

Impact of Personal Factors on Students' Academic Dishonesty in Higher Education: Evidence from Pakistan

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Abstract

Islamabad, a federal capital of Pakistan, has 22 federal chartered public and private universities, and 7 universities which are ranked in QS universities world ranking. Four of these are located in Islamabad city of Pakistan. The problem statement for this article, what are the evidences in literature that suggest the impact of personal factors on academic dishonesty among students? and what is perception of students about the personal factors that lay behind their academic dishonesty? The purpose of this case study was to review the impact of personal factors on students' higher education. The literature based evidences was collected through university available digital resources, and qualitative evidence was collected through face-to-face, semi-structured interviews from twenty higher education students from Islamabad based universities of Pakistan. The case study results identify three main factors of academic dishonesty through literature reviews i.e. lack of self-competency, pressure, and pride. The qualitative evidence highlighted the impact of personal factors among students and their academic dishonesty. The case study concludes that the pressure was found to be the main cause of academic dishonesty amongst university students primarily due to financial issues which are faced by individual students who are in low income households.

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Self-competency and pride also effected said students during the time of their higher education.

Keywords: Academic dishonesty, Ethics, Higher education, Personal factors, Students behavior.

1. INTRODUCTION

Islamabad is the federal capital of Pakistan and has a total number of 22 universities within both the private and public sector. Due to a large number of universities and their campuses, Islamabad is unique in this regard as compared to other Pakistani cities (HEC, 2019). According to 2019 QS university world ranking, 7 Pakistani universities were listed in the top 1000 QS ranking universities and four out of seven were located in the capital city of Islamabad. QS university ranking is based on the university offered programs, research publications, number of enrolled local and international students, local and foreign faculty members (Quacquarelli, 2019) where university national and international research collaboration represents the capabilities related quality of research (Abbas, Avdic, Xiaobao, Zhao, and Chong, 2018).

In Pakistan, all accredited universities and their sub-campuses that follow the Higher Education Commission (HEC) guidelines, are given academic and research goals and guidelines to ensure a high quality of education among students by means of competent faculty members. To maintain the quality of educational research, all accredited universities and their sub-campuses deployed anti-plagiarism checking software i.e. “Turnitin”. The purpose of deploying anti-plagiarism software was to identify an act of academic dishonesty among students in respective registered programs (Ikram, 2017; Tran, Huynh, and Nguyen, 2018). Plagiarism policies and anti-plagiarism software is helpful to university faculty members and administrative staff by discouraging and controlling academic dishonesty and plagiarism at all levels of academic activity, such as course assignments, semester research work reports, and final dissertations (Fatima, Abbas, Ming, Hosseini, and Zhu, 2019).

1.1 Discussion Questions

1. What are the evidences in literature that suggest the impact of personal factors on academic dishonesty among students'?
2. What is perception of students about the personal factors that lay behind their academic dishonesty?

2. LITERATURE EVIDENCE ABOUT IMPACT OF PERSONAL FACTORS ON STUDENTS' ACADEMIC DISHONESTY

In Pakistan, all academic research facilities (such as the availability of a digital library) are available to the faculty members and also to students within the university premises (Abbas and Faiz, 2013). Still, students can be convicted of academic dishonesty due to several reasons, one factor includes personal stressors that increase the chance of plagiarism. This personal factors is considered to be a type of self-imposed stress which is expressed by three major causes, those being: lack of academic skills, pressure and pride (Fatima, Ming, and Abbas, 2018). These three listed causes do not control an individual (i.e. student or faculty member), instead, an individual (student) may engage in an act of academic dishonesty due to a lack of self-competency related to their academic ability (Devlin and Gray, 2007).

Academic abilities are further linked to a lack of knowledge about plagiarism and also linked to the poor writing skills of non-native students (Fazilatfar, Elhambakhsh, and Allami, 2018). The act of academic dishonesty is considered a part of behavior during the learning process where students violate the basic ethical principles of research and fairness to achieve set objectives (Lin & Wen, 2007). It has also been noted that stress and competition among students occur due to certain social environments and as a result of varying individual behavior (Maramark and Maline, 1993).

Lack of self-competency belongs to low self-esteem or a low self-belief stemming from a student's poor academic skills (both writing and analytical), laziness, time mismanagement and pressure from teachers to complete assigned tasks via a specified deadline (Fatima et al., 2019; Rehman and Waheed, 2014). Within the pride factor, students want to be seen and respected as high achievers and want their motivation to be validated by their teachers (Leong, Ismail, Costa, and Tan, 2018) and sometimes a student's low motivation and negative attitude towards their studies (Šprajc, Urh, Jerebic, Trivan,

and Jereb, 2017; Tran et al., 2018) forces them to lean towards acts of academic dishonesty.

3. QUALITATIVE EVIDENCE FROM STUDENTS' ABOUT PERSONAL FACTORS OF ACADEMIC DISHONESTY

According to university students, *“personal (intrinsic) factors affect the daily life of many students and said factors also impede their studies. Often, these factors can force students to lean leniently towards the act of dishonesty”*. Some of the personal factors that influence plagiarism are commonly found in university students because of *“academic competition with fellow students in getting high scores”* and sometimes because of tight deadlines requiring students to submit *“written tasks (assignments) of several courses at same time”*.

Other students said that *“in the context of Pakistan, financial pressure on students”* is a major cause of academic dishonesty as compared to other factors. Financial pressures among students was related to academic dishonesty because of the *“limited financial resources of students who belongs to lower or medium class family backgrounds, where parents desired quality, higher education for their children, despite it being very hard for them to bear expensive education in Pakistani universities”*.

Sometimes factors such as *“writing skills, time constraint”* may also put stress on the students and encourage them to take risks to complete the given task (both written course assignments or practical/experimental written reports) within a short passage of time. To fulfill coursework assignments, students *“sometimes reuse their fellow’s course material (essays, reports) or reuse their own previous work without proper citation or acknowledgement”*.

Part-time students argued that *“academic dishonesty has no specific boundaries, it can be commonly found in both full-time and part-time students”* because students can be involved in this act due to several personal reasons. Other full-time students said that *“full-time students focus less on their studies due to poor-time management and too many social activities which affect their studies when they have a large amount of written coursework, essays, or report assignments due within short submission deadlines by teachers. Part-time student on the other hand, focus on office routine work instead of their studies”*. Students also argued that *“most of the students want to show*

that they are efficient in front of their teacher by completing their given tasks or assignments within a very short time” without carrying out university and course plagiarism. “Sometimes students want to get more attention from their teacher as hardworking students and they want to be compared to their peers and class fellows.” Hence, due to certain pride factors, students often forget to respect the university designed academic ethics policies and guidelines.

4. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

This case study concludes on the basis of published literature and also cites evidence from students through interview sessions. It was found that there are three common factors that are related to personal factors of academic dishonesty among university students. Whilst pressure is seen as the main cause of academic dishonesty due to the financial issues faced by most students coming from low income families, a lack of self-competency and a pride factor also impact students at the time of their studies as well.

To overcome the personal factors that catalyze academic dishonesty among students, (1) university should offer full scholarship programs for deserving students, (2) universities should redesign their fees, so that students from varying family classes (low, medium, and high class) can afford and continue their education, (3) university and schools should design the student workload based on course programs, where students can easily handle courses and research work pressures during each semester, (4) before the start of each semester, each teacher ought to highlight the danger of plagiarism and its possible consequences to enrolled students, and finally, (5) the university must offer some form of academic writing and analytical writing course, so that students can improve their writing skills.

5. TEACHING NOTE

5.1 Case Synopsis

This case study covers public sector universities located only in Islamabad due to their national and international level research reputations. This teaching note covers the personal factors of academic dishonesty among MS students enrolled in Pakistani universities. This research topic covers personal factors of academic

dishonesty related to research and academic ethics through the perspective of students entering higher education in Pakistan.

5.2 Data collection and analysis approach

For this case study, we randomly conducted face to face, semi-structured interviews of twenty individuals (university students) through different public sector universities located in Islamabad, the federal capital city of Pakistan. The sample technique for this research was random. The interviewees were requested to participate as volunteers and upon mutual agreement we arranged a 20 minute interview session for each student. The propose of conducting such interviews of MS students was because they have knowledge about academic dishonesty and its consequences.

5.3 Target Audience

We considered only university students for this case study as our target group. Published literature and qualitative evidence about university student interviews helped us to draw conclusions for this case study. On the basis of this conclusion, local research communities and university authorities, including teachers, can potentially get a better understanding of the overcoming listed personal factors of academic dishonesty among all university students, through scholarship programs, academic training workshops, and symposiums.

5.4 Objective and key issues

The objective of carrying out this case study was to explore and highlights the personal factors related to academic dishonesty among university students, and to give some suggestions in order for communities to overcome this issue. Collected evidence for this case study will helps social scientists and research scholars to understand the impact of the personal factors that impact a student's life and their professional research studies, where they may have the choice to either become involved in academic dishonesty or condemn it completely.

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