

## Effects of Academic Dishonesty on Sustainable Academic Achievements: A Study of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Punjab

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*This research explores academic misconduct's prevalence, patterns, and impacts on sustainable academic achievements in higher education institutions (HEIs) in Punjab. The study aims to grasp the extent of academic dishonesty among university students, analyze its effects on their academic results, and provide evidence-based recommendations for stakeholders. Using a quantitative research design, data were gathered from 160 students at the Government College University Faisalabad through a well-structured questionnaire. The data is self-reported and the results reveal that students are engaged in academic dishonesty. 41.9% of the students reported that they have never cheated, while 36.3% admit to rarely cheating during exams. Additionally, 26.3% of respondents observed frequent cheating among classmates, and 22.5% acknowledged helping others cheat. The study emphasizes the crucial role of institutional policies, ethical education, and cultural factors in controlling academic dishonesty. Recommendations highlight the necessity of integrating ethics into the curriculum, enhancing surveillance, and fostering a culture of integrity within HEIs. These insights provide valuable guidance for policymakers and educational institutions to address academic dishonesty and promote sustainable academic success.*

## 1. Introduction

Academic integrity is crucial in educational institutions, especially in higher education. However, there is growing concern about academic misconduct such as cheating in exams, plagiarism, and other dishonest behaviours, and how it impacts students' academic success. An increase is observed in higher education globally as well as in Pakistan. This increase has a huge effect on the socioeconomic structure of the society (Tight, 2019). Universities are not only important for sociologists to understand because of their size, but also because they produce human capital, and scholarship in various fields and often provide the teachers, who then socialize the younger generations, which has a tremendous impact on society. Sociologists are concerned about the quality of education, systems of assessment, and learning standards (Brimble, 2016).

The ultimate goal is to enhance the quality of education and ensure that academic achievements reflect true student capabilities. It is important to note that academic dishonesty is a term used interchangeably with academic misconduct. Genuine learning outcomes result from knowledge and dedication, and engaging in any form of cheating jeopardizes one's career by depriving them of the necessary professional practice and knowledge. The majority of educators are familiar with these terms (Garavalia et al., 2007).

Institutions of higher education have a primary function of providing learning outcomes. However, in the past decade, there has been a compromise in the quality of education, leading to diminished learning outcomes due to a lack of academic integrity and rising grade inflation. The main objective of this research is to study the role of academic integrity in students' learning outcomes to help them in their future careers. The quality of education and learning outcomes also align with Sustainable Development Goal 4, which aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all (United Nations Development Program, 2023). The quality of education in HEIs shows concerns related to employability (Academia, 2019), skills and abilities (Hoodbhoy, 2015) subject knowledge (Zubair, 2018), and General Awareness and creativity (Raza, Mehmood, & Jaleel, 2019) all resonate with learning outcomes. So, the concerns are genuine. There are multiple factors behind this disadvantaged situation, which include but are not limited to a shortage of funds and resources (Higher Education Commission, 2019).

This study examines the effects of academic dishonesty on students' academic achievements in higher education institutions in Punjab. It investigates the various demographic and academic factors to understand the prevalence of academic dishonesty and its correlation with academic performance. The article presents data on the basic academic information of the respondents' distribution including university years, study subjects, and cumulative grade point average (CGPA). It also investigates the intensity of different academic dishonesty behaviours, such as cheating during exams, copying assignments from the internet, and using mobile phones to cheat. The analysis uses descriptive statistics, including mean and standard deviation, and bivariate using gamma test to provide a comprehensive understanding of the patterns of academic

misconduct among students. By identifying the underlying factors contributing to academic dishonesty and its effects on academic outcomes, this research aims to inform stakeholders within higher education institutions and suggest strategies for promoting academic integrity. Keeping in view the above situation, the present study comprises the following research objectives:

- To collect the background statistics of the respondents
- To identify the intensity of academic dishonesty among students at the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)
- To calculate the effects of academic dishonesty on sustainable academic achievements
- To suggest research-based recommendations for the implementation of HEIs stakeholders

## 2. Literature review

Löfström et al. (2015) studied academics' perspectives on teaching academic integrity in higher education. They found that educators have diverse and conflicting views on how to teach academic integrity despite recognizing its importance. The study highlighted the need for clearer guidelines and a more unified approach to effectively promote academic honesty among students. Quraishi and Aziz (2017) examined academic dishonesty among undergraduate students in Punjab, Pakistan. The study identified several factors influencing dishonest behaviour, such as institutional type, gender, academic goals, teacher effectiveness, parental pressure, and classroom size. The research emphasized the need for targeted strategies to curb dishonest behaviour and provided valuable insights into promoting academic integrity in higher education in Pakistan.

Ransome and Newton (2018) examined the integration of academic integrity into postgraduate certificates in higher education (PGCert) in the UK. They found that academic integrity was not thoroughly covered in the recommended reading lists for PGCert programs at UK universities. The study found the need for a more comprehensive inclusion of academic integrity in educator training to address contemporary challenges in higher education. Ullah (2019) stated that academic dishonesty is often viewed as a victimless crime. Two sociological theories, "rational choice theory" and "social control theory," provide explanations for academic dishonesty. Additionally, the basic assumptions of "social learning theory" also offer insight into the reasons behind academic dishonesty.

Soroya et al. (2020) researched academic integrity and suggested that factors such as gender, age, field of study, GPA, and type of institution can impact students' behaviour. The findings regarding gender and age were inconclusive, but GPA consistently correlated with integrity. Additionally, students at private universities generally demonstrate higher levels of academic integrity compared to those at public universities. These findings highlighted the importance of educational institutions promoting a culture of academic integrity through comprehensive policies and practices.

Studies by McCabe et al. (2006) and Ullah Khan et al. (2019) found that higher religiosity correlates with lower academic dishonesty. This suggested that religious beliefs discourage unethical behaviour. Spirituality had less influence. Cultural context matters, with religiosity strongly impacting academic integrity in Pakistan. Attitudes toward cheating mediate the relationship between religiosity, spirituality, and cheating behaviour. Incorporating discussions on religiosity and ethics into the curriculum and creating supportive environments may promote ethical behaviour in educational institutions.

The study by Haq et al. (2020) focuses on the factors influencing academic misconduct among university students in Pakistan and addresses the gap in the literature regarding sociocultural dynamics that influence academic integrity, particularly in South Asia. The study identified key factors such as teachers' behaviours, evaluation methods, peer pressure, and the prevalence of rote learning that contribute to a culture of academic misconduct in Pakistani universities. The findings emphasized the importance of comprehensive strategies including ethical education, better evaluation methods, and increased awareness among both students and faculty to effectively combat academic dishonesty. In addition, they stated that providing valuable insights for policymakers and educational institutions aiming to enhance academic integrity in Pakistan.

Stephens et al. (2021) build on existing research about academic integrity interventions. It is grounded in theoretical frameworks such as Rational Choice Theory, Social Learning Theory, and Moral Development Theory. These suggest that academic dishonesty is influenced by factors like perceived risks and benefits, peer behaviour, and moral reasoning. Studies have shown mixed results on the effectiveness of integrity interventions, highlighting the importance of contextual factors. More rigorous research, such as natural experiments, is needed to establish causal relationships. Additionally, the impact of online academic integrity courses, particularly outside the U.S., has been underexplored, a gap that Stephens et al. aim to address through their study in New Zealand.

Lau (2021) emphasizes the importance of academic integrity for research postgraduate students. The study demonstrates various interpretations of academic integrity influenced by cultural, educational, and individual factors. The findings highlighted the need for comprehensive educational programs to promote a deeper understanding of academic integrity and better support postgraduate students in upholding high standards of academic honesty in their research.

Gunton (2022) explores the changing role of academic librarians in promoting academic integrity in higher education. The study showcased the implementation of a self-paced, online learning activity by a regional Australian university's library, which has become an integral part of the university's efforts to address academic misconduct. This initiative was in line with existing literature that underscores the significance of comprehensive, university-wide approaches to managing academic integrity (McCabe & Trevino, 1993; Whitley, 1998). The case study highlighted the substantial impact of librarians in raising awareness and building capacity for ethical scholarly behaviour. Through the creation of the Academic Integrity Tool,

librarians have proven their ability to contribute to promoting academic integrity, transcending traditional roles actively. Establishing a dedicated Academic Integrity Unit at the University of Southern Queensland further reinforced this collaboration, emphasizing the valuable role of librarians in collaborating with academics and institutional leaders to cultivate a culture of integrity within higher education.

Joseph and Natarajan (2022) conducted a study at Sultan Qaboos University in Oman comparing healthcare and non-healthcare students' attitudes towards academic integrity. They found that healthcare students showed better devotion to academic integrity policies due to their ethical education and professional standards. However, they also highlighted the need for interventions to improve academic integrity in non-healthcare programs. The study emphasized the importance of tailored approaches and consistent enforcement of policies to promote academic integrity across different fields in higher education, particularly in non-Western settings.

The study by Mahmood et al. (2023) focuses on academic integrity in universities in Punjab, Pakistan. It highlighted the influence of peer behaviour, penalties, and institutional policies on academic dishonesty and emphasized the importance of ethical education. The study found a lack of context-specific research in South Asian countries, particularly Pakistan. It suggests that localized strategies like awareness campaigns and ethical education are crucial to combat academic dishonesty. These insights can be valuable for policymakers and educational institutions in Pakistani universities.

Academic integrity is a significant concern in digital learning platforms, especially with the growing use of tools like M-readers in educational programs. A study by Al Damen and Cambridge (2023) at Sultan Qaboos University examined the effectiveness of measures to prevent cheating among Foundation Program students. The study reveals the need for a balanced approach that upholds integrity while supporting learner independence. (Al Damen and Cambridge, 2023).

In her 2024 study, Kell et al., emphasized the importance of maintaining academic integrity in the evolving landscape of higher education, particularly in online learning. The shift to emergency remote teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic has led to an increase in instances of academic dishonesty, especially among health sciences students. This study aimed to explore these issues by examining the experiences of health sciences students at a South African university, with the goal of developing strategies to uphold academic integrity in the digital age.

Knerr (2015) discussed the quality of human capital of Asian students in her book "Asian Students in Germany: Contexts of their Studies, Living Conditions, and Future Plans". In Chapter 7, she specifically addressed the learning outcomes of Pakistani students. Mahmood et al. (2022) found that learning outcomes significantly impact the quality of human capital, which poses a challenge for Pakistani immigrants. This challenge encompassed language skills, social capital, human capital, citizenship, work documentation, and other factors. The government is heavily investing in the human capital development of its citizens, particularly in higher education, by providing indigenous and overseas scholarships to help them enhance their abilities and contribute to the nation.

### 3. Material and Methods

Methodological techniques are crucial for analyzing sociological and empirical research. This study took place in District Faisalabad and used a quantitative research design to examine a social phenomenon. The population was the university students and the Government College University Faisalabad was selected randomly. The students of the GCUF were interviewed with the help of a well-structured questionnaire using a simple random sampling technique. The inclusion criteria were that the students should spend at least one year in the university as students that's why the students of the first year were excluded from the sample as the researcher wanted to collect data from the experienced ones. In total, 160 respondents were interviewed. The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, mean, & standard deviation) to understand the situation and inferential statistical techniques were applied using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

### 4. Results & Discussion

The results of the study discussed the academic background of the students, their intensity to understand and rate academic misconduct, and its relationship with academic outcomes are given below:

**Table No 1: Data of Respondents by Basic Academic Factors**

Indicators	Options			
	2 years	3 years	4 years	> 4 year
University years				
F (%)	30 (18.75)	24 (15.00)	66 (41.25)	40 (25.00)
Major	A/H*	SS	NS	B/L
F (%)	3 (1.88)	105 (65.63)	39 (24.38)	13 (8.13)
CGPA	2.00-2.50	2.51-3.00	3.01-3.50	3.51-4.00
F (%)	3 (1.88)	28 (17.50)	77 (48.13)	52 (32.50)

A/H\* = Arts & Humanities, SS = Social Science, NS = Natural Sciences, B/L = Business/Law

The table No 1 provides a summary of various academic indicators and their corresponding frequency distributions among the respondents. It shows the duration of university years, with the majority (41.2%) of students in the last year (4<sup>th</sup> year) of their studies, while a smaller percentage (18.7%) spent two years. The distribution of majors reveals that the largest group (65.6%) studied Social Sciences, followed by Natural Sciences (24.3%). In terms of academic performance, most students achieved a CGPA between 3.01-3.50 (48.1%), with fewer students (1.8%) in the lowest CGPA range of 2.00-2.50. Similar results were reported by Anwar et al., (2020) that majority of the students secured more than three CGPA.

The table No 2 provides survey data on academic dishonesty among university students. It reveals that 41.9% of students reported never cheating during exams, while 36.3% admitted to rarely cheating, resulting in a mean of 1.9 and a standard deviation of 29.19. Regarding classmates' cheating frequency, 26.3% of students observed that cheating always occurred, leading to a higher mean of 3.33 and a standard deviation of 11.40. When asked about helping others cheat, 22.5% said they never did, but 30.6% admitted to doing so rarely, with a mean of 2.61 and a standard deviation of 11.89. Copying assignments from the internet was another prevalent behaviour, with 32.5% stating they never engaged in it, while 25.6% did so



sometimes, resulting in a mean of 2.34 and a standard deviation of 17.39. The frequency of being involved in such activities, possibly as a victim or participant, showed a mean of 2.86 and a standard deviation of 4.79, with relatively low percentages across the board. Most students (77.5%) reported never using their phones to cheat, leading to a low mean of 1.41 but

Indicators	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	67 (41.9)	58 (36.3)	25 (15.6)	4 (2.5)	6 (3.8)	1.9	29.19
2	19 (11.9)	23 (14.4)	45 (28.1)	31 (19.4)	42 (26.3)	3.33	11.40
3	36 (22.5)	49 (30.6)	32 (20.0)	26 (16.3)	17 (10.6)	2.61	11.89
4	52 (32.5)	39 (24.4)	41 (25.6)	18 (11.3)	10 (6.3)	2.34	17.39
5	36 (9.0)	31 (7.8)	37 (9.3)	31 (7.8)	25 (6.3)	2.86	4.79
6	124 (77.5)	17 (10.6)	8 (5.0)	11 (6.9)	0 (0)	1.41	51.79
7	45 (28.1)	41 (25.6)	37 (23.1)	18 (11.3)	19 (11.9)	2.53	12.64

1. Cheated during exams (own experience)
2. Classmate Cheating frequency
3. Assist others in cheating
4. Copy assignments from the internet
5. How often has this happened to you in university?
6. Usage of mobile phone to cheat in exams
7. Classmates using their mobile phones during university exams.

\* 1 for “Never”, 2 for “Rarely”, 3 for “Sometimes”, 4 for “Fairly Regular”, 5 for “Always”,

a high standard deviation of 51.79, indicating considerable variation. Lastly, 28.1% believed their classmates never cheated using phones, while others observed varying frequencies, resulting in a mean of 2.53 and a standard deviation of 12.64

**Table No 2: Prevalence and Patterns of Academic Misconduct in University Settings**

Overall, while many students maintain academic integrity, there is significant variability in cheating behaviours, with some students engaging more frequently than others. Quraishi and Aziz (2017) and Anwar (2020a, 2020b) has also examined academic dishonesty among undergraduate students in Punjab, Pakistan and identify the similar kind of results. In addition Quraishi and Aziz (2017) found that the class size was an important indicator of dishonest behaviour whereas Quraishi and Aziz (2017) and Anwar (2020a, 2020b) both were agreed that institutional type, gender, and teacher effectiveness were the important indicators to minimize the academic dishonesty in higher education institutions.

**Table No3: Correlation Between CGPA and Copy-Paste Assignments**

CGPA Scale	2.00 -2.50 F (%)	2.51 - 3.00 F (%)	3.01 - 3.50 F (%)	3.51 - 4.00 F (%)	Total F (%)
Never	0 (0.0)	13 (8.1)	25 (15.6)	14 (8.8)	52 (32.5)
Rarely	1 (0.6)	10 (6.3)	18 (11.3)	10 (6.3)	39 (24.4)
Sometimes	0 (0.0)	3(1.9)	19 (11.9)	19 (11.9)	41 (25.6)
Fairly Regularly	2 (1.3)	0 (0.0)	10 (6.3)	6 (3.8)	18 (11.3)
Always	0 (0.0)	2 (1.3)	5 (3.1)	3 (1.9)	10 (6.3)

Total	3 (1.9)	28 (17.5)	77 (48.1)	52 (32.5)	160 (100)
Gamma Value: .175		Significance = 0.66			

Table 3 shows the correlation between the achieved CGPA and the submission of copy-paste assignments. The students who never and rarely copy-paste their assignments hold better CGPAs while the students who submitted copy paste assignments has less grades than others. Anwar et al., (2020a, 2020b) also found that the copying assignments from the internet and academic misconduct may get popularity in coming years that will badly effect the education quality in higher education institutions (HEIs).

**Table No 4: Effects of Academic Dishonesty on Sustainable Academic Achievements (Gamma Values)**

Statements*	Gamma Value	Significance
Cheated during exams (own experience)	-.008	.938
Classmate Cheating frequency	.186	.059
Assist others in cheating	.181	.073
Usage of mobile phones to cheat in exams	-.045	.766
Classmates using their mobile phones during university exams.	.055	.579

\* Statements were assessed on the following Likert scale:

1 for “Never”, 2 for “Rarely”, 3 for “Sometimes”, 4 for “Fairly Regular”, 5 for “Always”,

The similar variables that were selected for assessing academic misconduct in descriptive analysis were considered for bivariate analysis (Table 4). The students' own experience of cheating during exams, frequency of classmate cheating during exams, helping other in cheating, and using mobile by himself/herself and by others were the indicators that were the variables co-related with the CGPA obtained by them. The results help us to understand the effects of academic dishonesty on the academic performance of the students. The results shows that cheating and mobile phone usage have the negative effect on the academic performance of the students with the gamma value (-.008) and (-.045) respectively. In our study, we found that technology like smartphones is contributing in the academic misconduct. Similarly, Kell et al., (2024) emphasized that the shift to emergency remote teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic has led to an increase in instances of academic dishonesty and suggested to develop strategies to uphold academic integrity in the digital age. The results are also verified with the studies of Anwar et. al., (2020a, 2020b).

## 5. Conclusion

The sociological analysis focused on the attitudes and experiences of 160 university students. It aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of academic misconduct and its impact on academic performance of the students. The study, conducted at Government College University, Faisalabad, revealed a complex relationship between academic misconduct and students' performance but agree that in future, the academic misconduct will get popularity as the students are losing their values of integrity. While a majority of students maintained academic integrity, a notable portion engaged in dishonest practices such as cheating during exams, helping others cheat, using mobile phone, and copying assignments from the internet.



These behaviours were prevalent across various university years, study subjects, and CGPA ranges, indicating that academic dishonesty was not limited to any particular group.

## 6. Recommendations

There is a dire need to talk about academic misconduct to the students so that their personal values and socialization can be revived regarding the right and wrong deeds. Academic misconduct is not a simple phenomenon as it will lead them to the life-long learning of misconduct and they will be habitual of rehearsal this misconduct in their future roles. Teachers are the nation builders and they should give awareness to their students through different channels and teacher's training can also play a crucial role. Strict and clear policy-making and their implementation without discrimination can stop this misconduct. Being fair and encouraging honest students will help us to face this challenge. It is suggested that institutions integrate ethics and academic integrity into their curriculum that will nurture a supportive academic environment that prioritizes honesty. It is also important to implement strict check to minimize opportunities for cheating. Involving all parties in promoting integrity, developing tailored strategies that respect cultural differences, and ensuring ongoing monitoring and research are all crucial steps in fostering a culture of integrity and helping students attain sustainable academic achievement.

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