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RESEARCH PAPER

The Sociological Dynamics of Academic Integrity in the Universities of Punjab, Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to investigate the correlation between academic integrity and university students' learning outcomes, a crucial concern for educational institutions globally, particularly in Pakistan. Employing a quantitative research design, 160 students from universities in Faisalabad participated through multistage sampling. Data collection utilized a structured questionnaire and was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics via SPSS. Results indicated a male majority (62.5%) aged 18-22 (50%) and predominantly enrolled in BS programs (78%). Notably, 40% reported daily completion of class tasks, correlating with a perceived university integration. Bivariate analysis showed that students frequently visiting the library and completing classwork regularly achieved higher grades. Recommendations include awareness campaigns, robust misconduct detection, ethical education programs, technological solutions for dishonesty, strengthened academic policies, a supportive environment, research promotion, and stakeholder collaboration for enhanced academic integrity. These measures are crucial for fostering excellence in learning and maintaining integrity in higher education institutions.

KEYWORDS Academic Integrity, Learning Outcomes, University Students

Introduction

Academic integrity is defined as "a set of shared values and ethics which include honesty, fairness, rigor, trust, and respect about students' academic work and its assessment". Academic integrity is based on the principle that how you learn is as important as what you learn (Stephens, 2019). Academic integrity is defined as "Academic activity that has six characteristics Honesty, Trustworthiness, Fairness, Respect, Responsibility and Courage". These characteristics are the cornerstone of any learning activity. "The expectation that instructors, students, researchers, and other members of the academic community work with honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and accountability" is what academic integrity is defined as (Bretag, 2010; 2011; 2014).

Academic dishonesty is another word used to refer to academic misconduct in popular literature. Genuine learning outcomes are the result of knowledge and dedication, but engaging himself/herself in any form of cheating action stakes their career by depriving one of required professional practice and knowledge. The majority of academicians are familiar with these terms (Garavalia, Olson, Russell, & Christensen, 2007).

There is a significant relationship between academic integrity and learning outcomes as learning outcomes are "Statements of what a learner is expected to know,

understand, and/or be able to demonstrate at the end of a period of learning. They are explicit statements about the outcomes of learning – the results of learning" (Adam, 2006). Learning outcomes are acquired skills, knowledge, and abilities that a person can attain as a student as the result of his/her successful engagement in academic activities (Hartikainen et. al., 2019). The sum of the learning outcomes is shaped as human capital which is defined as knowledge, values, skills, and behaviors that are required for the labor force. Human capital refers to a set of skills and abilities that are required for employees to perform their work (Eseyin, Uchendu, & Bright, 2014).

The provision of learning outcomes is a manifest function of institutions of higher education and it has been noticed that since last decade, the quality of the education is compromised. Learning outcomes diminish due to a lack of academic integrity and grade inflation is rising. The major objective of the present research is an effort to study the role of academic integrity in the student's learning outcomes that will help them in their career adjustment afterward. The quality of education and learning outcomes are also the concern of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) under SDG-4 to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong opportunities for all which is the major concern of this research. Specifically, target 4.7 is focusing on the sociocultural and moral aspects of learning (United Nations Development Program, 2023).

Literature Review

Stephens (2019) defined academic integrity as it is a set of shared values including these five main pillars which are trust, respect, honesty, fairness, and rigor on which we can assess the academic activities of the students. Haq *et al.*, (2020a) have also adopted this definition of academic integrity means "excellence of character or personality in educational settings" in their research.

Learning outcomes signify the expected achievements resulting from the successful completion of an academic program or course. Whether it's a short-term course or a long-term degree program, these outcomes are defined at the program's outset, complete with measurement tools. Throughout the program, continuous monitoring ensures that both instructors and students meet the specified targets, a practice common in higher education (Mahajan and Singh, 2017).

Learning outcomes represent the skills, knowledge, and abilities acquired by students through their academic engagement (Hartikainen *et al.,* 2019). These encompass a range of competencies such as writing, numeracy, IT proficiency, reading, independent event handling, management, communication, subject-specific knowledge, social skills, and professional competencies. Serving as concise descriptions, learning outcomes act as vital benchmarks, offering guidance to both educators and students. Universities utilize a grading system to assess and quantify the proficiency levels achieved by students across these diverse skills and abilities (Hartikainen *et al.,* 2019).

In Pakistan, the "quality of education" is constantly a matter of concern and many researchers, educationists, and social scientists are concerned about it. The youth is unable to cope with the employability requirements and their knowledge and skills are not up to the mark, the theoretical and practical knowledge is poor as well as their creativity and general awareness which are required for the job market (Hoodbhoy, 2009; 2015).

Raza, Mehmood, & Jaleel (2019) stated that educational institutions should train students according to the demand of the market. The environment of the academic institutions matters in the learning of the students. The main focus of the researchers was

on the learning environment at higher education institutions. In another study, Rashid & Waheed (2014) related to perceptions of academic dishonesty and the factors behind found that 51% of students between the age of 21-35 years think that cheating is a normal activity. Around 48% said that academic dishonesty is ethically wrong but around 47% of them said that is acceptable in the Pakistani context. The respondents varied in their opinion. Some students also said that their involvement in academic dishonesty makes them dull, diminishes creativity, and lowers the level of learning outcomes.

Thomas (2016) studied academic misconduct in Thailand and found that the collective environment plays a role in academic misconduct. It also found that inactive teaching, and unmotivated students also lead to involvement in a lack of academic integrity.

Quraishi and Aziz (2017) gathered data from 1000 university students belonging to 8 distinct universities and found that various forms of academic dishonesty are common among students. On the scale of cheating in examination, this study found that around 89% of students were involved while 90% were involved in copy-paste assignments. Overall, they summarized that around 89% of students were involved in academic misconduct. Academic integrity is challenging in Pakistan.

Ullah (2019) stated that academic dishonesty was considered a victimless crime two theories explain academic dishonesty sociologically "rational choice theory" and "social control theory". However the basic assumptions of "social learning theory" also provide a virtuous explanation of academic dishonesty.

Aurangzeb & Akhtar (2019) studied among MPhil and Ph.D. students at a public sector university in Islamabad and focused on attitudes towards plagiarism. A quantitative survey with three hundred students in which an equal number of males and females participated reported that management students are keener towards plagiarism, social sciences students try to justify their actions, and languages students were more concerned about penalty/Punishment. Postgraduate students from all three disciplines agreed strongly that their understanding of plagiarism altered after taking part in this study.

Haq *et al.,* (2020a) explored the academic integrity, grade inflation, and human capital. They asked the respondents to write an essay to assess their level of human capital and after the assessment, they found that there is a grade inflation in our higher education institutes that became the cause of lack of academic integrity which results lesser quality of learning outcomes.

Haq *et al.,* (2020b) studied the challenge of academic integrity among university students with qualitative research design and found that if the students are satisfied with the teacher's behavior in the classroom and the teacher's evaluation method in Examinations than their integration can be ensured. While the peer pressure for academic misconduct also played an important role. It is also found that rote learning played a significant role. They suggested that teacher's professional and moral training is the need of the time.

Knerr (2015) in her book "Asian Students in Germany: Contexts of their Studies, Living Conditions and Future Plans" also discussed the quality of human capital of Asian students, and in chapter 7, specifically the learning outcomes of Pakistani students were also discussed. Mahmood *et. al.,* (2022) found that learning outcomes affect the quality of human capital which was a challenge for the Pakistani immigrants as well. This challenge was referring to language skills, social capital, human capital, citizenship, working

documentation, and many others. The government is investing a lot in the human capital of its individuals especially in higher education by offering them indigenous and overseas scholarships to help them to enhance their abilities and serve the nation in return. Hassan *et al.,* (2022) found that the academic return migrants were also not satisfied with the situation of academic institutions about the diffusion of new ideas in academic activities to increase the academic integrity of students.

Tanveer, Mahmood, & Shabbir (2023) explored the influence of educational technologies on the educational outcomes of students in selected universities in Punjab, Pakistan. The researcher collected data from the university students by using a disproportionate stratified sampling technique and found that these technologies improved the academic integrity of the students as they learned new and up-to-date knowledge due to the intervention of technology.

Material and Methods

Methodological techniques are important for analyzing sociological and empirical research. The present study was conducted in the District Faisalabad. The quantitative research design was adopted to study this social phenomenon. The respondents were the students of the universities in Faisalabad. A multistage sampling technique was used to collect data from the targeted population. One top-ranked university in Faisalabad was selected purposively and 160 respondents from the selected university were interviewed with the help of a well-structured questionnaire through a simple random sampling technique. The data was evaluated through descriptive statistics to get an overview of the situation and inferential statistical techniques were applied by using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

Results and Discussion

Demographic information

Table 1
Demographic information of the respondents

Indicators	Frequency	%	Indicators	Frequency	%
Gender			**Years at University**		
Female	60	37.5	2 years	30	18.8
Male	100	62.5	3 years	24	15.0
Degree Program			4 years	66	41.3
BS (Hons.)	124	78	> 4 years	40	25.0
M.Phil./MS	36	22.5	**Obtained CGPA**		
Age			2.00 -2.50	3	1.9
18-22	80	50.0	2.51 - 3.00	28	17.5
23-27	69	43.1	3.01 - 3.50	77	48.1
28-32	11	6.9	3.51 - 4.00	52	32.5

Table 1 provides a comprehensive overview of the demographic details of the survey respondents: The respondents include 60 females (37.5%) and 100 males (62.5%). A huge majority 78% were pursuing BS (Hons.) degrees, while others were in M.Phil./MS programs (22.5%). Half of the respondents (50%) belong to the age group of 18 to 22 years old. 43.1% of the respondents belong to the age group of 23 to 27 years old. Only 6.9% of the respondents belong to the age group of 28 to 32 years old. 41.3% were studying in the 4th year of their degree, 15% were in the 3rd year of their studies, and 18.8% were in the 2nd year of their degree. 25% of them spent more than four years in the university and the majority of them were those who enrolled in another program in the same university. There were very few (1.9%) of the respondents were securing 2.00 to

2.50 CGPA, 17.5% were securing between 2.51 to 3.00, while the majority of the respondents (48.1%) of the respondents were securing 3.01 to 3.50 CGPA and 32.5% of them were securing between 3.51 to 4.00 CGPA.

Table 2
Academic Integrity indicators of the respondents

Indicators / Response*	1 F (%)	2 F (%)	3 F (%)	4 F (%)	5 F (%)
Doing Classwork	64 (40.0)	37 (23.1)	10 (6.3)	18 (11.3)	31 (19.4)
Lecture revision	18 (11.3)	11 (6.9)	21 (13.1)	64 (40)	46 (28.7)
Visit to the Library	19 (11.9)	29 (18.1)	78 (48.8)	20 (12.5)	14 (8.8)
Notes Preparation	17 (10.6)	17 (10.6)	24 (15)	56 (35)	46 (28.7)
Group discussions	14 (8.8)	13 (8.1)	32 (20.0)	57 (35.6)	44 (27.5)
Use of technology for studies	21 (13.1)	15 (9.4)	30 (18.8)	51 (31.9)	43 (26.9)

* 1 for "Daily", 2 for "Weekly", 3 for "After two weeks", 4 for "Monthly", 5 for "Near exams only"

Table 2 shows the results of academic integrity indicators. A significant 40% of the respondents reported that they are doing their classwork daily, demonstrating a strong commitment to their studies. Another 23.1% studied after one or two days, reflecting a somewhat regular approach. In contrast, 19.4% of respondents mention studying only near exams, indicating a more sporadic study pattern. The results are aligned with the literature suggesting that regular and consistent study habits are associated with better academic performance (Pashler *et al*., 2008). In contrast, those who study only near exams (19.4%) might reflect the "cramming" behavior identified in research as less effective for learning (Kornell & Bjork, 2008). The majority of the students are not regular in revising their lectures (68.7%), indicating a more sporadic study pattern. However, the majority, comprising 48.8%, do not have a regular library routine, The findings here can be related to studies emphasizing the importance of library resources in academic success (Cox & Jantti, 2012; Schwartz *et al*., 2013). The majority of the respondents (59%) were not regular in preparing notes. There is lack of productive group discussions as results showed that 35.6% do not participate in group discussion on regular basis. Additionally, 27.5% of respondents mention that they only do group discussion near exams and at the time of assignment and presentation. The majority of the students (32%) are not using technology regularly for academic learning.

Bi-Variate Analysis

The bi-variate analysis of the study is showing the relationship of academic integrity and the learning outcomes.

Table 3
Crosstabulation of Frequency of studying and its Relationship with Obtained CGPA

Frequency of Studying / Obtained CGPA	2.00 -2.50 F (%)	2.51 - 3.00 F (%)	3.01 - 3.50 F (%)	3.51 - 4.00 F (%)	Total F (%)
Daily	0 (0)	15 (9.4)	23 (14.4)	26 (16.3)	64 (40.0)
After one or two days	0 (0)	4 (2.5)	21 (13.1)	12 (7.5)	37 (23.1)
Weekly	0 (0)	2 (1.3)	5 (3.1)	3 (1.9)	10 (6.3)
Not regularly	1 (0.6)	1 (0.6)	11 (6.9)	5 (3.1)	18 (11.3)
Study only near exams	2 (1.3)	6 (3.8)	17 (10.6)	6 (3.8)	31 (19.4)
Total	3 (1.9)	28 (17.5)	77 (48.1)	52 (32.5)	160 (100)
Pearson R = -.141			Gamma = -.150		

Table 3 examines the relationship between the respondent's frequency of studying and obtained CGPA. The results showed that the students who daily spend time studying are getting better grades than others. The gamma value (-.150) indicates that there is a **negative association** between the frequency of studying and CGPA. In other words, the students who are not studying regularly or only studying near examinations are associated with **lower** academic grades.

Table 4
Crosstabulation of Lecture Revision and Notes Preparation and its Relationship with Obtained CGPA (Learning outcome)

Lecture revision / Obtained CGPA	2.00 -2.50	2.51 - 3.00	3.01 - 3.50	3.51 - 4.00	Total
	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)
Daily	0 (0.00)	2 (1.30)	7 (4.40)	6 (3.80)	14 (8.80)
After one or two days	1 (0.60)	5 (3.10)	3 (1.90)	2 (1.30)	11 (6.90)
Weekly	1 (0.60)	1 (0.60)	12 (7.50)	6 (3.80)	20 (12.50)
Not regularly	0 (0.00)	13 (8.10)	30 (18.80)	20 (12.50)	63 (39.40)
Study only near exams	1 (0.60)	7 (4.40)	25 (15.70)	18 (11.20)	51 (31.80)
Total	3 (1.90)	28 (17.50)	77 (48.10)	52 (32.50)	160 (100)
Pearson R = .043			Gamma = .064		

Table 4 examines the relationship between the respondent's frequency of lecture revision and notes preparation and obtained CGPA. The results showed that the students are not habitual in notes preparation and lecture revision daily but they mostly do this near examination. The gamma value (.064) indicates that there is a positive **association** between the frequency of preparing notes only near exams and CGPA. In other words, the students who are studying only near examination are associated with a **higher** academic grade.

Conclusion

This sociological analysis examined the attitudes and experiences of 160 university students, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of academic integrity and learning outcomes. This study at Government College University, Faisalabad, reveals a complex relationship influenced by personal values, peer influence, and institutional environment. Higher academic integrity correlates with better grades, critical thinking, and practical knowledge. Challenges include cheating prevalence and the lack of ethical standards. This research lays a foundation for policy discussions and interventions to promote integrity and enhance learning outcomes in Punjab's universities. Collaborative efforts among stakeholders are essential for fostering a culture of integrity and preparing students for academic and professional success.

Recommendations

Recommendations call for awareness campaigns and robust misconduct detection systems. The study recommends a shift in students' attitudes towards integrity, emphasizing ethical education programs, effective communication, and mentorship. Technological solutions to detect dishonesty are proposed. Additionally, the study suggests strengthening academic policies, fostering a supportive university environment, promoting research, and continuous monitoring and evaluation. Collaboration with stakeholders is encouraged to share best practices and collectively enhance academic integrity in the higher education institutions of the country.

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