue of ethical behavior in academic work

In order to more thoroughly analyze the attitudes of students and teachers toward academic dishonesty in higher education institutions, the study was divided into several parts. As a result, the study included studies from various countries, including Finland, Taiwan, Canada, China, Israel, Vietnam, Malaysia, and Pakistan.

In one of the studies, M. Ludlum et al. [17] looked at the age, gender, and academic orientation of Finnish students to determine differences in their attitudes toward plagiarism. Researchers surveyed students to determine whether they would tell their professors that they had witnessed plagiarism. Non-business school students are more likely to report withdrawals to faculty than their business school counterparts. After analyzing some scientific works, it can be concluded that students are against tolerating and encouraging plagiarism, believing that it usually happens accidentally due to insufficient awareness in this area.

The researchers analyzed the policy of academic integrity and dishonesty in some Canadian universities in order to find out the opinion of teachers about student dishonesty in classes. According to their data, more than half of professors agree or strongly believe that dishonesty in the classroom is more common today than in the past [18].

Using a representative sample of Israeli students, J. Kasler et al. [19] collected data from a wide range of academic disciplines. The researchers note that while the majority of students surveyed consider academic dishonesty to be a serious problem, most of them deny being involved in it. About 60% of respondents believe that academic dishonesty occurs occasionally or frequently on college campuses; 45% have personally witnessed such incidents, but 98% have never reported them. Half of the respondents believe that universities should have reasonable consequences for cheating.

A survey of philology students at a private university in Southern Taiwan found that plagiarism is seen as a deliberate form of fraud and theft [20]. The experiment was conducted during an 18-week course in composition in junior college. In a study, X. Sun and G. Hu [21] studied the views on plagiarism of professional English language teachers from some Chinese institutions. Respondents' views on plagiarism turned out to be even more nuanced and contradictory. It appeared that some participants were overly tolerant of academic dishonesty and even viewed it as a viable technique to improve their own education. When asked about general attitudes towards plagiarism, all participants answered positively.

According to research by G. Hu and J. Lei [22], some Chinese high school students view academic dishonesty as acceptable and even justified. In addition, they consider it fair, if not ethical, to obtain information useful for the next test.

S. T. Javaid et al. [23], investigating the perception of plagiarism among undergraduate students at a university in Pakistan, concluded that students often claim to know what plagiarism is and how to avoid it but refrain from such efforts when they need to plagiarize to pass a course or get a high grade. Therefore, it can be concluded that, despite the seriousness of the problem, students continue to tolerate academic dishonesty.

D. T. T. Nguyen [24] used surveys and in-depth interviews to investigate the attitudes of students from various academic fields toward plagiarism at a private international institution in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. As a result, students learned to be tolerant towards the practice of using other people's works both in the educational institution and outside of it. They do not make money from customers who use their services to buy assignments or write texts.

S. A. Kassim et al. [25] found a significant inverse relationship between attitudes toward academic dishonesty and intentions to commit academic dishonesty among Malaysian university students studying disciplines such as surveying, accounting, applied sciences, plantations, business and management, marine sciences, computer sciences, and sports sciences. Students internalize the message that cheating is acceptable behavior and that they must put their own needs first if they are to succeed academically.

## Factors affecting the problem of academic dishonesty

In order to study the topic of academic dishonesty in more detail, it is necessary to determine the factors that influence the spread of this phenomenon, as well as which factors should be paid attention to by educational institutions in order to reduce the problem of ethical behavior in academic work.

D. Thomas [26] conducted a study in Thailand with the participation of 207 students. It has been found that when students in the classroom can develop their intelligence and actively demonstrate their skills and abilities, they are less likely to copy. It can be concluded that if teachers take the initiative, dishonesty in the classroom can become normal in the eyes of students. In addition, unmotivated individuals who feel that they are not learning anything in class and individuals with rigid attitudes may be more likely to engage in unethical behavior, such as academic dishonesty.

Having analyzed the opinions of graduate students of applied linguistics, M. A. Malik et al. [27] identified the causes of academic dishonesty. One is that many students have no idea what plagiarism is. Second, there is a general lack of academic writing experience among students. Third, lack of control and ignoring time limits. Another reason for plagiarism is the tendency to lie and laziness among students. The development of cheating in academic work is influenced by the organization and guiding principles of the educational system: language problems among students, a lack of language competence among students, and standards set by the educational system.

G. Hu and G. Lei [22] surveyed students at institutions in China and found that students were less inclined to engage in academic integrity if their teachers were more approachable. Close friendships can cause or contribute to student churn by encouraging them to act dishonestly to achieve their interpersonal goals.

D. Thomas [26] concluded that in Taiwanese colleges, both high achievers and low achievers drop out for the same reasons: laziness, saving time, and improving grades. However, most individuals with low academic performance attributed their poor performance to plagiarism.

Another cause of academic dishonesty among students may be a situation where the exact meaning of the term is unclear [28]. Due to the lack of agreement on the definition of plagiarism, teachers do not have complete information about it. Moreover, even being aware thereof students or professors prefer to ignore cases of academic dishonesty. There are no rules or regulations regarding cheating, and teachers do not even try to check for it when grading tests and assignments. Those students who are often under

pressure are more likely to plagiarize [29]. This is true, as stress can be caused by a variety of reasons, including tight deadlines, a heavy workload, or rushing through a large number of courses.

Foreign business school students are more prone to academic dishonesty or emulate another student if they have a lower level of foreign language proficiency [30]. Casual plagiarism is caused by insufficient knowledge of academic standards and guidelines.

After conducting research in Israeli universities, Y. Peled et al. [31] found that the attitude, character traits, and school policies of their teachers had the greatest influence on the tendency of students to drop out. The results of the freshman survey had a direct impact on curriculum and administrative decisions.

J. Costley [32] concluded that the main reason for dropping out of a virtual university class in Korea is the study load, particularly the stress of offline learning. Distraction from such training is caused, in particular, by the fact that the classes are difficult. Attrition is common because it is critical to getting a decent grade and because professional learning is more beneficial in person than online.

After conducting research in Germany and Slovenia, researchers concluded that one of the main causes of academic dishonesty in these countries is the prevalence of online resources that promote plagiarism. Pride, peer pressure, and the educational component are also key elements in the spread of plagiarism. Other factors are constant pressure from multiple sources, lack of knowledge and methodological uncertainty [33].

According to a survey of professors and students conducted at an Iranian university, the most common reason for plagiarism is that students do not understand that education is designed to help them develop their own original thoughts and ways of thinking [34; 35]. Most students doubt or do not trust their own abilities. Another reason is that it is difficult for students to express their emotions in their own words. This happens because the student lacks the skills necessary to write scientific texts.

M. A. Henning et al. [36] investigated the problem of academic integrity among medical university students. According to research, before starting their own projects, students may use the Internet to copy and paste other people's concepts and work. Another reason is that writing texts is a difficult task for non-native English students. The incentive to help classmates get a satisfactory grade on an assignment can lead to widespread academic dishonesty [37-40].

It is worth noting that different cultures have different ideas about what constitutes dishonesty. After investigating the causes of academic dishonesty at a private university in the United Arab Emirates, researchers concluded that plagiarism was related to factors such as peer pressure, a Falawian worldview, and shame avoidance [38; 41; 42].

Hence, academic dishonesty can arise from various reasons, such as students' indifference to the effort to produce original work, pressure from deadlines, a lack of academic literacy, and even their cultural background [39; 40; 43].

According to A. A. Patak et al. [41], there are three main factors affecting the prevalence of academic

dishonesty among students studying English as a foreign language in Indonesian universities, namely: easy access to online resources where students find certain information without a proper link to the source; poor evaluation by teachers; and insufficient academic writing skills.

Students are more prone to academic dishonesty when they have a positive attitude towards it [10; 44; 45]. It is worth agreeing with this opinion since individuals who are more aware of subjective norms of academic dishonesty are more prone to plagiarism and fraud. Individuals who are perceived as having stronger behavioral control are more likely to engage in academic dishonesty [46-48].

It can be concluded that the perception and attitude toward ethical behavior in academic work can be influenced by several factors [42; 49; 50]. In order for higher education to develop practices that are more likely

to affect academic dishonesty, it is important to understand why it occurs.

Therefore, all factors affecting the problem of plagiarism among students can be divided into six categories: student, peers, teachers, university, family, and society (Table 1). The student factor consists of the personality of the students themselves, as well as their knowledge, abilities, psychological aspects, etc. [51-53] The presence of peers or friends constitutes the peer factor. Teachers who directly teach students or supervise their learning are called the teacher factor. University-related factors influence governance and curriculum. The family factor mostly concerns parents. Culture and the availability of technological resources are social variables [43; 31]. These six elements are important because they influence the promotion of ethical behavior in academic work.

**Table 1.** Factors contributing to the Issue of Ethical Behavior in Academic Work

| Category | Themes |
|---|---|
| Student | Unfamiliarity with ethical behavior in academic work |
| | Lack of understanding of academic policies and regulations |
| | Poor academic skills |
| | Carelessness and leniency |
| | Heavy workload/ Lack of time |
| | Laziness and deceitfulness |
| | Shame avoidance |
| | The desire to pass/gain higher grades |
| | Different forms of pressure |
| | Lacks interest in the study |
| Peer | Strong peer relationships |
| Teacher | High expectations |
| | A teacher-centered approach |
| | Inactive teaching context |
| | High teachers' approachability |
| | Teachers' attitudes / Negative reactions/ Ignore fraud and plagiarism |
| | Faulty assessment |
| University | Weak management of the education system |
| | Institutional policies issues |
| | Courses lack reasonable academic value |
| Family | Patriarchal pressure |
| Society | Culture influence |
| | Become a trend |
| | The ease of use of information-communication technologies and the Web |

*Source: compiled by the authors.*

All of these components are important and can help address the problem of academic dishonesty in higher education. It is worth noting that the most important determinants of ethical behavior in academic work are characteristics related to students. In addition to institutional and societal variables, researchers also consider the factor of teachers to be important in the issue of ethical behavior in academic work in higher education institutions [44; 54-56].

## Conclusions
Thus, the study found that there were differences between teachers' and students' views on academic dishonesty. This situation is due to a number of sociocultural, institutional, and individual variables, as well as the fact that most students have no idea about ethical behavior in academic work.

According to most studies, students and teachers believe that the issue of ethical behavior in academic work is common, but they also deny and oppose it. They firmly believe that academic dishonesty is a pressing problem in higher education. In addition, some studies indicate that students do not feel guilty about not attending class and, in some cases, believe that plagiarism is acceptable and justified. Students also demand a lenient attitude towards it and accept the practice of using online sources and other people's assignments as their own. These concepts mostly apply to higher education in Asian countries.

According to research, all factors affecting the prevalence of academic dishonesty among students can be divided into six categories: student, peers, teachers, university, family, and society. Higher education institutions should pay attention to these factors in order to

develop strategies that can be used to reduce or contain the problem of plagiarism in academic work.

The scientific novelty of the research lies in the fact that the issue of the perception and attitude of teachers and students toward academic dishonesty in higher education institutions in different countries of the world was separately investigated, and the factors affecting the spread of plagiarism were also analyzed. In further research, scientists should pay more attention to studying the issue of attitude toward the problem of ethical behavior in academic work. Also, further research should focus on the issue of why students behave unethically in academic work, how they solve and identify the problem of ethical behavior, and analyzing recommendations that will help reduce the use of plagiarism.

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# Сприйняття та ставлення до питання етичної поведінки в академічній роботі у вищій школі та фактори, що на нього впливають: Огляд досліджень

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**Анотація**

**Актуальність.** Сьогодні тема академічної доброчесності є досить актуальною серед наукової та освітянської спільнот, і вона ґрунтується на тому, що етична поведінка в академічній роботі у вищих навчальних закладах є ефективним інструментом, який забезпечує якість вищої освіти з точки зору міжнародних стандартів. Проблема академічного шахрайства у вищих навчальних закладах набула глобального характеру, що змусило дослідників зосередитися на вивченні академічної етики з різних точок зору.

**Мета.** Основною метою даного дослідження є вивчення сприйняття та ставлення викладачів і студентів до питання етичної поведінки в академічній роботі, а також чинників, які сприяють вирішенню проблеми плагіату.

**Методологія.** Під час дослідження було використано такі наукові методи: структурно-функціональний метод, метод синтезу, логічного та порівняльного аналізу, метод узагальнення.

**Результати.** Дослідження показало, що ставлення студентів до питання етичної поведінки в академічній роботі є схожим, що зумовлено різними інституційними, соціокультурними та особистісними чинниками, а також тим, що деякі особи не мають уявлення про плагіат. Показано, що до проблеми етичної поведінки в академічній роботі може призвести низка факторів, і жодна таксономія не може пояснити ані всі ці фактори, ані те, як вони впливають на проблему, ані те, як вона проявляється. Дослідження показує, що студенти не відчувають провини за те, що пропускають заняття і використовують чужі роботи на власний розсуд. Більшість вимагає толерантного ставлення до плагіату і сприймає практику видачі чужих завдань та інтернет-джерел за власні.

**Висновки.** Практичне значення роботи полягає в тому, що всі теоретичні положення, висновки та рекомендації можуть бути використані в навчальних закладах викладачами та студентами для підвищення рівня знань про етичну поведінку в академічній роботі.

**Ключові слова:** плагіат; шахрайство; нечесність; неправомірна поведінка; вища освіта; проблеми сприйняття та ставлення; академічна доброчесність.