

Towards Promoting Academic Integrity in Tertiary Level with reference to Northern Illinois University (NIU) Model

Ali Ahmed Hussein (PhD)

American Public University

Charles Town, West Virginia, United States

Abstract

This paper attempted to study the possibility of Promoting Academic Integrity in tertiary level of education with Reference to Northern Illinois University (NIU) Model. The study focused on the importance and challenges of promoting academic integrity through flexible teaching at tertiary level of education. The study started with definitions of integrity in general and academic integrity in particular in addition to shedding light on the significance of academic integrity particularly at the level of higher education as well as its relationship to culture. The study collected data from different sources and from the literature that addressed this issue as well as drawing on the researcher's own experience in teaching at the higher education for a long time. Then the study discussed some of the challenges that face Academic integrity such as plagiarism and fabrication of information. Finally, suggestions have been made on how to protect Academic integrity from these violations and misconduct, and it was also suggested that flexible teaching and assessment can help promote academic integrity violations immediately.

Keywords: promoting academic integrity, challenge, flexible teaching, misconduct

1- Introduction: What is integrity?

A number of general dictionaries and philosophical summaries give different definitions of integrity. For example, it is defined as the quality of being honest while having strong levels of moral compass and principles (Martin et al., 2013). A person with integrity can be trusted. Integrity is a very important virtue to have in life because it helps one to be a respectable person. When a person has integrity, he/she is more likely to make good decisions, treat others with respect, and be successful in life. People with integrity usually possess many positive traits. They have several key traits that set them apart from others such as being honest, reliable, and trustworthy. They possess strong moral behavior and always do the right thing, even when it is not easy. Moreover, people of integrity are respectful and humble as they treat others with kindness and compassion and are always mindful of their words and actions. With these qualities, people of integrity inspire respect in those around them and they are known for setting an example of how to live life with dignity. The individual with integrity will know what is right and be willing to act on that knowledge. In contrast, a person without integrity might be dishonest or act out of self-interest at the expense of others. Another definition of integrity from the same sources is that integrity can also be defined as the consistency of actions, values, methods, measures and principles. Integrity implies solidity and wholeness; the state of being whole and undivided. In some contexts, the word integrity can mean having moral or ethical principles, virtues or strengths such as honesty and fairness. Ideals of good behavior include personal responsibility, honesty, fairness, respectfulness, self-discipline and compassion.

<https://www.geeksforgeeks.org/integrity-importance-and-challenges/>

2- Academic Integrity

After defining integrity in general, the study will focus specifically on Academic *Integrity*. It is interpreted as the values, behavior and conduct of academics in all aspects of their practice: teaching, research and service. The term ‘academic integrity’ is widely used as a term for the conduct of students, notably in relation to plagiarism and cheating. (Macfarlane et al., 2004).

In the academic context it is ‘the expectation that teachers, students, researchers and all members of the academic community act with honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility.’ It follows that breaching academic integrity is known as ‘academic misconduct’ or ‘academic dishonesty’ <https://www.teqsa.gov.au/students/understanding-academic-integrity/what-academic-integrity#behaviours-that%20support%20academic%20integrity>

Several research studies focused on academic integrity from different angles. For example, Kitahara & Westfall (2007) discussed promoting academic integrity in online distance learning courses. They mentioned that universities face challenges to ensure academic integrity in online distance learning, so they reviewed the literature to find about the extent of the problem of academic dishonesty in distance learning courses and discussed issues relevant to this. Their argument was that while the challenge to protect academic integrity is common both in the online and in-person courses, online courses present special concerns for implementation of protective measures. Similarly, Spaulding (2009) examined student perceptions of academic integrity related to both online and face-to-face course formats. That was done by a survey to measure the frequency students participated in academic misconduct and the instances in which students believed other students participated in academic misconduct. Findings gave evidence that there may be no significant difference in academic misconduct between online courses and face-to-face courses and so concerns about academic dishonesty should not necessarily be more strongly focused on the online courses. Jones (2011), on the other hand, focused on internet plagiarism among students who were studying an online business communication course. This study recommended ten strategies to reinforce academic integrity and assist students with avoiding internet plagiarism. It is concluded that although academic dishonesty is a concern for all educational environments, it is particularly of a major concern in on line courses because students work independently and with less direct monitoring by an instructor.

3- Relationship between academic integrity and culture

The relationship between culture and human behavior is a widely accepted view and academic integrity is undoubtedly part of human behavior. This has been addressed in many past research studies. For example, Garcia and Dominguez (1997) state that culture is dynamic, persists over time, and, therefore, guides an individual’s capacity to make meaning of their world and experiences. Most importantly, Bourdieu (1984) argues that people can be unaware of their own cultural influences and how it shapes their decisions. Thus, the cultural practices, values and beliefs guiding an individual’s decisions appear natural and intuitive but are in fact culturally driven. Consequently, culture plays a crucial role in influencing and guiding an individual’s decisions and meaning. Thus, cultural differences may impact academic integrity at tertiary level (Cutri and Pretorius 2019; Pretorius and Macaulay 2021). Many universities and tertiary level institutions offer scholarships for students to do their undergraduate or postgraduate studies. This has led to the emergence of various cultural differences that influenced academic integrity which raised more concern from universities and institutions.

Cultural difference can be a strong cause for academic dishonesty amongst international postgraduate students as academic integrity has different definitions for different cultures (Velliaris and Breen 2016). This highlights that students may have different standards of academic integrity and plagiarism depending on their cultural background. According to Cutri (2019) students bring their pre-existing beliefs into academia while they, at the same time, grapple with newly formed expectations to be experts in their fields.

4- Importance of Academic Integrity

East (2009) highlights the importance of viewing academic integrity as a holistic approach that supports the development of an honest community within any higher education institution. Thus academic integrity is important in education in general and higher education in particular for many reasons. First, it helps build trust between the individual and other members of society. People are more likely to trust someone with integrity because that can help them in dealing with him/her in both their personal and professional life. Second, integrity can help one to remain true to him/herself. It can be easy to show others what they want or expect from you, but if you have integrity, you will be able to stay true to your own values and beliefs.

Third, integrity can lead to success both professionally and personally. If you do the right thing even when no one is watching, people will certainly notice that. If you do things that you know are wrong because they may benefit you, eventually people will find out, and then they will not respect you anymore.

To have a successful career, it is important to make sure that your work reflects who you are and not just the person others want you to be. For example, let us assume that someone is offered a promotion at work and then he/she thinks that this new job would be too much of a time commitment, so he/she declines the promotion offer. In fact, it is his/her integrity that led him to take that important decision.

5- Challenges facing Academic Integrity

According to *Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency*(TEQSA), academic integrity can be supported by acknowledging where the information that people use comes from by clearly citing or referencing the source. It can also be supported by using information appropriately in relation to copyright and privacy laws and more importantly by acting ethically or doing the 'right thing', even when facing difficulties

However, a range of challenges and behaviors can violate academic integrity. Sometimes, students mistakenly believe that these behaviors are commonplace or do not have consequences. This is wrong. Different penalties can apply for breaching academic integrity. The behaviors that undermine or breach academic integrity are sometimes called Academic Misconduct/ Dishonesty

Whitley & Keith-Spigel et al (2002) identified the following forms of Academic misconduct: First, cheating involves unauthorized use of information, materials, devices, sources, or practices in completing academic activities such as tests /exams. This practice of cheating is normally caught up by exam proctors. *The NIU Student Code of Conduct (NIU, 2023c)* states that the term "cheating" includes, but is not limited to: use of sources beyond those authorized by the instructor in writing papers, preparing reports, solving problems, or carrying out other assignments, acquisition (without permission) of tests or other academic material belonging to a member of the university faculty or staff and engagement in any behavior specifically prohibited by a faculty member in the course syllabus or class discussion.

Second, plagiarism, which is a type of cheating in which someone adopts another person's ideas, words, design etc., as his or her own without acknowledging the source. For example, copying and pasting material from a website into one's own document without proper citation is considered plagiarism. It happens mostly in writing assignments and research. According to *NIU Student Code of Conduct (NIU, 2023c)*, the term "plagiarism" includes but is not limited to the use, by paraphrase or direct quotation, of the published or unpublished work of another person without full and clear acknowledgment. Plagiarism also includes the unacknowledged use of materials prepared by another person or agency engaged in the selling of term papers or other academic materials. According to Fatemi and Saito (2020), plagiarism can be either intentional or unintentional. They consider intentional plagiarism as purposely using other people's work and promoting it as your own. In contrast, they define unintentional plagiarism as not acknowledging other researchers' ideas by, for example, forgetting to insert a reference, not inserting the reference for every sentence from a source, or placing the reference in the wrong place within the text (Fatemi and Saito, 2020).

The third example of academic misconduct is known as falsification or fabrication of information which involves the unauthorized creation or change of information in an academic document or activity such as writing, videos and recordings.

6- How to promote Academic Integrity?

The present study suggests that one effective way of promoting academic integrity can be through flexible teaching. Flexible teaching involves a lot of activities that can promote academic integrity. These include, among others, talking about academic honesty often., expecting high standards from students. engaging students in the learning process, explaining why academic integrity is important and discussing the University's policy and penalties. More importantly teachers need to include on the syllabus a statement such as:

All students are responsible for knowing the University's policy on academic honesty. All academic work submitted in this course must be your own unless you have received my permission to collaborate and have properly acknowledged receiving assistance. It is my responsibility to uphold the University's academic honesty policy and report my belief of dishonesty to the Office of the Vice President for Instruction.

<https://www.niu.edu/flexteaching/guide-to-course-delivery/how-can-i-encourage-academic-integrity.shtml>

According to Northern Illinois University the NIU Model for promoting academic integrity,

Good academic work must be based on honesty" (NIU, 2023a). Promoting honesty in academic work requires understanding of the definition of academic dishonesty, its different types, and its causes and consequences.

In this Model Academic dishonesty refers to committing or contributing to dishonest acts by those engaged in teaching, learning, research, and related academic activities, and it applies not just to students, but to everyone in the academic environment (Cizek, 2003; Whitley, Jr. & Keith-Spiegel, 2002). NIU considers academic dishonesty a serious offense, regardless of whether it was committed intentionally or not (NIU, 2023a; NIU, 2023b).

7- How can Flexible Teaching help promote Academic Integrity in the NIU Model?

Emerson et al. (2005) highlighted that a lack of academic integrity in students' writing is often a result of a lack of understanding of the academic writing process. However, experienced academic writers understand that academic writing is indeed a process (Wilson and Cutri, 2019). For instance, writing manuscripts often undergo multiple revisions and a lot of editing before submission for publication. Peer reviewing then involves further changes before final publication. Going through this process, students can acquire good experience that helps them overcome some of the feelings associated with writing anxiety (Lam et al., 2019). This can be done through teaching and assessment. In teaching, teachers can do many things to promote academic integrity among their students. First, they may include in the syllabus a statement about cheating and plagiarism along with academic integrity standards as an obligation of participating in our learning community. Second, teachers need to provide ongoing feedback to reduce cheating. Students may be tempted to cheat if they do not know how to approach a task. More importantly, on the syllabus teachers need to include a general statement such as:

All students are responsible for knowing the University's policy on academic honesty. All academic work submitted in this course must be your own unless you have received permission to collaborate and have properly acknowledged receiving assistance

This statement is important as it acts as a reminder for students to be aware of academic integrity throughout their course of study.

In the Assessments part of the course teachers can minimize opportunities for cheating in tests and quizzes. There are several techniques that can be taken to reduce cheating, plagiarism, or other academic integrity violations. These may include open-ended assessments that can take the form of case studies, projects, essays, interviews or any critical thinking activity. Another technique is to limit the time of the test/ quiz. This time limit gives students enough time to properly progress through the activity but not so much that those unprepared can seek help from their peers or from elsewhere. Another way to control cheating is to randomize or shuffle question order. That way the students will still receive the same questions of the test but not in the same order. Teachers can also use some Internet applications that help detect plagiarism such as *SafeAssign* or *Turnitin*.

8- Conclusion

In conclusion teachers and educators are advised to promote academic integrity in their institutions. There are many ways to achieve this such as explaining why academic integrity is important and how it maintains fairness among students. Another example is to create an atmosphere of integrity as well as talking about academic honesty too often. More importantly students need to be taught and trained on how to acknowledge references/ sources through quoting and paraphrasing. One more important thing teachers need to do about promoting academic integrity particularly in the first day of classes is to discuss the University's policy and penalties regarding Academic misconduct or dishonesty.

References:

- 1- Cizek, G.J. (2003). More unintended consequences of high - stakes testing. *Educational Measurement: Issues and Practice*, 20 (4) 19-27
- 2- Cutri, J. & Pretorius, L. (2019) "Autoethnography: Researching Personal Experiences", published in the edited volume *Wellbeing in Doctoral Education: Insights and Guidance from the Student Experience* by Lynette Pretorius, Luke Macaulay, and Basil Cahusac de Caux (Springer Singapore). [[1](#), [2](#), [3](#)]
- 3- East, J. (2009). Aligning policy and practice: An approach to integrating academic integrity, *Journal of Academic Language and Learning*, 3(1), . A38-A51
- 4- Emmerson, L. Rees. and Mackay, B. (2005) Scaffolding Academic Integrity: Creating a Learning Context for Teaching Referencing Skills. *Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice*, 2(3)
- 5- Fatemi G, Saito E (2020) Unintentional plagiarism and academic integrity: the challenges and needs of postgraduate international students in Australia. *J Furth High Educ* 44(10):1305–1319. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2019.1683521>
- 6- García, J., & Domínguez, L. (1997) Cultural characteristics as a lens for viewing the world, shared group values, and socialization processes within ecological systems. [[1](#), [2](#)].
- 7- Jones, Dorothy L. R. (2011). Academic Dishonesty: Are More Students Cheating? *Business Communication Quarterly*, 74 (2), 141-150.
- 8- Kitahara, R., T. & Westfall, F. (2007). Promoting Academic Integrity in Online Distance Learning Courses, MERLOT Journal of Online Learning and Teaching. 3, (3). Available from <http://jolt.merlot.org/vol3no3/kitahara.htm>
- 9- Lam, C.G., et al. (2019) Science and Health for All Children with Cancer. *Science*, 363, 1182-1186.
- 10- Macfarlane, B., and R. Ottewill. 2004. A special context: Identifying the professional values associated with teaching in higher education. *International Journal of Ethics* 4, no. 1: 89–100.
- 11- Martin, A. J., Nejad, H. G., Colmar, S., & Liem, G. A. D. (2013). Adaptability: How students' responses to uncertainty and novelty predict their academic and non-academic outcomes. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 105(3), 728–746. [[1](#), [2](#), [3](#), [4](#), [5](#)]
- 12- Pretorius, L. and Macaulay, L (2021) "Notions of Human Capital and Academic Identity in the PhD: Narratives of the Disempowered," published in *The Journal of Higher Education*. [[1](#)]
- 13- Spaulding, M. (2009). Perceptions of Academic Honesty in Online vs. Face-to-Face Classrooms. *Journal of Interactive Online Learning*, 8(3), 183-198.
- 14- Velliaris, D. and Breen, P (2016) An Institutional Three-Stage Framework: Elevating Academic Writing and Integrity Standards of International Pathway Students. *Journal of International Students*. Volume 6, Issue 2: 565–587
- 15- Whitley, B. E., and Keith-Spiegel, P. (2002). *Academic Dishonesty: An Educator's Guide*. Mahwah, NJ. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.
- 16- Wilson S, Cutri J (2019) Negating isolation and imposter syndrome through writing as product and as process: The impact of collegiate writing networks during a doctoral program. In: Pretorius L, Macaulay L, Cahuzac de Caux B (eds) *Wellbeing in doctoral education: Insights and guidance from the student experience*. Springer, Singapore, pp 59–76.
- 17- <https://www.geeksforgeeks.org/integrity-importance-and-challenges/>
- 18- <https://www.teqsa.gov.au/students/understanding-academic-integrity/what-academic-integrity#behaviours-that%20support%20academic%20integrity>